

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING ... IS THERE A DIVIDING LINE?

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The title of this piece is simply a contraction of similar questions that always seem to crop up in a discussion of public relations and advertising.

Probably the chief difficulty posed is the supposition that the questioner knows what public relations is all about and that's not always true!

My wife often confounds her friends when they ask just what her husband does for a living. She replies, "He's in public relations." The response is usually a double take, accompanied by a confused look, followed by, "Oh, that's wonderful!" - a slight pause - then "But what does he do?"

This is not as unusual as it sounds. Some years ago a very distinguished businessman in St. Louis approached us as follows: "I think our company needs public relations. I haven't the slightest idea what it is; how much will it cost us to get it?"

This company has been a client of ours for over 10 years. But it took three months of intensive study and research of this particular business before we could give a definite answer to whether or not this company needed public relation counselling and how much it would cost.

After talking, discussing, lecturing and generally holding forth on this subject, we've come to the conclusion that it isn't easy to discuss public relations at all. Nor does the question as to the dividing line between public relations and advertising lend itself to pat answers.

Consider, for example, this comment from the March 1960 issue of RELAZIONI

PUBBLICHE, the official publication of the Italian Public Relations Society:

"Many facts of today's business life reveal an evolution which is not always perceived by the general public. Indeed, this is brought about by inertness or defective observation -- to appraise those facts individually, and to attach to them an occasional or contingent character. Among those facts we must include all those events which go beyond the traditional production and sales activities of the concern, such as action in the field of culture, community life, construction of homes and residential centers for employees, and which are evidence of new trends in the management of business life, inspired by social concepts and not solely governed by the law of profit.

"It should also be noted that the public, under the influence of the innumerable visual and oral pressures brought to bear on it, has much changed: it has widened its knowledge and experience, and has become more sensitive and exacting towards the products and the selling criteria of a concern.

"It is now well established that the public is not contented with a mere barter of money against products, but also expects politeness, understanding, tact, importance. Consequently, a concern must take care of its own public, and this does not only consist of buyers, but of all the other people with whom that concern has relations. Accordingly, public relations is to be conceived as a continuous process aimed at gaining good-will and comprehension on the part of all the classes of public with which a concern is in contact."

If you'd like to go back and re-read the above, it's all right with us. It is quite a mouthful. But it will give a faint idea of what happens when you try to come up with a simple definition of public relations.

What public relations people do is probably more to the point than what public relations is.

And the public relations program itself depends upon the individual character of the particular business, the people who run it, their operations and problems. Thus, it is almost impossible to discuss the subject in generalities with any degree of intelligence.

There are, however, some principles we go by. These are not too difficult to put in writing. Putting these principles to work, though, is where the skill and the experience of public relations practitioner comes into play. Public relations people differ in just about the same manner as individual lawyers, physicians, bankers or businessmen differ.

WHO'S CONFUSED?

It is understandable that many people are confused about public relations because "Public Relations," as we know it today, is of comparatively recent origin.

Some people equate publicity, stunts, advertising, speeches, fixing traffic tickets, settling labor disputes, working on government and legislative problems, etc., with public relations. Still others think it is a means of accomplishing some objective that somehow could not otherwise be reached without it.

Many people just plain don't know.

WHAT PUBLIC RELATIONS IS...

In many respects the practice of public relations at any level, for both small and large businesses, and in any field, is simply an extension of an individual's personal public relations and the way in which he achieves them.

You live with many "Publics" -- your family, your neighbors, your friends and associates at work and at play. You can be your own researcher -- assuming, of course, that you can be objective about yourself -- (not a safe assumption by the way!)

Here are some simple tests:

What are your relationships with people?

Do they like you?

Do they understand you?

Do they cooperate with you?

Do they support the things you support?

If they do, you have good public relations.

EVERYBODY HAS PUBLIC RELATIONS...

It is the same with an organization -- a company, an industry, a civic institution, or government. In fact, everyone and every organization has "public relations."

It is never a question of whether you have it. The question is only whether your public relations are good or bad!

Fortune Magazine states it this way:

"Good public relations is good performance -
publicly appreciated"

This can further be expressed by a mathematical formula of sorts.

X plus Y = Z

X PLUS Y EQUALS GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS...

The Z is our objective -- Good Public Relations.

Now - let's give values to "X" and "Y"

X is good performance.

Achieving good public relations is not a matter of publicity, good layout, fancy pictures, slick words, or beautiful packages. Let's look at it this way:

You simply cannot achieve good employee relations unless they are based on fair wages and good working conditions, etc.

You cannot achieve good customer relations with a shoddy product or bad service.

You cannot achieve good stockholder relations with fancy annual reports if you don't have a solid operation to back it up.

So, it can be demonstrated - the "X", or your basic performance, is vital to your public relations.

Good public relations is being good -- and getting credit or appreciation for it.

INTRODUCING - "COMMUNICATIONS" ...

Important as doing the right things ... the process of gaining public appreciation, understanding, and knowledge of that performance is also important. This is the "Y" in our public relations formula.

This is where the process we know as "COMMUNICATION" comes in. Some confuse it with publicity and even notoriety - but that by no means begins to describe it fully.

It is telling people about what you do - and why you do it - and how what you are doing is important for the good of the public or the good of the community or the good of the society. It is earned recognition.

We believe that good performance alone is not enough; people must know about your performance if they are to appreciate it. The competition for the eye and the ear and the mind of people today is tremendous. Whether we like it or not - the world is full of people - and organizations - who are doing great jobs, but who lose out from lack of recognition.

Let's repeat the formula: "X" plus "Y" = "Z" or

Good performance plus Good communication =

Good public relations.

WHO ARE OUR "PUBLICS"?

We learn very quickly in the practice of public relations that we are not dealing with some large group or some inanimate object or mass of people called the "PUBLIC".

In our communication process we deal with many "publics". We must consider numerous groups, organizations and people. Each of these "publics" consists of individuals with feelings and emotions. We need to understand what these individual publics do and why they do it... their likes and dislikes, their opinions. We must know and analyze their problems whenever possible.

If we are to do an effective job in public relations the program must be translated to the individual persons in these many "publics". This means "pointing" towards specific groups instead of using a scatter approach, hoping that some of the information will stick.

A CLOSER LOOK AT OUR "PUBLICS"...

Practically every business deals with many "publics".

The most important of these may be employees, customers, suppliers, civic, service, church, fraternal and school groups, other organizations and media of various kinds such as newspapers, radio, television, etc.

If the business is large enough, it may have directors and stockholders as still other "publics" to consider. And ever-present are the government bodies with whom most businesses have associations of one kind or another. Each of these organizations, groups, or agencies can be considered a separate "public".

LOOK WHAT'S HERE...

If we move the camera up a little closer to our employee publics, here's what we find:

Executives	...	Supervisors	...	Salesmen	...	Drivers
Office Personnel	...	Warehousemen	...	Maintenance men		

and there are:

Union employees ... Non-union employees

Add to this, union business agents, union officers, shop stewards, etc.

By no means does this exhaust the list. For instance, in the "office" category alone we could break our "publics" down even further into supervisory, clerical, secretarial, stenographic, accounting, business machine operators, telephone operators, cleaning women, porters, etc.

This is not an attempt to confuse. It does give some idea of what we mean.

Once we spot our "publics," plans and methods of reaching these groups now begin to materialize, and now we can understand the need for proper and frequently different planning to reach the individual groups most effectively.

Not all businesses will have such complicated "publics" to deal with - it's just as important, however, to know they exist.

"BUCKSHOT" VERSUS "PINPOINT"...

Now, when the list of "publics" is examined closely, it soon reveals what problems of communication are involved.

Obviously, there are many occasions, when an over-all or all inclusive approach would be effective.

Equally obvious is the need for a pinpointed approach in numerous instances.

For example, if our sales or loans were down, we would not be spending much time working out the sales problems with secretaries, accountants, or IBM machine operators. We would normally confine our communications to those most directly responsible for sales.

STILL MORE...

If various employees are complaining about bad treatment, favoritism, unnecessary or public criticism, discourtesy from superiors, obviously, the human relations job needs to be pinpointed where it will do the most good -- to the supervisors concerned.

Sometimes the only effective communication is an individual or separate approach to the various groups and at different times to achieve the best and fullest results.

The important point we are trying to make here is that to have effective communication we must always be conscious of which "public" or "publics" we are trying to reach. With this principle always before us, we can undertake to do a better job of effective communication.

"DO IT YOURSELF" - PUBLIC RELATIONS...

Once the need for the kind of communication and the groups we want to reach has been established, planning begins. Publicity, special events, press statements, speeches, feature stories, lectures and seminars, films and publications, and the many other methods for getting across information and ideas can be adopted. While in many cases the "do it yourself" public relations will suffice -- no one need be embarrassed about seeking public relations help, counsel, or advice about any of these technical matters.

Just remember that, after all, just because a person is a good organizer, a super-salesman, a banker, a manufacturer or an excellent executive, it doesn't make him a good public relations expert, writer, layout artist, speechmaker, etc.

Nor can we always be objective about our own problems. It often takes someone else to see our own problems more clearly or in proper perspective.

Get the best advice you can - and use it!

GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS PAYS OFF...

The practice of good public relations pays off. It pays off in dollars and cents -- but it does more than that.

Good public relations pays off in fewer headaches, fewer ulcers, and in better and more enjoyable living.

Good public relations can go a long way in obtaining cooperation, in changing attitudes, in preventing lost tempers and endless arguments, and, sometimes, actual hurt.

And in today's fast - moving, competitive world, we believe a sound public relations program is as essential as intelligent, forward-looking leadership to insure tangible growth and lasting good will.

WHAT PUBLIC RELATIONS IS NOT!

Public Relations is not a false front for --

- ... bad human relations
- ... poor business practices
- ... unfair treatment of employees
- ... failure to hold up your share of community responsibility
- ... bad customer relations
- ... or inefficiency

No one should EVEN WASTE TIME WORKING ON A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM IF THEY THINK IT WILL HELP TO COVER UP ANY OF THESE.

LET'S LOOK BACK...

Reviewing what we have said about "Public Relations," here's where we stand.

1. Public Relations is really an extension of your personal life.
2. If people respond favorably to you and your organization, you have good public relations.

3. No one can escape Public Relations. Everybody has it. The only real question is whether or not we have good or bad public relations.

4. Good public relations is good performance - publicly appreciated.

5. X plus Y equals Z.

6. Good performance is the biggest part of the job. Public appreciation, however, is the important link necessary to complete the equation.

7. Publicity without good performance is not good enough.

8. Study of all "publics" involved in Public Relations program is essential.

9. Effective "Communication" - the way we tell our story - is very important in carrying out the total program.

10. Good public relations pays off in many different ways.

11. But Public Relations is not a front for:

... bad human relations

... poor business practices

... unfair treatment of employees

... failure to hold up your share of community responsibility

... bad customer relations

... or inefficiency

WHAT ABOUT OUR QUESTION, HOWEVER...

Now, after all this, we have with us the still unanswered question as to the differences - if any - between public relations and advertising.

A quick general answer is to say that advertising is directed at selling a product or a service; a public relations program is directed at selling the institution which produces that product or service. Advertising encourages you to buy a certain automobile. Public relations is concerned with what you think of the manufacturer

as a place to work, as a company in your community, as an investment possibility, and so on.

This does not mean that advertising does not affect your public relations. It often does. And it does not mean that institutional advertising may not be a part of your public relations communications program. It often is.

Another difference involves the "seen" and the "unseen."

Almost every advertising program results in the use of some paid media. The agency and the client can see or hear the pictures or words that are produced.

The public relations consultant, however, functions in different areas. Sometimes he meets with a client for hours or days to discuss and consider a particular program, problem or project. The end result of all this may be a simple yes or no. Frequently, a tangible program does not result in the same manner as a program of advertising. Frequently as a result of consideration of the public relations problem the advice is given that no action should be taken. This seldom happens in advertising.

In advertising, with the effort directed toward direct sales, a simple dollars and cents evaluation of the program in both cost and results can be made from looking at the specific record. These records can tell the story of results obtained although one must understand that no single thing or program can usually be said to be totally responsible for a successful sales program.

It is much more difficult to evaluate a public relations program unless one goes to the time, trouble and expense of taking opinion surveys before and after more important phases of the program.

Another thing. The advertising agency usually receives its principle fee from commissions based upon advertising placed or production accomplished.

The public relations consultant usually only has his knowledge, experience and judgment as his stock in trade. These add up to time as the ingredient or chief measure of the public relation consultant's fee.

Problems of human relations, employee relations, community relations etc. seldom result in commissionable production. Generally speaking, most advertising agencies of whom we have knowledge limit so called public relations activities to product publicity or special promotions. For these activities, the agency usually charges an over-riding fee to cover the time consumed by its staff employees in this usually non-commissionable activity. Some advertising agencies list public relations departments as part of the service they render.

To sum up. It helps to answer the question raised in the initial subject of this piece by knowing more about what public relations is, and what public relations people do. Where apparent conflicts exist in borderline cases, between advertising and public relations, apply the good old process of common sense using the yard stick of the client's best interest as the best solution.

It seems to me that this is just about where we came in. . . . and probably as good a place as any to stop.

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