



UNIT-5

Public Relations' Tools and Methods

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Explore various types of publicity media and their role in Public Relations

Unit 5

Public Relations' Tools and Methods

We have already defined PR as the art and science of creating and maintaining a two-way communication relationship with different publics. The term the “public” refers to stockholders, shareholders, employees, activists, interest groups, suppliers, government, communities, and the media, etc. The nature of an organisation determines its public. It is the responsibility of the PR practitioner to choose the most suitable media for transmitting information to the various publics. The kind of media chosen should make it easy for the recipient to receive and comprehend the message being delivered. The message should also be crafted in the form for easy digestion and to ensure communication is effective (i.e. the literacy level of the recipients should be known).

This unit will focus on various media for sending information to target audiences. We will also look at the advantages and/or disadvantages of these media while bearing in mind that the type of media selected will be determined in part by the kind of public, the finance available, time limits, and the objectives of the message.

Publicity Media

The mass media (TV, the press, radio, and film, etc.) is the vehicle for conveying information or messages to the masses who are scattered over large geographical areas. The PR practitioner has to have detailed knowledge of these media in order to deploy them more effectively. The type of media chosen for publicity will depend on the objectives of the publicity, the nature of the audience, the budget available, and the content of message to send.

The Press

The press can serve as an effective medium for sending information with high impact. Many stakeholders such as governments, private and public sectors, and even, NGOs make use of this medium to great effect, usually by using newsprints to send information to their respective audiences.

There are some magazines dedicated to businesses, professional groups and other industries. There is also the option of publishing in periodical for niche markets such as for toys, textiles, stationery, automobiles, electrical, and computers, etc. The attractiveness and creativity of using magazines make them quite effective as a long-term reference material for people to read whenever the like for as long as they wish-a good publicity option for many organisations to use to send periodical messages.

Publicity through Press

Publicity comes in the form of press releases, features, and background articles. The mode and timing of undertaking PR activities using the press is determined by the PR practitioner in consultation with management. Bearing in mind that the information will be competing with other organisations', your timing of publication should be just right for your own to be noticed.

News Releases

Press releases are used to disseminate news for organisations. Materials supplied to the media should be interesting and factual. It is important to keep the following point in mind when preparing press releases:

- i. It should indicate clearly the name or organisation, address, and telephone number; along with the sender's name and designation, etc.
- ii. The date for release should be indicated
- iii. Content should be newsworthy, error-free and written in a journalistic style and typed on one side of the sheet only
- iv. It should be brief and unambiguous
- v. It should have a headline and should be signed
- vi. It should be released well on time for publication

Editorial / Article Features

Influential PR practitioners who have established good working relationships with media organisations may provide newsworthy background material required in selecting the most suitable media for publishing publicity information in editorials or as special feature articles. A good and newsworthy material is what columnist desire and could be just the right avenue to provide publicity via feature articles to promote products and services of a company.

Feature articles could be used to highlight peculiar problems and the company's products recommended as the solution to the problem. The write up can be done by either the PR practitioner or a well-trained and experience columnist.

Letters to the Editors

Writing letters to editors in the press is another tool for the PR's practitioner to employ to promote the image of their organisation by elaborating on what they think of the organisation in a positive light. Editors also publish feedback from the public, especially letters having a strong point of view well argued.

Television

TV is profoundly an important tool for undertaking mass publicity because it appeals to all the senses. Another characteristic of TV is that it can create dramatic effect and arouse interest. TV serves as an ideal medium for currently developing news to be broadcast to a wide audience. It also affects the socio-economic development of many people. The news is usually supplied by the PR department to a representative from the TV station. Alternatively, PR may be approached by the TV station to provide them with feature news. However, the news feature should not seek to promote sales or look like a commercial so that it can be accepted.

How to prepare publicity material for TV?

The first step is to pick a news topic that is worth reporting. Next, select a producer to film the event. The news clip should not be more than 90 seconds. It is best to present the story in an “inverted pyramid” manner, with the most important news placed at the start and the not – too - important ones placed below in descending order to enable the editor to quickly create the ideal sequence advert.

After filming, add voice cast, music, and text to complete the news file. Another option is to send an edited already-made film with written scripts or instructions describing the visual components for a newsreader to read. When crisis emerge, TV crews may approach your organisation to cover the event. In such circumstances, your responsibility as a PR practitioner would be to assist by giving them access to background information about the crisis. Coverage involving crisis reportage must include management’s viewpoints, as well.

Radio

Like TV, radio can also be deployed quite effectively to achieve the objectives of PR programmes with the added advantage that it is highly mobile compared to the TV.

How to use Radio as a Public Relations medium

News releases should be written in a style befitting radio without much editing by the announcer. News worthy to be broadcast should be releases at intervals throughout the day. RP can dispatch various messages about their companies using radio. Programmes may also be sponsored by the companies to create publicity for their brands.

Films

The PR practitioner needs a working knowledge of film-making to make valuable contribution to the content and quality of the films. The practitioner can contribute by providing the background information, the length of the film, how the film should be presented etc. Films can be used for educating consumers, training employees, for safety precautions, or improve community relations.

New Technologies

There are a variety of new technology options to choose from. Large corporations tend to use sophisticated technologies such as email, teleconferencing, fax, intranet, or video conferencing while local companies rely mostly on posters, bulletin boards, and rural fairs. But more and more local firms are switching to new technologies because the prices are falling and they are now becoming readily available for smaller businesses.

Oral Communication

This mode of communication occurs mainly through phone calls, meeting, public address systems, panel discussions etc. Organisations use oral communication to training employees and educating them about

the company policies. Supervisors also use it to communicate with their subordinates in an informal setting. Other groups of people who make use of oral communication include suppliers and dealers and consumers during PR programmes. It is effective, fast, and cheap but with the disadvantage that the message may be easily forgotten or even misunderstood because there is no opportunity to refer to it for clarification purposes.

Meeting

Meetings involve the coming together of two or more people for a particular purpose. Advance notices about the agenda are often dispatched to the concerned parties before commencing the meeting.

Speeches

The PR department prepares and delivers formal speeches which are normally newsworthy and of great interest to the public. Formal speeches are fairly quick ways to convey information to the public. The speaker for the occasion should be competent and well-trained to perform the function. The time and venue chosen should be suitable for maximum effect. The voice used to convey the message should be well-controlled and punctuated with pauses for dramatic effect and to grab the attention of the listeners. When the message is in relation to some crisis, it should be delivered in a dignified manner.

Printed Literature

Publicity literature comes in the form of house journals, brochures, booklets, annual reports, and direct mail, etc. These are used to inform the public about the company's activities and to persuade them to patronise services or products. We will elaborate of some of these important literature items below.

House Journal

Two types of house journal exist; the internal and external house journals. The internal house journal is used for communicating information to employees while the external one is used to inform external entities such as stockholders and suppliers or other public groups. These two journals may be combined into one to provide information for both groups.

The house journal is an important tool for management to communicate its thoughts to employees and to foster togetherness amongst groups belonging to the organisation. House journals come in newspaper format or take the form of a booklet. The newspaper format is more functional while the booklet forms tend to be more lavish or extravagant.

How to bring out a House Journal

The house journal could be a one-way or two-way communication medium depending on the philosophy of the organisation. A one-way journal tend to focus on providing information about top executives to the employees whereas an open company employing a two-way communication approach requires the flow of information from the organisation to the employees as well as information flow from the

employees to the organisation. Journals published should be interesting and attractive for maximum impact and to grab people's attention. Good interesting topics and titles should do the trick.

Steps for Creating Successful House Journal

- Planning: requires developing a concept that best serves the company
- Organising: When PR is given the go ahead by management, it needs to secure the right staff to do the job. Large or frequent issues require a large number of staff
- Publishing: Try and develop a personal style for writing the house journal
- Distribution: Find out the most ideal way to get the journals to reach the intended target readers. The journals may be distributed at the workplace or to the homes of the readers. Also, provide questionnaires to collect feedback on the contents that the readers liked or disliked to help improve the content in future

Annual Reports

They are communication tools used by corporate firms to convey financial information to shareholders as well as to potential investors. They contain balanced sheets and statements of account as well as the chairman's statements or views. The PR practitioner may not be directly responsible for the annual reports but he/she may suggest themes for the chairman's statement and the format for presenting the report. PR could secure the services of professionals to design an attractive report containing charts, diagrams and photographs of important data and activities using high quality glossy paper. This occasion also presents an opportunity to promote the profile of the company in the director's report.

People who may be interested in the annual report include:

- a) The investing community in general, the potential shareholders who are looking for investing in a suitable company
- b) Banks and financial institutions, etc.
- c) The financial press
- d) The business community

Photographs

Photographs could be used for illustrative purposes. They may come from any event organised by the company. Staff photographers or professional photographers are required to create imaginative and high quality prints.

Brochures

Brochures include pamphlets, flyers, or folders. A brochure is a multi-panel sheet of paper which provides information on a unique subject. A booklet has more pages than a brochure and it is normally stapled and not folded.

Reasons for using brochure and booklets include the following:

- To explain a new concept, product, service, or talk about the functions of a new building
- To describe features of a product and to promote sales indirectly
- To ask for donations

PR personnel are required to know the basics of designing booklets and brochures for them to be able to provide useful guidelines for their production by professional designers. To design an effective brochure, the PR practitioners should first identify the problem that needs to be addressed and craft the manner of dispatching the information to the target recipient.

Publications of brochures and booklets are relatively cheaper and quicker to produce.

Advertising

The conventional definition of advertising is “any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor”. It can be classified under two categories. The first, known as product advertising, is used to promote the sale of goods and services. The second type is known as corporate or institutional advertising or PR advertising. This involves buying space and time for advertising or promoting ideas or educating the public about specific issues. Advertising from PR departments is geared to promote positive attitudes of the public towards an organisation and to attract investors and also to promote good employee-employer relations. It is also done to keep government officials informed about activities of the organisation.

The objectives of PR advertising will determine the type of message to send and the media to use for disseminating the message.

Miscellaneous Communication Tools

Other means of communicating information to the public include:

- Stickers, posters, and labels to serve as reminders
- Racks or bins for display of products and window display
- Identification on the pack
- Speciality gifts like calendars, diaries, pens, and key chains, etc.
- Provision of any necessary leaflets and catalogues, etc., to assist a customer's decision to buy.

Direct Mail

Direct mail is highly selective or specific in nature because it is used to address selected group of people. It is cost-effective and flexible in that the number of messages to send can be increased or decreased depending on prevailing circumstances. Direct mail is used to convey all types of messages and announcements. It is personal, it can be friendly and the PR practitioner has total control of the content and the time to send off the message.

Media Relations

It includes activities such as press briefing, press conferences and press visits to facilities. We will elaborate on each of these activities in the subsequent paragraphs below.

Press Conferences

Press conferences are well-planned and organised settings for releasing important news to all media at the same time. Press conferences should not be too frequent unless the news is crucially important and requires discussion between the media and the PR person. If no discussions are required, then a press release will suffice.

Things to consider before holding a press conference include the following:

- Who will address the press conference? Ideally, it should be done by the head of the organisation or a department.
- Make available a press kit which must contain a press background, news release, pictures, literature about the organisation, a writing pad, and a pen or a pencil.
- Make a list of invitees from the media carefully. Decide a venue which is accessible to the media persons. Make arrangements for the transportation of media persons from a convenient place to the venue and return journey.
- Decide the timing. It should neither be too early or too late in the day. The conference should end at such a time that the media persons are able to get back to their place and work for filing the story on time.
- Arrange hospitality.

It is important to have good ongoing relationship with press personalities not only during press conferences but also informally to establish friendly relationships.

Press Briefings

Unlike press conferences, press briefings do not require the elaborate arrangements described above. These releases are used on occasions such as during crisis to clarify situations or events and also to provide accurate information to press people. A written statement from the PR department will safeguard against any entity misquoting the spokesperson of the organisation.

Press Tours

Press tours tend to resemble press conferences in many ways, but in these occasions, the venue is the company's premises. Press tours are done on special occasions. They require meticulous planning and organisation for successful execution.

The PR personnel should consider the following when arranging a press tour:

- List of media men
- Suitable travel arrangements
- Accommodation at site
- Briefing press party at site
- Background Information
- Hospitality

Adequate provision should be made for a representative to accompany the visiting press to ensure everything works according to plan, especially with regards to hospitality for the press entourage.

Exhibitions

They involve events such as international trade fairs and local community events. Exhibitions are designed to promote an organisation's reputation and showcase its products and services to increase patronage and increase its profitability. Exhibitions are also occasions for competing firms to assess the performances of other competitors.

During exhibitions, interest is heightened leading to customers making further inquiries and placing orders for products in a calm environment because the customer is in a relaxed mood. Exhibitions should be planned with the following in mind:

- The objectives to be attained during the exhibition
- Selecting a suitable time for the exhibition
- Preparing a budget for the show
- Designing the right stand and proving display section for posters, videos, murals, and diagrams, etc.
- Provision for publicity, press conferences, literature for participants, and advertising
- Provision for insurance, hospitality, transport, rest rooms, and emergency handling
- Answering visitors' enquiries and receiving feedback from visitors

It should however, be noted that exhibitions are expensive media to engage due to the high costs involved in procuring facilities and the associated logistical and hospitality aspects. Only use this channel when you are absolutely sure that you can reap the maximum benefits it is likely to offer.

Open Days

Organisations use open days as a means of building a stronger relationship with communities and stakeholder and the public. During open days, companies allow visitors to have a tour of their facilities and to see how things are done. To ensure a more pleasant tour, trained guides should be available to answer questions and also provide the visitors with hospitality services before or after the tour, whichever happens to be the most appropriate. It is common for companies which manufacture food products to give away gifts to the visitors in their quest to promote goodwill.

Special Events

Special events include local festival or sponsoring an international event to reinforce important messages that a company needs to communicate to its target market or stakeholders. They are usually undertaken as a form of community relations program and need to have a management group to supervise the event and to provide effective publicity to achieve the objectives of this PR activity.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Business Communication, (2009), By Bhagaban Das*
- ✓ *Principles of Internet Marketing: New Tools and Methods for Web Developers, (2009), By Jason Miletsky*