

15.5: Public Relations and Its Role in the Promotion Mix

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to

- Define public relations and discuss its role in the promotion mix.
- List and describe the tools of public relations.

Public Relations Defined

With today's ever-changing media landscape, maintaining a positive image with the public is of utmost importance. This is where public relations becomes an important tool in the promotion mix. Public relations is about creating and maintaining a favorable public image. Unlike other tools in the promotion mix, public relations is not paid for; it is earned media. The result of public relations is called publicity.

There are two sides to public relations. The first is considered the “fun” side, where marketers get to share stories of all the great things an organization is doing. This helps to promote the brand's image in a positive, feel-good way. The other side of public relations is damage control. This is when something negative happens within an organization and marketers must perform crisis communication—that is, addressing issues that could negatively impact the reputation of a brand. Consider in 2017, amid the height of Black Lives Matter protests, when PepsiCo aired a commercial featuring Kendall Jenner calming an angry crowd by simply handing a police officer a can of Pepsi (Business Insider, 2017). Activists slammed Pepsi for trivializing such an important issue. Originally, Pepsi released a statement supporting its advertisement, but public backlash soon changed that position, and the company issued an apology, saying it had “missed the mark” with its intentions.

Careers In Marketing: Public Relations

A public relations professional shares information on behalf of a company. There are various types of public relations jobs, and knowing the kinds of skills you should have to get the job is important. Read this article to learn about the various types of jobs and the necessary skills.

Read this [article from Harvard Business Review](#) to gain insight into whether a job in public relations is right for you. And learn from this [expert guide how to get a job in public relations](#). Want to learn about what a day looks like for a public relations professional? Check out this video from a public relations professional about what a day in the life of a real-world public relations professional looks like.



The Role of Public Relations in the Promotion Mix

In many organizations, public relations has been an afterthought or a sidebar to marketing, something used only when a crisis has occurred. However, public relations is more important than ever as the public seeks brands whose values are aligned with their own and is not hesitant to boycott those who don't. In fact, according to a 2017 survey, 86% of consumers say that authenticity is a key factor when deciding which companies and brands they will support (Business Wire, 2017). For example, in the past several years, the public has become more aware and vocal about the use of Photoshop in advertisements. In fact, many celebrities have spoken out about their own photos being Photoshopped in media and how unauthentic it translates to the public. Similarly, companies such as CVS, Dove, and Target have stopped—or limited—the use of model editing to challenge unrealistic beauty standards.

The Tools of Public Relations

In an age of information access and sharing, companies can no longer afford to hide behind their mistakes, nor can they afford to miss opportunities to boast about their good deeds. Marketers must be keenly aware of how the organization's image is portrayed publicly—to all interested parties. There are several tools that marketers should use to positively impact this image. While public relations and publicity aim to promote positive images to the public, marketers must use public relations to minimize the impact of negative publicity as well.

Consider CNN's *Blackfish*, which aired in 2013. The documentary shed light on the consequences of keeping orcas in captivity, forcing them to perform for sightseers at sea parks. It took a deep dive into the lives of these captive marine mammals and how sometimes such animals can be deadly, as was witnessed at SeaWorld in 2014 (Wikipedia, Inc., 2024). The results of the negative publicity created by the documentary caused SeaWorld's park attendance, as well as its market value, to drop (MarketWatch, 2014).

📌 Link to Learning: Examples of Bad Publicity

Watch the *Blackfish* official trailer and see for yourself the message behind this documentary, and [read here about the impact](#) this negative publicity had on SeaWorld.



You can find numerous examples of bad publicity on the Internet. [Check out this article that identifies](#) many from companies such as Easy Jet, Tinder, and Tesla.

Press Relations

Press relations entails establishing and maintaining positive relationships with those in the media, such as newspapers and television. Press relations are controlled internally by the marketing team and often include the marketer sending press releases and other stories that help to maintain a positive image of the brand. Although press relations are controlled internally, it is up to the media whether the stories will be disseminated to the public. Consider your local news station that covers a story of a local bakery raising money for charity. The bakery owner or marketer has most likely sent the news station a press release of the upcoming

event. The local news station will decide if it will or will not cover the story in its newscast. The more positive relationships the bakery team has with the local news station, the more likely it is to receive media coverage.

Public Affairs

Another important public relations tool is public affairs—efforts to influence public policy and engage with public officials and trade associations. Public affairs often align with non-corporate entities, such as nonprofits and government agencies. However, for-profit organizations are becoming more and more involved in public affairs. Organizational leaders and marketers often share their economic impact with legislators to help policy makers amend or set new policies. For example, when Walmart plans to open a new store, the executives often reach out to local legislators to explain the goodwill and positive impact on the local economy. They continue conversations with local politicians to show they are “good citizens” of the community and help to impact local (as well as state and federal) legislation (Quorum, 2022).

Lobbying

Very similar to public affairs, lobbying involves the intention of influencing public policy and law. Lobbying is a way for companies to influence legislation in their favor. Lobbying is a large part of the political system in the United States, and many companies and industry associations contribute massive amounts of money to influence politicians. Lobbying has come under much scrutiny over the years as companies continue to grow and have larger resources to influence laws and legislation in their favor as opposed to favoring the individual or the greater society (Frankenfield, 2022).

For example, in 2020, the National Association of Realtors was the top lobbying association in the United States, followed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, and the American Hospital Association. Together, these associations spent over \$200 million lobbying to impact local, state, and federal legislation (Statista, 2022).

Events

Organizations are increasingly sponsoring or hosting special events to show support for various causes. Such events are also a way to showcase the company, products/services, and/or brands to the public. Often, companies use special events to show the public that their values and ideals are part of their business model. For example, Kroger has sponsored and volunteered for the Susan G. Komen Central Indiana Race for a Cure for many years. With one of its division offices located in Indianapolis, Indiana, the company has been covered by media for its involvement in the local chapter of the Breast Cancer Foundation (Susan G. Komen, Inc., 2016). The events not only provide a much-needed community service but also generate positive publicity for the company.

Digital Media/Social Media Marketing

Social and digital media have become important tools for marketing managers, and the use of these platforms is advantageous in public relations as much as in advertising. The biggest advantages to using digital tools in public relations and publicity is that they can reach a larger audience in a short time, are fairly inexpensive in comparison with other mediums, and allow for real-time communication.

The San Francisco Batkid took social media by storm when the campaign was rolled out by Make-A-Wish Foundation. A boy fighting leukemia wished to be Batman, and the campaign went viral with the hashtag #SFBatman. People everywhere took time to volunteer and take part in the boy’s dream.

Link to Learning: #SFBatman

Check the #SFBatkid Twitter hashtag here to see the Batkid’s journey, watch the trailer to a movie telling his story, and watch a video showcasing the public relations campaign.



Knowledge Check

It's time to check your knowledge on the concepts presented in this section. Refer to the Answer Key at the end of the book for feedback.

1.

What is a promotion mix element that is earned rather than paid for?

- a. Public relations
- b. Advertising
- c. Television advertisements
- d. Web page advertisements

2.

Which of the following is a way companies attempt to influence public policy and law?

- a. Press relations
- b. Events

- c. Lobbying
- d. Publicity

3.

Mikel does not have a lot of money for marketing his new business. But he wants to raise awareness of his company and decides to commit to handing out free water at a local 5K run. Which of the following is Mikel participating in?

- a. Events
- b. Lobbying
- c. Press relations
- d. Public affairs

4.

As a marketer, you are responsible for creating and maintaining positive relationships with the press. Which part of public relations are you responsible for?

- a. Lobbying
- b. Publicity
- c. Public affairs
- d. Press relations

5.

As a new business owner, Michaela is attempting to sway local leaders to give the business a tax cut for the first year of operation. She invites all the local officials to a public meeting, where she presents the anticipated economic impact of her business. Michaela is engaged in which public relations tool?

- a. Press relations
- b. Public affairs
- c. Lobbying
- d. Events

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