

The Many Publics of Public Relations

Every organization has numerous “publics.” To figure out who your “publics” are, think about who has a role in helping your organization achieve its goals and objectives.

The most obvious “public” or target audience for public relations is the customer or prospect. But there are many others who play roles in your success: suppliers, strategic partners, resellers, integrators, venture capitalists, bankers, end users, educators, competitors, investors, employees and their families, and the community in which you do business, as examples.

Even if you have a tightly defined customer market for your products and services, don’t underestimate the importance of raising awareness of your company and your products and services within each of your target audiences.

Public relations can take many forms, for example:

- PR can highlight new or improved products and services and promote them to customers or potential customers.
- It can announce changes within your organization.
- It can be informative and instructive.
- It can address industry issues and offer your company’s position.
- It can highlight applications and the successes of your customers.
- It can inform the industry and the business community of alliances and strategic decisions.
- It can acknowledge and promote the local interests of your workforce.
- It can spark interest among potential investors or provide assurance to bankers, investors, and business partners you already have.

Let’s examine the roles of these “publics” in assuring your company’s success.

- Customers buy your products and create cash flow for your company. Making and keeping customers is your ultimate reason for being in business.

- The larger business community and others in your industry are attuned to changes in your organizational structure and in new hires. Key personnel changes or structural realignments can signal the direction your company is taking, its growth status, and its position in the industry. Attracting new talent to your company is a statement of achievement and stability and reflects your strategic planning. Name recognition can also spark a desire on the part of investors and prospects to investigate your company or look at it anew.

- Likewise, the strategic alliances and partnerships you forge can tell your publics a lot about the strength and direction of your company and can attract investors, customers, and other potential partners.

- Informative PR can help educate your many publics about the kind of business you are in, the issues your company or industry niche are dealing with, technological innovations, applications for your product or service, and your company's or product's position in the marketplace. It can also correct misapprehensions about your company or business and get your side of an issue before your publics in a positive way.

- Your customers may appreciate being highlighted in a broader industry venue or to have a particular element of their operations receive recognition.

For example, a hospital's IT department might not get much attention in the traditional medical press, but its innovations can be applauded in a specialty IT industry forum. This reflects well on the hospital and its employees and on you.

- Employees like to see the company they work for headlined in local or industry media. It fosters pride and helps them feel a part of their local community and the industry. Raising awareness of your company in the community means when the employee says, "I work for XYZ Corporation," their friends and families have an idea what that means. Being known as a good place to work is a valuable commodity.

- PR in the communities in which you do business positions your company as a good corporate citizen. People like to do business with others who

share their interests and concerns and those who give back to the communities in which they operate. Employees also take pride in working for companies that support their communities. It's a winning situation and one that your company can justifiably take pride in and talk about.

So don't think of PR as simply a way to push your product or service. Strategic PR is a versatile, flexible, and creative tool to package and deliver your company's well-defined and managed message to your many audiences. The more they know about you, the more effectively they can help you achieve your organization's goals.

-Alan

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