Media relations

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify all important aspects of media relations researched by others and write a succinct literature review in order to facilitate the data gathering procedure for the future research in the field. Reliable references are quoted to fulfil the purpose of this paper.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper aims to provide an easy to read literature review about media relations and explain terms by appropriate examples. This is done by reading other articles from previous research and reviewed contemporary issues in terms of media relations that businesses face and how they manage the whole process.

Findings – Throughout the course of the work, it was found that many small to medium-sized businesses and organisations do not actually plan for their media relations and have limited knowledge of the concept. However larger organisations and conglomerates have a good understanding of media relations and use it as a powerful PR tool. Just a few of them integrate their media relations with other components of PR and this can allow some speculations.

Originality/value – Media relations should not be used when issues and crises rise; it is essential to have constant liaison with top media owners in order to be informed about what is going on in the market. This allows adopting/changing strategies when needed in order to earn more public trust, as well as proactively identifying potential issues. Such flexibility and relationship with the media helps businesses to hinder potential issues from being turned to any kind of situation, which may harm own brands and publicity. Therefore customers feel valued and the government trust that particular business activity, because it is in favour with the society. Hence it gives invaluable credit to the business of the company.

Keywords Information media, Press relations

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

There is almost no single industry without competition. Media is an industry where the competition is intense and it has been used for various purposes by organisations regardless of their size and country of origin. Hence, businesses and organisations need the media for a rainy day; therefore effective and intimate relationship, in which respect and understanding of each party's interest is carefully considered, must be exercised. Journalists and reporters are busy people whom getting hold of is difficult in the dog-eat-dog world of the so-called information era. Thus the best possible way of contacting them should be identified by responsible individuals at organisations. This is a vital task which needs extreme care and skills to establish and manage effective media relations (MR).

MR and its originality

Media are s now part of almost everyone's everyday life throughout the globe. Rapid growth of new media and impacts of media, in general, is inexorable, particularly by presence of the internet, interactive and digital media. Once a press release and/or news are aired, it is done and surely would have impacts; however small they are. Technology changed the world and facilitated building up relationship with media and interacting with a wider audience than ever before. Based on Lifetips (2007), the terms "public

relations" and "media relations" are still used interchangeably by many; however they are not exactly the same. Hence, drawing a clear line between the two terms is crucial in order to understand each of which roles better. MR addresses the relationship that firms build up with journalists, editors and analysts; whereas PR expands that relationship further to the general public. However, MR and PR cannot be separated in the dynamics of the twenty-first century and its turbulence. Surprisingly, according to Bland *et al.* (2001) there are still some practitioners who dedicate less time to MR.

Media has been divided into "traditional media" and "new media" by many scholar and practitioners (Cutlip *et al.*, 2006; Higgins, 1999). They are both equally important to organisations. Despite incredible growth of interactive and digital media, there are still some traditionalists who want to read about organisations' activities on hard copies rather than going on-line or press the "red button" on their digital TV (Digitalstore, 2007). This is why there are numerous of newspapers and magazines – as of traditional media – published every year. However, the internet as a new media is still booming throughout the world; although some argue that its growth is getting stagnant. New media is a new challenge, which has surely changed what the media used to be.

Cutlip *et al.* (2006, p. 252) discuss that inclusion of new media as part of the process of social changes. Therefore, there is enough evidence to suggest that, World Wide Web (WWW) is now becoming an important communication tool on which MR can be effectively exercised. White and Raman (1999) argue that the WWW is the first controlled public relations (PR) mass-media, but is not filtered through gatekeepers. Here, skills and passion are needed to take advantage of this new experience. Before the internet, advertising was the only way to transmit controlled messages via the mass-media. Hill and White (2000) mention organisations tend to strengthen corporate identity, gather data, provide information to their stakeholders and the media via WWW.

According to Fulton and Guyant (2002), the internet gives the opportunity to all organisations and businesses to pronounce their operation worldwide. It also allows direct and more effective communication with their key public regardless of geographic factors and barriers. For example, if something occurs in China now, within a few minutes it will be broadcasted throughout the world. The internet bypasses all the geographic barriers, but countries' rules and regulations, in which the organisation may have stakeholders, must be considered for legal purposes. Being successful in managing this, the media would be more interested to get in touch with such organisations. This in turn adds values to the company's publicity.

How to approach the media and journalists

According to Cutlip (1976, pp. 19-21) in the early years of PR, practitioners endeavoured almost exclusively to get attention in the mass-media for their organisations. Building up relationships with the media is a hard task and maintaining it, is even harder. A well established MR is the best avenue to create positive impression in the eyes of strategic public. It is important to have someone well trained and experienced available and accessible within an organisation; someone who can wisely disseminate information and understand what the journalists and reporters mean by certain phrases. If problems arise, an experienced spokesperson from the senior management (Wells and Spinks, 1998), should deal with the media to communicate complete and appropriate information. This is about credibility and reliability of content which an organisation can deliver to its public.

It is crucial to businesses and organisations to remember that they operate within communities, in which they have substantial audiences. Media is one of their key audiences (Wells and Spinks, 1998). Thus co-operation with the media is essential and the key to succeeding in establishing as well as maintaining relationships with the media. This is all down to communication skills and attitude of individuals. Before contacting the media, having an idea about what type of journalists and or reporters you are going to talk to is incredibly important. This is essential to bear in mind, as we are between two generations: traditional; and modern.

There is no complete consensus between the two yet; although both have great ideas. Therefore younger practitioners and scholars need to listen to and learn from experienced practitioners in businesses and organisations.

Learning process never stops and skills are always vulnerable to obsolence; this is particularly true in the media industry and MR activities. Hence this calls for regular knowledge update and following up relevant news by organisations. As it implies, MR is serious and real therefore it requires real management and importantly engagement of skilful individuals with great communication skills. Communication is an art and a science. It is art because a human being creates and delivers its purpose. It is a science, because we learn and experiment stuff; where we can give solutions to complexities. This is about innovativity and creativity as basic principles of gathering attention of the media for what organisations may have to say to their public. One way of maintaining good MR is to keep updating available data and evaluate the organisation performance constantly. Therefore, enhancing effective communications is essential. Nothing can replace the need for strategically planned communications.

Through professional approach and appreciating reporters' and journalists' limited time, organisations can attract their attention more effectively. For example giving space and time to them to get back to you rather than bothering them by constant calls and e-mails. This does not help but ruins relationships; everything should be carefully assessed and planned in the first place. Furthermore, the information should be designed in a way to encourage the reporters to get back to you as quickly as possible. However, follow up is an important task for organisations to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of what is taking place with respect to the organisation purposes. The information should be structured in a way that prevents future speculation and manipulation.

MR and its role in community image of organisations

Organisations continuously strive for developing their image and improving their long-term relationship with key publics (Grunig, 1990). Wells and Spinks (1999a) suggest ethics and honesty enhance positive "media exposure" while dealing with publics. This [positive media exposure] needs to be taken into the core of every organisation's activities, in order to increase chances of improving the organisation's community image. Young (1984) suggests that media network is an opportunity to every organisation to communicate information to the public. Thus, well established media relations offer organisations and businesses a higher exposure to publics and community. However, sustaining community image will not happen, unless organisations and conglomerates practice concrete MR. Therefore, they need to be on-line, in papers, on TV and radios accompanied by positive comments. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to have good news; dissemination of bad news needs to be well

structured and justified in order to save the organisation image and reputation in public minds.

Zikmund and D'Amico (1995) argue that press releases create a favourable image in the public minds; which would benefit the long-term strategic vision of an organisation. Wells and Spinks (1999b) discuss that organisations employ various communication channels to reach their target audience by following "effective communication systems" principles. Image and reputation of an organisation circulate the business blood where, businesses are a country's blood. Livingstone (2007) mentions that we can no longer imagine our lives without media and communication technology. MR plays an invaluable role, as they almost simultaneously get an organisation's messages across to publics. However, MR cannot be established overnight and importantly it is not confined with crises occurrence. Gumpert (1997) and Higgins (1999) both suggest that the future of PR and MR will be on the internet. This indicates the importance of new media to organisations and need for its adoption.

Role of business and organisations

Organisations need to endeavour to enhance public trust through effective MR, therefore they need to regularly emphasise their positive and fair activities. Accordingly MR would assist organisations for developing their reputation and reliability in a cost effective manner (Young, 1984). As of the dynamic nature of business environment, companies sometimes are surprised by issues and crises around them. To clarify the necessity of MR and its impact, Bland *et al.* (2001) argue that good MR would contribute to strategic objectives of organisations; in which various channels need to be utilised by organisation for fulfilling their strategic purposes.

The media look for all sources of information to find out about an event which they feel is newsworthy. Therefore, being the source to the media is critical, as information will be genuine and immunised from manipulation of outsiders. This is about collaboration with the media and providing them with first-handed news, which inevitably strengthens MR. Explaining the importance of an issue to journalists and reporters, is part of "grooming relationship" with the media; this will be of "value in the future" (CDPR, 2007).

It is crucial to businesses and organisations to convince the media experts, journalists, reporters and analysts to listen to what they have to say. Therefore, special skills and expertise are the key factors in developing media relations. Grunig (1989) in his discussion about the four models in PR, mentions that, asymmetrical communication PR tends to "persuade publics" whereas; symmetrical communication PR means to "reach a compromise between the interests of the organisation and its publics". Therefore, selecting the right media, the right journalists and the right reporters are deemed critically important to organisations to get their message across to their target public.

Conclusion

Consequently, it appears that organisations need to evaluate the effectiveness of their relationships with media on a regular basis; as effective MR enhances organisation image (Hill and White, 2000). MR is remarkable however, it is essential to think of the end result; which is the disseminated message to the publics. There are many opponent arguments in the world of PR and MR based on ongoing changes in all aspects of

business. The twenty-first century is the era of communications and collaboration in which the technology is evolving and directs the world as it goes along. The media alongside new technology has been improved over the past couple of decades; this enables organisations to set their story and shape or tailor their corporate image more effectively. Well established MR can disable speculation and rumours, if organisations take a strategic approach and co-operate with the media.

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