
Sharon Bannerton: Recognising PR as a business function

[Sharon Bannerton](#) talks PR theory and practice in a new series on a marketing tool that is becoming all the more significant in a world of instant communication and pro-active reputation management.

Descriptions of spin, publicity and image management have always jarred with me, as do textbook definitions like ‘multi-layered communication with relevant internal and external audiences’.

Some takes on public relations (PR) are glib, implying a fiction or deceit, and many are just over-baked, possibly trying to confer some mysticism on what is usually just a form of commercial or public service communication.

I’m not sure where I first heard it, but a definition of PR that resonates is the idea of “doing good and getting the credit.”

The job of PR

Creating and delivering a great product or service, creating jobs and wealth, sharing knowledge and expertise, spearheading innovation or positive change in the community, in charities, cultural life, public administration or elsewhere, is all newsworthy.

And it is the job of the PR to identify news potential, and to be the conduit between the brand or organisation and the media helping to communicate that news.

A recent trend, where brands and businesses engage at a more meaningful level with customers and employees, has been accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

And this is where PR can really support brand development and promote loyalty.

Effective marketing must harness sincerity and humanity, putting a human face on a brand or business and demonstrating empathy and emotional connection.

Shallow ad-hoc campaigns won’t achieve this. PR and reputation management need long-term strategy and consistent communication to build trust and convey thought leadership and expertise.

At what price reputation?

Another difficulty for business is that return on PR is not easily quantifiable or tangible. Return on

investment (ROI) isn't easy to measure in any marketing discipline, as per the quote attributed to Unilever founder, Lord Leverhume: "Half my advertising is wasted but I do not know which half."

Measuring the value of any relationship is complex and PR is no different.

But the value of positive relationships and understanding in commercial life shouldn't be underestimated. Especially in anticipation of challenging times, like this unprecedented pandemic or a downturn, positive sentiment and a good reputation will stand to individuals and brands.

The reality is that public relations exist; regardless of whether or not a business or brand decides to actively manage its reputation and relationships.

But, not managing business perception, in particular, and not being accountable, can be damaging.

The good news is that public relations can sound complex, but its practice is usually simpler than it seems, as this series of practical articles will hopefully show.

Some practical PR advice and DIY PR considerations follow in the next column.

Owner and Managing Director at [Bannerton PR](#), Sharon Bannerton heads a team of experienced

communications and media professionals, delivering impactful PR, media profile and events for consumer and corporate brands, trade organisations and public sector bodies.

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