

Wasted Time, Money and Energy



Public relations efforts are better off with management's involvement.

It's too bad that so many water management and manufacturing firms waste so much money on public relations (PR) activities that have little or no impact on the press or, more importantly, on their prospective customers.

One of the key reasons these activities fail is that management lets its in-house staff or an outside agency handle the company's PR without management's direct involvement. Another reason many efforts are a waste is that too often the people doing the writing would have a hard time writing a ransom note, let alone something an editor and/or his readers would want to read.

Some heads of companies feel that they can "assign" their PR activities to someone and then never offer any input after that. Then, when projects are completed, the managers wonder why the PR activities don't reflect their views and directions.

Public relations starts with management, and it ends with management. The people who "do things in between" merely facilitate management's messages. The PR person's job is to take a few statements and thoughts and put them into a form that makes the corporate managers sound knowledgeable and professional. As far as the company's public is concerned, the visible activities are all a direct reflection on management.

My company once told a company president that we would be happy to help him carry out his PR program, but that since he was responsible for directing, guiding and projecting the company to the outside world, the success or failure of the program really was up to him. No public relations staff or agency can assume that responsibility. It can only make it easier for management to communicate internally and externally, which aids in achieving the company's goals.

Today's Images

Lee Iacocca did something in the automotive industry that hasn't been done since Henry Ford: He humanized Chrysler

Corp. Very few people can put a name and face with General Motors, Ford, Toyota or Honda. But most Americans can put a name and face with Chrysler.

Bill Gates (despite current problems) knows one of his key jobs is the proper projection, internally and externally, at Microsoft. Lou Gerstner at IBM takes an active role in the company's PR activities. Al Shugart was Seagate to the world, but today can you visualize Seagate?

These key executives realized the importance of their roles as spokespersons for their companies and industries. Putting themselves in the public eye isn't a matter of ego. These people know that they have a responsibility to their shareholders, suppliers, employees and customers. They must present a strong, consistent image of the company—in good times and in bad.

If they didn't take their jobs seriously, their companies would blend into the background along with the hundreds of other firms you have difficulty recalling. These people make a PR person's job 150 percent easier.

PR Person's Job

It's not that management doesn't need an internal, external or combination PR team. Professionals are needed to present the company to editors/reporters; write technical and user articles; develop corporate, technical, product and applications backgrounders; set up press meetings, hospitality suites and other activities; as well as handle routine queries from the press. It's their job to help humanize the company to both the press and prospective customers.

Communication generally is carried out with the written word, so it is important that the individual doing the PR is able to string words and sentences together into a clear, concise and intelligent concept.

Liking people is not a main prerequisite for the job. Being able to interpret what people say is important. People outside the organization determine how the company, its products and image are perceived. People inside the organization determine the quality of the projected image of the company and its products. PR staff have to interpret the messages of both groups.

Pivotal Person

Even though the PR person is interpreting the messages of many groups, it is the management team that the PR person is reflecting and presenting.

The president of a company can equate himself to a precious gem. The PR person's job is to bring the gem out of the vault and present it in the proper light and setting. It's his job to prepare the audience for the president, properly present him and then carry out the nuts and bolts of

the job by providing editors with the material they need for their article and/or interview.

Without that precious gem (or president), no PR person can sell the company and its products to the media. If the boss is only paste, then the company and products also are paste. No amount of PR effort or rhetoric is going to make a difference.

As a result, PR people have to spend much of their time properly preparing manage-

ment for their meetings with the press. And they have to know how to support both management and the press.

Anyone who says that they do it differently and that they can completely remove management's responsibilities is only blowing smoke, and any president who believes that a solid communications program can work without his involvement is wasting precious time, money and opportunity.

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About the Author

G.A. "Andy" Marken is president of Marken Communications, Inc. in Santa Clara, Calif. He may be reached at andy@markencom.com.

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