

Step One – PR in a Nutshell

What is it?

Public Relations is fundamentally the process of managing how, when and in what way you communicate, so that you may ultimately influence the behaviour, attitude and perceptions of those important to you. In our 24/7 business world today, to be able to do this successfully is vital for any business, be it a multinational or one-man band.

But Public Relations – or PR for short – isn't some new fad. The principle of taking charge of how, when and where to communicate with others has been around for as long as humankind has needed to get a message understood. Alexander the Great realised that it wasn't enough just to win battles: you had to let people know about them, too; and so he would send runners ahead to spread news of his victories.

Thanks to technology, we don't have to go to quite the same exhausting lengths to get our messages across, but we must still grapple with the complexities of human interaction in seeking to be heard and understood. Getting the tone, language, approach and timing of how an important piece of news is passed on from one person to the next remains as relevant a process now, as it was in 400 BC.

While our need to communicate effectively may not have changed over the centuries, the way we do business has, of

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course, changed for ever. Certainly, with the advent of the Internet and the dotcom era, businesses have a window on the world and a direct route to customers that has simply never been possible on such a scale before. We are more accountable, more accessible, more vulnerable than ever before, and managing how we interact with the outside world can no longer be left to chance.

This is where public relations comes in. Effective PR is a vital ingredient for many businesses, attracting continued investment from successful organisations around the world. Despite sometimes turbulent market conditions (such as the fall-out from the dotcom boom and bust in 2000), the PR multimillion pound global industry is clearly one that is here to stay. So it's important and relevant. But what exactly is it? Unlike other business disciplines such as sales, finance and production, it has a whole range of titles and functions: public affairs, corporate communications, investor relations, publicity departments and press offices, for example, all have special communication remits to fulfil specific needs of an organisation. (Investor relations, for example, manages the communication and relationship between an organisation and its shareholders and their advisers.) Larger businesses often have several of these functions, but all can be fairly brought under the PR umbrella.

For the purposes of this book, though, we will stick to what is perhaps the best-known term, public relations, and its key principles, which are common to all of its specialist areas.

Defining PR

Let's first look at some popular definitions. Public relations is:

- about achieving positive editorial coverage in the media
- the process of engaging the public with your company

- the active management of your communications
- application of strategy and creativity in the management of reputation
- networking with potential clients at seminars, exhibitions and events
- taking important customers and clients to lunch

One of the complexities about PR is that it is all of these things – but never just one of them. As illustrated by the list of different specialist functions we saw above, PR has a very wide field of reference. Taking clients to lunch and getting editorial coverage in your local newspaper are just two activities that contribute to a broader, larger goal, which, as we saw at the start of this chapter, is ultimately about influencing opinions and behaviour. The secret of harnessing PR's power is understanding that it doesn't fit neatly into a box, and its influence touches every part of your business, just as the way you communicate does. View the descriptions as jigsaw pieces that go towards making up a completely integrated PR picture and you'll be on your way to grabbing some of that power for your own business.

The Institute of Public Relations in the UK defines PR in this way (which is really a summary of the points listed above): 'Public relations practice is the discipline which looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour.'

Whether it realises it or not, any business is already engaged in PR activity, because it is constantly giving out communication signals. Organisations communicate through brand image, attitude to customers, employee relationships, own-industry activities, local community and so on. By raising the profile of PR within your business, you have simply decided to acknowledge and take charge of, an activity that is already happening all around you.

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PR is more complicated than you think and can easily get derailed. Take a few moments now to think about your own experience. Have you undertaken any PR proactively? Was it a good experience? If your experience was less than satisfactory, don't let this put you off getting to grips with it in the future. It's easy to let a negative experience cloud your view. If you've worked with a PR consultancy that didn't deliver what you expected, it may just mean that it wasn't up to scratch. As with dentists, chefs, builders, teachers and so on, the quality of what you get will always depend upon the quality of who's supplying it.

Good PR doesn't merely rely on somebody else to provide the expertise: it also depends upon you. It's true that companies that use PR to the greatest effect are those that take it into the very heart of their organisations. They think, breathe and live PR as an inextricable part of their businesses. Consider those who may be said to have 'great PR' – it's no accident that many are successful entrepreneurs: Charles Dunstone of the Carphone Warehouse, Jeff Bezos of Amazon.com, Richard Branson of Virgin, Stelios Haji-Ioannou founder of easyJet – all are passionate about their businesses and all understand the immense importance of communication. Not for them a distant PR department functioning out on a limb: 'PR thinking' is very much part of their everyday business, because they understand that their companies' reputations rely not just on excellent products or services (these are a given) but on the way others – customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders and stakeholders – feel about them, too.

Will Whitehorn, Group Corporate Affairs and Brand Development Director for the Virgin Group, explains his company's approach to PR: 'We've always put it right in the heart of management decisions because we view it not just as a tool for communicating with the media but as part of how we build and grow the relationship we have with our customers.'

Can you think of a business that you believe has ‘good PR’? Do you think it has those general qualities we have looked at above? If so, why? Take a few moments to think about your own organisation:

Amanda Barry’s PR Health Check Quiz

- Are there potential PR opportunities that your business could be implementing now?
- Are you confident that your workforce know the goals of the organisation and how their jobs contribute to these?
- Do you know how to measure the effectiveness of PR?
- Do you know what sorts of media (newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, the Net and so forth) your customers and target customers read or view or listen to?
- Could you explain the differences between advertising and PR to someone?
- If you received an unexpected call from a journalist, would you feel confident about handling it effectively?
- If there was a sudden crisis, would your organisation be prepared to deal with it?

If you’ve answered no to any of these questions, then you and your business need this book! Keep reading and put your PR on the road to recovery.

Why bother?

But why bother to ‘manage’ communications at all? Don’t the facts speak for themselves? Sometimes of course, yes, but more often than not no. Think of personal relationships and how fraught they can be with misunderstandings. We often say one thing and our partners, families or friends may interpret our meaning in a different way from what was intended. If our

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words and actions can easily be misinterpreted in our private lives, so can they be when the relationship moves to the business arena – with often damaging results. When we *do* leave communications to chance, we need to be prepared for the unexpected – and sometimes a rather undesirable outcome! Communication with the media is a particularly tricky area, as demonstrated in the following example.

Case study: Sober advice

A university based in the North of England undertook a government-funded research programme to study the changing trends in social behaviour. The study was a serious attempt to understand the reasons behind an upsurge in the wine-bar culture and why the traditional Friday night ‘lads’ night’ was now being dominated by women. Press information was duly issued, but those in charge of the programme were aghast at the resulting coverage of it by some newspapers. While the same information had been sent to *The Times* and the *Sun*, the story received a dramatically different treatment. The *Sun* piece, headlined BOOZY BOB’S GOING ON £16,000 PUB CRAWL, not only sent up the whole project by poking fun at the research director, but also slammed the government-backed initiative for wasting taxpayers’ money.

While the university had obviously taken pains to communicate the research initiative to the media, its downfall lay in not taking into consideration the different styles and needs of the intended newspaper targets. It is not enough simply to broadcast your version of a story. Everything that is communicated is open to individual interpretation. By thinking through the various audiences with whom you will be communicating, you can anticipate and then minimise the potential for error or misunderstanding.

Ian Wright, group communications director at the drinks giant Diageo, and a past president of the Institute of Public Relations,

believes effective PR is a three-way process. ‘There’s broadcast and receive and then the third, vital element: what is actually done with the information,’ he explains. ‘Effective communication will always have some impact on people’s behaviour.’

With Boozy Bob in our case study, the university had overlooked this third element, assuming that what they were broadcasting would be received exactly as they intended. Unfortunately, none of us can be certain that this is the case. By using PR thinking from the outset, and actively managing this communication process – as we actively manage finances by working with accountants, or legal issues by gaining expert advice from lawyers – we can maximise our potential for being understood and increase the chances that we will stimulate an appropriate response.

Mind your language

While good PR may not always directly affect the bottom line, it’s worth remembering that *bad* PR always does. Remember Gerald Ratner? A few comments made at an industry dinner, when he described one of his company’s products as ‘crap’ – albeit as a joke – effectively destroyed his company’s reputation and therefore the company with it. Gerald Ratner forgot that not everyone would see the funny side. Journalists who were present at the dinner reported his remarks as a serious comment on his business and relayed them to a far wider audience, who, in turn, took his words at face value and turned their backs on his stores.

Hitting the jackpot

Sales of ‘Big Mouth Billy Bass’ the singing fish took off after it was revealed in the national press that the Queen and Tony Blair both had one on their respective mantelpieces.

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It was a great PR hit for its manufacturers and distributors, with lots of stories and pictures appearing in the newspapers. Its success was the result of a mixture of good fortune (that such high-profile figures were said to own the novelty) and the fact that it was a great news story (both the head of the royal family and the British prime minister had similar senses of humour).

There's no doubt, though, that this type of PR result leads to greater misunderstanding as to how PR operates. It is precisely because you cannot 'buy' the editorial coverage achieved from this type of exposure that it is so valuable – but by the same token, with no payment for the 'space', it can't be guaranteed to run. It is this element of unpredictability that makes PR such a roller-coaster ride. Had the timing been different or its fans less high-profile, Billy Bass could have sunk without a trace.

Great story + good timing + unpredictability = possible result.

Throughout the book we'll be discussing how, by applying the appropriate planning skills and understanding how the media operate, you can minimise the random nature and maximise the potential for such results.

Living with risk

Learning to live with the possibility of an unknown outcome while doing all you can to influence the eventual result is part of understanding how PR works. Embracing a certain amount of risk is an important part of the process. Many companies take a very defensive approach to PR, particularly when it comes to dealing with the media.

Julian Henry, MD of consumer PR consultancy Henry's House, believes that calculated risk taking is a vital part of getting the best from PR. 'Many companies see PR as a purely defensive tool,' says Henry, 'but working with the media will

always have an element of risk to it, so it's better to go with it, than trying to build defensive walls.'

Henry's House has worked with many clients from the entertainment world, including pop groups such as S Club 7. Henry's House managed the PR of the group and dealt with both the good and the bad PR situations that came their way. During 2000, one tabloid newspaper ran a front-page story about drug taking in the group, with the headline screaming SPLIFF CLUB 7. It was Henry's team that was in the front line when the journalist first called. 'We knew we couldn't stop the story,' says Henry, 'so we got in there and ensured that the facts were correct. We minimised the damage to the group's reputation by working with the journalists to make sure the story was as fair as possible.'

As Henry points out, the drugs story was going to run anyway, so what his team did was to ensure that the communications channels between the pop group and the journalists remained open. The point is that effective PR isn't just about managing the good stories: it's about dealing with the negative ones, too. Ultimately, proactively managed PR will keep those communications links open, even if sometimes the issues are uncomfortable for an organisation to deal with.

Case study: Stimulating debate

When dealing with the media, many companies fall into the trap of viewing PR as simply a means to put out positive stories about their activities and products. This is of course part of the PR function – spreading the 'good news' about a company – but it is only the tip of the iceberg. PR can be highly effective when focusing its activity around issues and stimulating debate that has relevance to its particular cause.

A good example of this is when the trade association for the British aerosol industry, the British Aerosol Manufacturers' Association (BAMA), was faced with a tide of anti-

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aerosol publicity following the ozone-depletion reports by the British Antarctic Survey in the 1980s: chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), in widespread use in aerosols at that time, were seen as contributing to the problem. The industry wanted to go to the media with stories on the benefits of the aerosol in a bid to combat the findings of the damning report. However, Grayling PR, one of the PR specialist consultancies approached by the BAMA, advised them to take a different tack.

Chris Davies, MD of Grayling explains, 'It simply wasn't possible to ignore the findings of the British Antarctic Survey and the fact that CFCs in aerosols were definitely not good news for the environment. We proposed, therefore, that the PR campaign should highlight exactly what the industry was doing to remove CFCs, and, most importantly, that it had set its own deadline for compliance with new guidelines for CFC use actually ahead of the internationally agreed one.' By addressing the issue head on, and being seen to be reacting responsibly to it, BAMA effectively 'lowered the temperature' over the issue – and allowed positive messages to be considered.

What about spin?

Spin is to PR what quackery is to the medical profession. Both do damage to the reputation of their bona fide counterparts and often to those who use them. A spin doctor is the rather funky, glib name now widely used by the media to describe anyone involved in communications or PR. I've even used it in the title of this book because it has become the widely accepted term for the business of PR.

Although the word 'spin' is now often used in this benign way, its original meaning is far from complimentary. First coined in the world of politics, spin generally refers to the

practice of distorting, adapting or putting up factual information in order to gain favourable media coverage or convince others of your point of view. Unfortunately, for the serious business of PR, spinning is a trap that too many easily fall into, with even its biggest critics, the media themselves, succumbing (each mainstream newspaper has a political leaning and therefore tends to give its own 'spin' to political news reporting).

Of course, there's no reason why politicians or businesses shouldn't put forward their arguments in a positive and persuasive manner; but, when fact strays into fiction, this is where spin begins. Whenever PR is used to cover up unpalatable situations or truths, you know you're in spin country. Hence this type of spin is at once derogatory and damaging to the whole communications process.

But isn't it right that a company should vigorously draw attention to all the good things about its products or services? What harm is there in embellishing the facts a little? It is right, of course, to promote your business in the most positive and enthusiastic way you can, but it is never OK to step beyond the line of reality. Two parts of the bedrock of effective PR are honesty and trustworthiness – and you ignore these at your peril. Popular perception may be that PR is just the opposite, but, without integrity, we're not talking PR – just a load of old spin.

Dealing with uncomfortable or negative news appropriately is very difficult, and is the reason why some resort to spin, believing it will help get them out of a bad situation. But businesses that do learn to manage the bad issues with honesty and integrity earn the trust and respect of everyone around them, including their customers. It may not be possible to convince everyone of your arguments, but it is possible to strive for a balance between the openness required for good communication and the sensitivity of commercial interests.

Case study: 'Tell Shell'

The Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell, which was voted 'Britain's Most Admired Company' in the *Management Today* 2001 awards (but which has since suffered some less-than-happy times) demonstrated how it is possible to walk this difficult line in some of its dealings with environmentalists and protesters. In the wake of its clash with protesters and its subsequent forced U-turn on the dumping of the Brent Spa oil rig in the North Sea, Shell UK overhauled its entire approach to communications and vigorously took on board the opinions of the public into its operations.

By taking an integrated approach to how it was communicating with those it needed be in contact with – including the fuel-buying public, its employees, shareholders and environmentalists – the company uses its website as an important means of staying in contact with these crucial stakeholders. By providing a dynamic feedback facility within the site – called 'Tell Shell' – it is able to have direct dialogue with protesters and supporters alike, limiting accusations of simply providing 'spin' by wholeheartedly embracing the fuel debate.

What PR can do – and what it can't

One of the thorny issues businesses face when working with PR for the first time is understanding just what it can and cannot do. Remember: those who use PR most effectively are those who not only take its principles to their hearts, but know what a sustained PR effort can do over time.

Five ways PR can help your business

1. Promote understanding between a business and its stakeholders

The benefits of good communication will help develop stronger relationships at every level. The Carphone Warehouse

has an enviable employee loyalty reputation, which is well deserved. The company works hard at keeping its workforce motivated and happy with a continual programme of incentives, benefits and strong, internally focused PR activity.

2. Build trust and confidence with opinion formers

These are such people as journalists and potential shareholders – trust is at the very core of most successful relationships. By developing trust and confidence with those who have the power to influence your business, PR creates a channel that keeps communication going through the good and the bad times.

3. Stimulate debate and encourage changes in behaviour, attitudes and perceptions

PR is the persuasion business. By encouraging debate and providing well-thought-out campaigns, PR gives a business the power to encourage a change in others. Professor Paul Whiteley, head of politics at Sheffield University, explains how important the persuasion process is in the world of politics and what factors must be at play for it to be effective.

‘Recent research on the psychology of persuasion in politics highlighted three conditions that must be present for effective persuasion to take place,’ he says. ‘The communicator should firstly be perceived as knowledgeable – voters do not listen to people who they think are ignorant of the issue.

‘Secondly, they should be trustworthy. Trust is a key requirement for effective communication to take place. Trust is won over a period of time and becomes a huge asset. If you are trusted, people will be prepared to listen to you and hear you out. In the political world, in the lead-up to the 1997 British general election, Tony Blair was trusted to a much greater extent than he was in the lead-up to the 2001 general election. In his four years as British Prime Minister, he was seen to have let voters down on several issues, so people became disillusioned.

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‘The third condition for effective persuasion is common-held beliefs. Voters can be persuaded if they think the speaker has similar values and interests as themselves.’

The three criteria for effective political persuasion – knowledge, trust and common interests – have resonance in the business world, too.

4. Mobilise opinion and overcome apathy

PR is used extensively by groups who believe passionately in a cause and want to persuade others to join them. Charities, pressure groups and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) such as the British Heart Foundation and Amnesty International use PR to gain support and help keep their activities in the public eye.

5. Increase awareness

PR works alongside advertising in pointing out what’s special or different about your business/product/service. But, unlike advertising, PR goes a step further by working with third parties – such as journalists – to spread the word on your behalf.

Five things PR can’t or shouldn’t do

1. Deal in untruths, falsehoods or manipulation

Telling lies won’t only make your nose grow longer, it will also put paid to any hope of credibility in the future. Whether you’re telling whoppers, as a certain American president did on national TV, or simply saying no when the answer is really yes, remember that effective PR is always built on trust.

2. Operate in a vacuum and ignore valid criticism

The effectiveness of any PR activity is always inextricably linked to the environment in which it is operating, which includes the world inside and outside an organisation. Its power to influence others will also depend upon the climate of

opinion and how successful it is in taking on board other points of view, as illustrated by the PR approach we saw taken by Shell UK and the BAMA earlier in this chapter.

3. Be unreliable or inconsistent

Another important factor in good relationships is consistency. As individuals we tend to admire those who behave in a consistent manner. Journalists in particular value a PR contact who is reliable. Andy George, a music journalist, laments the lack of reliability in his own industry.

‘It looks bad on a business if they fail to do what they say they are going to do,’ he says. ‘Often I’ve been told that a CD for review is in the post, when they have clearly forgotten to send it. So not only is the review opportunity missed because the deadline is passed, it makes them look pretty inept.’

4. Make promises that it can’t deliver

There is a current trend among clients towards asking PR specialists to guarantee editorial coverage as part of their contract. While it is certainly good practice to set realistic goals and targeted objectives, it’s not possible to *guarantee* coverage unless you pay for it. Then it’s called advertising, promotion or advertorial (see Step Three).

5. Encourage unrealistic expectations

This is otherwise known as PR puff. The problem with puff is that, when the reality comes to light, it actually seems more disappointing than maybe it deserves to appear. The challenge with PR is always to look at ways to bring out the benefits of what is already there. When the sportswear specialists Speedo launched their new Fast Skin swim suit to coincide with the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, the company took care to use four years’ worth of research to support their claim that the suit could improve times by up to 3 per cent. An impressive claim that could be supported by hard data.

Puff the PR dragon

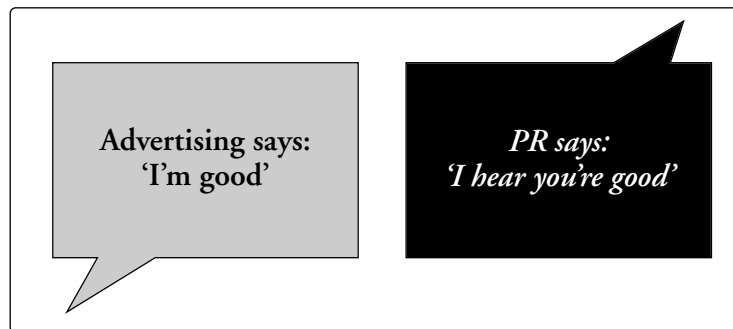
PR is used by some as a smokescreen to cover up unsavoury or negative details – or simply to build something out of nothing. To create froth, puff, fancy dressing is a great temptation, but it really must be resisted if you are going to build and sustain any kind of credibility with those you are communicating with – be it customers, journalists, employees, suppliers, even your competitors. Being caught out overstating your case wrecks credibility in an instant. As a customer yourself, how many times have you been disappointed when the new lawnmower, computer, easy-to-assemble desk or instant bread mix turned out to be not quite what you expected when you got it home? The disappointment soon turns to frustration and what should have been a moment of excitement or satisfaction turns into anger at being duped. You may well get away with it once or even twice, but, once confidence is lost, it is very difficult – if not impossible – to win it back.

How can PR be measured?

Because PR deals in many intangibles, it demands its own specific measurement tools. Many become frustrated because it seems impossible to gauge accurately whether their PR efforts have paid off. The problem lies not with measurement but the methods used. It's often a waste of time to measure the results of PR activity directly against short-term sales forecasts, because PR works on changing attitudes and behaviour. It's a slow-burn, long-haul activity that may not necessarily be immediately obvious on the profit-and-loss sheet. There are exceptions, of course, such as when PR is used to achieve awareness for a new product launch and the resulting media coverage stimulates sales.

But often the impact of PR demands a more sophisticated method of measurement. We'll be looking at the methods and techniques to use in Step Five.

PR and advertising – understanding the difference



PR is quite often confused with advertising, which is quite surprising, since the fundamental ways in which they work are very different. It's true that both are methods of communication. It's also true that both seek to influence the minds and attitudes of others. But, from thereon in, they take separate paths.

One of the best explanations I've heard of how to describe the differences between PR and advertising is to compare them to a car and a boat. Both are methods of getting you to your destination, but each takes a very different approach. However, when PR and advertising are co-ordinated (as a car and boat may be used at different stages in the same journey), powerful communications campaigns result (see the case study concerning Sega pirate TV on page 21).

PR versus advertising

Advertising is:

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- one hundred per cent controlled by the advertiser
- guaranteed to appear in return for payment
- regulated

PR, on the other hand, is:

- directed, but not 100 per cent controlled by the instigator
- not paid for space, so there are no guarantees
- not regulated

In advertising, you pay for the right to display or broadcast your message, be it on a giant billboard, on the side of a double-decker bus, on the page of a magazine or newspaper, on radio or on TV. You can even pay to have your message printed on the food we eat such as eggs, or make your corporate logo an integral part of a product – popular in the fashion world with brands such as French Connection, Nike and Tommy Hilfiger.

In fact, if you've got the spending power, you can pay to get your advert put on just about anything – there are even plans to train giant lasers on the sky so that your advertising message can be projected into space. Advertising is about guaranteeing that your message, which is 100 per cent controlled by you, gets to appear exactly *where* you want it to, *when* you want it to and in the *format* you choose.

PR, on the other hand, is very different and infinitely more frustrating, because it carries no cast-iron guarantees. It is the business of not only getting others to broadcast your message for you, but getting them to do it without expecting any payment in return. PR traditionally must rely on working through a third party, usually journalists, to get its message across to a desired audience. This is a crucial and fundamental difference between advertising and PR and why, when it comes to credibility, PR can blow advertising clean out of the water.

Think of how reviews work. We may see an advertisement for the brand-new Ford car; we may even pause at the page to take a closer look. But it is the ‘road-test feature’ that grabs our attention. What do the reviewers think? Is it any good? Is the acceleration really going to take my breath away? While we may not always agree with the reviewers’ verdicts, we are far more likely to believe what they have to tell us than the manufacturer’s own advertisement.

It’s not a perfect world, of course, and there are instances when a journalist has a hidden agenda or particular axe to grind. Part of the job of PR is to get round this by getting to know who these journalists are and whether they do have personal bias. If they are doing their job right, they will offer an objective view to help us make up our own minds. It is the job of PR to make sure that the journalist has all the information he or she needs to carry out the review and that these facts are presented in the most informative, relevant and interesting way.

However, like advertising, PR can be only as effective as the quality of the message it is there to impart. Remember that PR is about building trust and providing information with integrity. If your web-design company doesn’t have as many big-name clients as your rivals, then focus on other benefits that you offer – such as younger workforce, more competitive rates, area of specialisation or trial-before-you-buy offers. PR is about identifying and making the most of the benefits that are already there, not inventing those you wish you had.

Case study: When advertising and PR are linked

Working in harmony, PR and advertising make a powerful combination. When the computer entertainment giant Sega launched its Mega CD games console to its target audience – cynical, seen-it-all-before teenagers and the world-weary journalists writing for the computer games industry – the

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company knew it had to do something unexpected to grab everyone's attention.

The advertising campaign kicked off with a series of billboard and magazine ads, promoting two new consumer products: cat food and washing powder. The style of the ads was deliberately corny, with 1950s homemaker-type images and text, and did not make any reference to Sega or the new Mega CD product. The PR campaign was timed so that products' press releases were issued to all the relevant consumer media at the same time, with even a telephone hotline set up for people wanting to know more. Calls were received as people were intrigued by rather bizarre claims on the ads – claims such as that the cat food was 'good enough to eat'.

The press office received several calls from journalists following up the story, with some even requesting interviews with the man pictured in the ads eating the cat food. However, then came the masterstroke of the campaign. Firstly, the posters were 'piratised' overnight – a pirate eye patch appeared over the faces of the corny characters in the advertisements. Then, TV ad spots were taken, which began with the same images and themes of the poster ads – but then they would be suddenly 'taken over' by a fanatical, subversive pirate TV station, with a crazy host talking about the new Sega Mega CD console. The TV ad was one of the longest ever on British TV at that time – designed to reflect the 'epic experience' that gamers could expect from the console.

At the same time, the billboard ads were also subject to another pirate invasion, with a corner of each ripped off to reveal the pirate TV station's host and information about the Sega Mega CD. When the media realised that they had been caught out and that the whole cat-food/washing-powder campaign was a spoof, there was a flurry of editorial coverage across the national newspapers, the majority of

which commented on how clever it had been. Even the more serious business media, who had been curious as to why they had been sent information about the original cat-food/washing-power products, enjoyed the joke and reported it favourably.

The amplification of the ad campaign was just one of the PR tactics used by Sega in the launch of the Mega CD, but it was undoubtedly a brilliant one. By combining the advertising and PR campaigns, the company pulled off a clever coup. By making the advertising campaign the story itself, instead of focusing on the benefits of the product, Sega managed to stimulate a powerful set of responses in its audiences: curiosity, shock, humour and admiration.

Case study: When advertising and PR are not linked

When advertising and PR are not co-ordinated, the opportunity to capitalise on their joint power is lost. Value for money can also be seriously diluted. 3rd Rock Organics was an independent organic-soft-drinks business based in Boston, New England. The company launched a new range of 100 per cent natural fruit juices, targeted at the office-worker snack and lunchtime market. The top of each plastic bottle also served as a mini-cup, which provided the product with its own unique benefit in a quickly overcrowding organic-drink sector. 3rd Rock decided to invest \$500,000 advertising the new range and took a major series of ads, featuring real office workers enjoying the drink, in the local newspaper, in women's and health magazines and on billboard sites in the city's heavily populated office-block areas.

It was only after the campaign was up and running, however, that the company then briefed its PR consultancy on the project, with just \$20,000 left in the budget. Press releases were issued to the drinks trade and target consumer media, and tasting sessions were organised at the local

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shopping malls and food halls. Some editorial was achieved, although, because many of the magazine deadlines meant journalists were working two months ahead, consumers couldn't read about the drinks until long after they first went on sale.

The trade media did run snippet news pieces, but, largely, the launch went unnoticed. The drink range struggled to gain support from the trade buyers, which meant consumers were not able to buy it and ultimately the range was discontinued.

What could have been done differently here? Had 3rd Rock Organics brought the advertising and PR together from the start, the results might have been far more satisfying. The advertising agency's idea of using real office workers was strong and, by the use of black-and-white photography, the images were striking.

The PR consultancy could have suggested a competition to find candidates for the shoot ahead of the campaign, so that editorial about the ad campaign, the drink range and the chance for ordinary office workers to 'be famous' would have appeared in the local media. The editorial and competition would have created a buzz that would have helped the reps selling the range to the bar, shop and café traders. The unique top/cup feature on the juice bottles could have been offered as an exclusive story to one of the drinks-trade magazines, with information about its development and profile information on 3rd Rock Organics, contributing to the exposure and awareness raising to the trade.

Finally, by co-ordination of the advertising and PR timing schedules, product samples could have been supplied to consumer-magazine journalists in time for editorial to appear just as the advertising campaign hit, thereby providing the greatest impact. The office workers could see the ads, read

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about the drink and ultimately go into their local snack bar and buy a juice to try for themselves.

Step One summary

- Like it or not, PR is already a force in your business, because every business is constantly communicating with those in and around it. Using PR Power is about taking control of the steering instead of freewheeling along just hoping for the best.
- Public Relations is like a jigsaw – it has lots of pieces that need to be put together to form a complete picture.
- Do what the entrepreneurial giants do and put PR at the heart of your business.
- Effective PR is about taking the rough with the smooth. Learning to deal with bad as well as good news is the sign of a PR-savvy business.
- Bin the spin.
- Don't leave PR out on a limb. Remember that integrating it with advertising and other marketing activities increases value and effectiveness all round.

