



## How To...Draft a Public Relations Strategy

### Definition of Public Relations

*"PR is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. PR is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."* The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) - [www.ipr.org.uk/](http://www.ipr.org.uk/) . PR is more than simply producing publicity material. An organisation is only as strong as its reputation. The PR function is to manage that reputation.

### Why do you need a PR Strategy?

- To complement the overall business plan of an organisation
- To identify ways in which PR can help achieve an organisations objectives
- To focus and manage all the communications of an organisation
- To ensure maximum benefit from all PR activities
- It can also help educate those within an organisation about the value of PR

### Essential questions a strategy should answer:

1. *Where are we now?*
2. *Where do we want to be?*
3. To whom are we talking (audiences)?
4. What do we want them to do and why do we want them to do it?
5. What are we going to say to them (messages)?
6. Where are we going to reach them?
7. When are we going to reach them?
8. Which techniques (methods) are we going to use?
9. How much are we going to spend?
10. What if there are unforeseen problems?
11. How did we do?

*(The first two questions are essential only if your organisation does not already have a business plan.)*

#### 1. Where is your organisation now?

PR practice should ideally be driven by research and analysis so it is essential to carry out some research among key audiences (can be simple questionnaires or telephone calls). Analyse your results to see if the perceptions of the organisation is correct. Summarise where your organisation is now (you can include personal observations here).

#### 2. Where do you want to be?

It is essential to get management input here as this should be inline with an organisations' as well as identify ways in which PR can help specifically help an organization achieve its objectives. Keep this realistic but visionary (the whole world being aware of your company is not realistic unless you are Coca Cola, for example). You want group X to know you exist; You want group Y to sign up for some



of your services; You want the media to publish your news releases; You want to help secure future government funding; and so on.

### **3. To whom are you talking (audiences)?**

PR objectives are nearly always about influencing someone either to take action or not to take action, the action having some effect on an organisation, Identifying target audiences is a vital part of a strategy. The person or persons (public) being targeted become the target audience (e.g. suppliers, customers, shareholders etc.) Where possible, identify the smallest possible groupings of individuals for maximum effect. Once identified, audiences should be prioritized as it is unlikely you will have the resources to communicate well with all of them at once.

### **4. What do you want them to do and why do you want them to do it?**

When all the potential audiences (as primary, secondary, etc.) are listed, write down what you want each audience to do and why. This can be combined with the previous section (listed after each audience). The why will mostly be obvious, for example, TERENA wants the NRENs in Europe to continue to be members. Why? Because it is a membership organisation, and without the NRENs it would not exist.

### **5. What are you going to say to them?**

In a new section, under each identified audience add statements about what you should say to each audience in order for them to do what you want. Ensure messages are simple statements and you can list many potential messages here. *Remember:* A message must be repeated many times in many different forms in order to have the desired impact on an audience. Messages should be tailored to each audience. Context, tone of voice and choice of language should be considered at all times. Don't bombard audiences with too many messages at once – you may need to pick a couple of main messages to begin your campaign.

### **6. Where are you going to reach them?**

The audiences have now been identified, as have the key messages for each audience. But where are you going to reach them? Some audiences you may have all the data you need in order to reach them – names, email addresses, postal address etc. But, there may be some audiences you do not have any details of. You, therefore, will need to use specific methods of communication that can help you reach them. For example, perhaps you can reach them by placing stories in the magazines they read (media relations).

### **7. When are you going to reach them?**

Timing is very important. It is vital to link specific PR activities to fixed events in the corporate calendar. For example, there's no point in issuing a news release days after an event. It is important to include milestones and deadlines here as well (e.g. draft text, edit text, meet designer, first proofs, etc.).

### **8. Which methods of communication are you going to use?**

Decide what you are going to do in order to convey your key messages to your key audiences (brochures, news releases, videos, etc.) but...ensure you are using the right methods to reach each target audience. DO NOT decide on the methods of communication before you have identified audiences and



messages – this is a very common mistake. One size does not necessarily fit all! Remember you will need to repeat key messages in several different forms in order to get the desired response. Also remember you cannot target specific audiences via a website so your web information should be clearly understood by as many audiences as possible.

## 9. How much are you going to spend?

The answer to this question will have a bearing on number 8 so they should be considered together. Unfortunately we all have budget constraints which will have an effect on the methods of communication that we can use. Budget (wo)man hours as well as include design, printing, mailing costs etc. Allows you to know your limitations, set priorities and plan in advance and it means no nasty surprises for your managers.

## 10. What if there are unforeseen problems?

This helps focus the mind on potential things can (and do) go wrong. Brainstorm with managers, colleagues etc. Perhaps your software doesn't work on windows; your server can't cope with the number of increased hits on your website etc. Think how to deal with potential problems. Contingency planning is vital!

## 12. How did you do – measurement and evaluation?

You cannot possibly know if your campaign is successful unless you measure your success somehow. Set measures (before embarking on a campaign). They can be as simple as:

- Number of hits/unique visitors on your website
- Media coverage (opportunities to see; positive versus negative; etc.)
- Increased demand for services
- New contacts made
- Output (news releases, publicity material developed, etc.)

Some essential jargon busting:

**PUBLICS** - a group of people with similar interests

**STAKEHOLDERS** – a special public, composed of those who have a particular interest (or stake) in your organisation (e.g. universities)

**AUDIENCES** – a “public” with whom you are communicating

**PRIMARY PUBLICS** – the audiences you specifically want to influence (the people whose behaviour you are trying to change)

**SECONDARY PUBLICS** – the people who can intervene on your behalf and influence your primary publics (e.g. the media)

**TERTIARY PUBLICS** – the “special” publics composed primarily of organised groups that can mobilise quickly and endorse your cause (e.g. TERENA as a membership organisation)