

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN IN SUCCESSFULLY RUNNING A HUMANITARIAN CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT: *Public relations activity is increasingly widespread worldwide, each company knowing that in order to make its activity known to the public, it requires punctual public relations actions, actions that require proper planning and organization. Planning must be preceded by research and communication with all stakeholders, with company employees, but also with external partners. At the same time, for an efficient planning, a very important element is the budget available, but also the other material resources involved in the campaign. In the work the humanitarian campaign I presented is an example of the implementation of the stages of planning such an activity. It started with the definition of the goal, continued with the raising of money to pay part of the treatment of the twin children suffering from autism spectrum disorder, then the activities were planned: a charity football match, raffles, etc. Also, partnership was concluded, sponsorships were obtained in order to successfully run the humanitarian campaign. Therefore, for the success of a humanitarian campaign it is important to carefully plan each stage and to probe the expectations that the public has, but also to choose those categories of audiences that are suitable for the proposed goals.*

KEY WORDS: *public relations, planning, public relations campaign plan, public relations specialist, humanitarian campaign.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *A12, M37.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of public relations is very complex and diverse, and the public relations specialist is challenged every day to solve and streamline a variety of situations. There are many public relations associations around the world and they are developing at a very fast pace.

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From an economic point of view, the field of public relations has developed the most in the USA where organizations spend the most money on this activity. There are independent public relations firms here, but this field is also very developed in Eastern Europe or in former Soviet countries, especially in the fields of public affairs, corporate relations, health and marketing communication. Also, an area with high potential for development is Asia as a result of the privatization of national industries and the expansion of market economies to South America and Africa.

Rex Harlow, who founded the American public Relations Society (PRSA), gathered 500 definitions of public relations and discussed them with other specialists, developing a compressed definition: public relations is a distinct managerial function that contributes to establishing and maintaining mutual directions of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics. This function involves managing problems or events; helps the management to be informed about the public opinion and to react to it; define and strengthen the responsibility of the management to serve the public interest; it helps leadership keep up with change and use it effectively, serving as an early warning and trend prediction system, and uses both research and ethical communication techniques as the main tools for work” (Wilcox, et al., 2009).

Scott M. Cullip, Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom in *effective public Relations* states that “public relations is the managerial function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various audiences upon which its success or failure depends.” Authors J.E. Grunig and Todd Hunt say that public relations is “the management of communication between an organization and its publics.” But the most modest definition is that of Lawrence W long and Vincent Hazelton who state that public relations is a management communication function whereby organizations adapt, motivate, or maintain their environment to attract organizational goals. They argue that public relations should, rather than persuade, stimulate bilateral communication and mutual understanding, and an organization also changes attitudes and behaviors, not just the target audience (Wilcox, et al., 2009).

In the European view of public relations, their aims and functions are taken into account. The public Relations activity must contain the following elements:

- ✓ Creating and strengthening trust, understanding and sympathy;
- ✓ Increased attention, interest and needs;
- ✓ Building and maintaining bilateral communication and relations;
- ✓ Creating understanding and establishing mutual agreement;
- ✓ Articulation, representation and adjustment of interests;
- ✓ Influence of public opinion;
- ✓ Resolving conflicts and achieving consensus [Public Relations Review].

2. STAGES OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN

The public Relations Plan is a design tool, structured, that is carried out on various occasions, according to the objectives assumed by the organization and in accordance with the proposed goals. The public relations plan must include the following

steps: Research, planning, communication and evaluation. These elements make up any public relations plan.

2.1. Research – the first stage of the public relations plan

Research is the first step in the preparation of the public relations plan and consists in informing and collecting data by the organization so that it can make informed decisions. Before starting this stage, the public relations specialist must answer a few questions: What is the problem? What kind of information do we need? How will the results be used? Which audience is the subject of research? Who does the research? How will the research results be analyzed and applied? What time will be allocated for this activity? What costs does it entail?

Although the research activity is considered to be the first stage of the plan, elements of it can be found throughout the other stages. The goals for which a research is undertaken are diverse and can be: Obtaining credibility in front of management – when the public relations specialist comes with accurate data, with concrete results, not with intuitions; defining the audience and segmenting the audiences – it is desirable to know the type of audience; helps to formulate the optimal strategy so as not to waste resources and time with ineffective strategies; crisis prevention – research identifies possible problems, risks, etc. before they impact the public; company media, monitoring competition, influencing public opinion, measuring success, etc. ((Wilcox, et al., 2009).

There are different research techniques that are used according to the purpose, audiences, strategy, etc.

The best-known research technique is *scientific sampling*. Sampling consists of "the prevalence of a small sample from an overall group" (Giddens, 2001) and assumes the existence of two characteristics: Random ocacater and large number of subjects. If the samples are chosen appropriately, then the results will be generalized to the total population and will be correct. That is why representativeness is very important – the group of individuals must be typical for the total population. The most important sampling procedure is random sampling or by establishing the "probabilistic sample" in which subjects participate as diverse as possible, with the most varied concerns, but an important aspect is also the participation of the largest number of subjects.

Depending on the intended purpose and the proposed theme, the sample size varies. National surveys have samples of between 1000-1500 people with a margin of error of up to 3% in the 95% of cases. If the same questionnaire is applied 20 times, results are obtained in 19 out of 20 times within the limit of 3 percentage points. In public relations, people's attitudes and behaviors are surveyed, so it is not necessary to have more than 250-500 people with a margin of error of 5%-6% or a sample of 100 people if strictly adhering to the rules, has a margin of error of 10% (Wilcox, et al., 2009).

It is very important to get the right results that *questionnaires are designed*. In order for a questionnaire to be effective, it must be carefully thought out and properly developed. The most important rules for drawing up questionnaires are the following:

1. Formulation of objectives – the objectives must be formulated in writing, must be clearly defined and entail measurable results;
2. Establishing the information to be collected and drafting the questions on this basis;

3. Determination of the sample size;
4. The questions raised must be clear, not contain ambiguous words or suggested answers;
5. The questionnaire should be formulated in such a way as to allow for rapid and efficient interpretation.

Questionnaires can be applied both directly, face-to-face and indirectly, sent by post or phone. The way the questionnaire is administered depends heavily on its objectives. Therefore, depending on our intention to see hot reactions, some questionnaires apply only directly, face to face with the subject.

2.2. Planning – the second stage of the public relations plan

It is the second stage of the public relations plan and the most laborious consisting in the actual organization of the activity starting from the results of the research obtained in the previous stage. Planning must be a strategic one, “knowing where you want to get (the target) and how you can get there (the strategy).” To deliciously set the direction of the organization, to avoid the drift and inertia of routine activities" (Wilcox, et al., 2009). The public relations practitioner must think, analyze, choose the most appropriate methods and combine them effectively.

There are two significant approaches to the planning stage: *Goal management* (MBO) and Ketchum's strategic planning model.

Goal Management (MBO) is the formulation of a strategy that leads to the achievement of a specific objective of the organization. In their public Relations Management by objectives, Norman R. Nager and T.H. Allen approach *management through objectives in 9 steps*:

- step 1. Client or employer goals: For what purpose does communication take place? How does it help achieve goals?
- step 2. Audience/audience: Who is the message for? What are the characteristics of the audience?
- step 3. Audience goals: What does the audience want to know? What interests him?
- step 4. Media channels: Which channel is best for sending the message?
- step 5. Media goals: Why would a media trust publish such news?
- step 6. Sources and questions: Which primary or secondary sources will be used? Which experts will be interviewed? Which quotes fit?
- step 7. Communication strategies: What factors can block/distort the message? Are the media favorable or unfavorable to the message?
- step 8. The essence of the message – what impact does the message have? What is the purpose of the message, to inform or to motivate?
- step 9. Non-verbal support – How can the message be better highlighted with photos, graphics, movies, etc. (https://books.google.ro/books/about/Public_Relations.html).

Ketchum's strategic planning model has 4 points:

- Facts: General data (trends in the field), aspects of the product or service, competition data (strengths, vulnerabilities) and consumer data;
- Objectives: Business objectives, the role of public relations, sources of business development;

- Audience – the target audience (audience category and their sensitive points), the current audience (audience opinion about the product, service or problem) and the desired attitude.
- Key messages – What messages should be sent to change or strengthen the public's attitude? (Wilcox, et al., 2009).

2.3. The development of the public relations plan

The public relations plan includes relevant elements about the organization, the purpose for which it is achieved, but also the projection for the future. Any public relations plan shall contain at least the following elements:

1. The situation or context

In order to design a good plan, we need to understand the situation or context in which such a plan is required. There are three typical situations in which it is necessary to achieve it:

- The organization must introduce a remedial program to deal with a negative situation. For example, Mark Trucks started a large campaign when its market share fell.
- The organization is to carry out a specific, unique project. For example, the inauguration of the new library in San Antonio to draw attention to the fact that the library is a place of culture, accessible to all.
- The organization strives to strengthen its position in the market. For example, a lighting company distributed brochures with interior decorations at Christmas and its dealers participated in decorating R. McDonald's houses to attract new customers.

2. Objectives

Setting goals is very important. In developing them, we must take into account that they are relevant – to match the situation, to be realistic and to be measurable, that is, to indicate the success or failure of the program.

The objectives may be to inform when messages are issued and to disseminate them correctly and to raise public awareness of the existence of a new product on the market, or they may be motivation objectives aimed at producing reactions among the public. If the information objectives are more difficult to quantify, the motivation objectives are measured by the campaign results.

3. The audience

The audience must be defined very well and the key audiences are followed by demographic data: Age, income, social status, education, etc. Many organizations understand through the target audience – the media audience what is not right because the press has the role of facilitating access to a certain audience, without being that themselves.

4. Strategia

Strategy is the conceptualization of how the goal is to be achieved. It can be a general strategy or several smaller strategies depending on the organization's objectives and audiences.

Very important at this stage are *key messages or themes*. They must be impactful, repetitive and run several times throughout the program. It must also refer to feelings, emotions, feelings, etc. and produce emotion.

5. Tactics

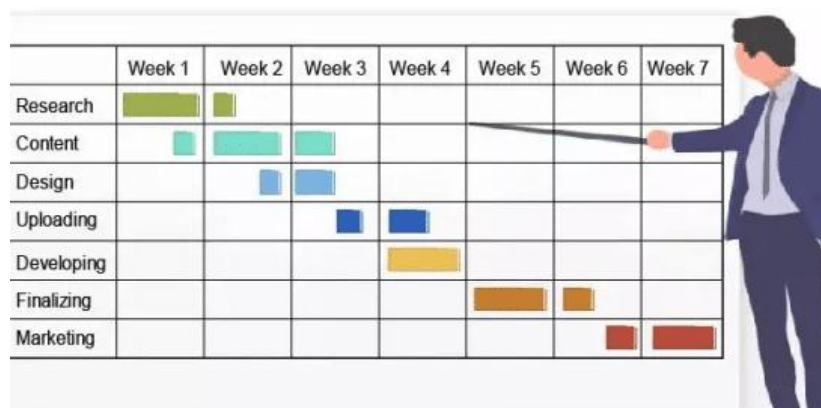
They are basic elements of the plan and represent the concrete actions that implement the strategy and help achieve the proposed objectives.

For example, M. Trucks' tactics put into practice the strategy of creating a dominant voice in specialized media: The free telephone line to encourage requests for documents on the product, the presentation of new models of Trucks trucks, the organization of press conferences for editors of a specialized magazine, etc.

6. Schedule of activities/agenda

In a public relations campaign, there are three key moments that the organization must decide:

- Campaign timing – planning must take into account the context and the fact that there are times when key messages are better received by the public, others are seasonal (e.g. Christmas) or others can be broadcast at any time;
- Planning tactics – it is advisable that at the beginning of the program there are more activities for greater visibility, and in the course of their number to be reduced slightly because the customer is already familiar with the product;
- Schedule – it is important to meet deadlines, especially those imposed by publications, and to plan everything carefully. There are two planning tasks: On a daily basis – with names, responsibilities, tasks, etc. or graphically, for example Gantt chart as shown in the figure below:



Source: <https://doads.ro/diagrama-gantt/>

Figure 1. Gantt Graph

7. The budget

Budget is a very important component of planning. It often starts from the budget and according to the existing financial resources, activities are also planned. The budget has two dimensions: The amount allocated and the additional expenditure. It is advisable to allocate at least 10% for unforeseen expenses.

8. Assessment

The evaluation criteria must be realistic, credible, specified and adapted to the proposed objectives. Information objectives are more difficult to assess, but criteria such as: Number of brochures offered, number of press releases, maybe even number of press appearances can be taken into account. Motivational goals are measured by increasing the market share, by the number of people who called a certain phone line, etc.

3. HUMANITARIAN CAMPAIGN “GIVING YOU WILL GAIN”

“Fan Sport” Association is an old boys football sports club from Baia Mare, Maramureş, which was founded more than 15 years ago. Passionate about football but also about the desire to bring a smile to the lives of the less fortunate, the guys from *Fan Sport* have proposed to carry out a humanitarian campaign every year in December. The cases they select for the campaign come from different backgrounds, but because each of them is a parent, they have set out to focus on cases of sick children or children who need material support or support. Each year, a situation is chosen, a case from several proposals and all efforts are focused on supporting it. The cases are selected according to two criteria: There are chances of cure or improvement of the disease and the interest shown by the parents.

For last year, two twin children – Iannis and Ayan – 4 years old who suffer autism spectrum disorder – ASD, need attention, patience and love. Having specific communication difficulties, they show more intense love and compassion for their loved ones and need friends, play and socialize. One of them is at the level of development for 1 and a half years, and the other at the stage of two years. They do not manage to eat alone, they have diapers and should be monitored at all times. Intensive therapy started as early as possible can significantly reduce the symptoms of ASD due to the cerebral plasticity specific to the early development period. However, in order to support this therapy, it is necessary to be able to cover some costs, that is about 6000 lei/ month. The family and financial context is also difficult, as the mother is the only one who takes care of the children, but who is unable to work to get the necessary amount of therapy, being forced to stay at home with them.

The stages of the humanitarian campaign “giving you will acquire” are as follows:

1 Investigation of the case

After the case of the two children with autism spectrum disorder was proposed, the context in which support for them could materialize was analyzed. The parents of the children were contacted to discuss the situation, the children’s doctor was contacted to explain their medical situation, the steps to be taken in order for them to gain some autonomy: eating alone, getting dressed and going to the bathroom by themselves, etc., then they contacted several therapy centers to have a clear picture of the costs involved. Parents were exposed to the possibility of supporting them, discussed the conditions under which this can be done, were asked if they would consent to photos, video images of children, story exposure, etc.

2 Planning the campaign

The next stage in the preparation of the campaign was its planning. The planning involved three main elements: The timing of the campaign, the planning of the assets and the composition of the calendar.

2.1. Campaign moment

It has been established that the most appropriate time for the campaign would be December, around winter holidays because it is a specific time when the world is more interested in giving gifts, people are empathetic and willing to help, the message will be better received by the public during this time.

2.2. Planning tactics

The central activity around which the campaign will be built will be the charity mini football match at the Sports Hall “Lascar Pana” in Baia Mare. There was also a raffle with prizes from various sponsors.

We contacted various public institutions and private entities for promotion, sale of tickets for the match and sponsorships: Schools, administration, churches, companies, etc. Also, at the match were invited famous players from Maramures area to be representatives, people who have made careers in football and who are currently coaches. At the same time, sweatshirts were purchased for the raffle with the signatures of the players from the “Otelul Galați” team, packages with sweets were prepared for the children participating in the match, packages received from sponsorships, etc.

2.3. The calendar

Once the activities to be carried out have been established, they have been planned on time:

- At the beginning of November, it was established the taking of photos, video images, posters, posters and other presentation materials with the two children Iannis and Ayan to promote the case;
- Starting with mid-November, the event will be promoted on the Facebook page of Fan Sport Association, but also in the press;
- After promoting the case on Facebook and in the press, tickets are put on sale at the match: In schools, institutions, companies, knowledge, etc.;
- Until December 8, there will be constant posts on the Facebook page and in the press with reminders to announce the event;
- on december 8 will take place the charity match and raffle announced for the participants;
- One or two days after December 8, the winners of the raffle and the results of the campaign will be announced on Facebook, but also in the press.

3. Communication

The communication stage takes into account three main channels: Communication with the press, communication on the social page of the association and internal or non-formal communication – knowledge, friends, family.

In the first stage, a press release was drawn up to promote the humanitarian campaign in which it was stated: The case, the motivation to be supported, how it can be supported, as well as the appeal to the population to respond positively.

Regular posts were made on the Facebook page of the association, both at the beginning, in the form of an announcement, as well as along the way, as reminders and at the end, with the results and the impact of the campaign.

At the end of the campaign, a press release was sent describing the campaign and its results, as well as thanks to those who contributed to the support for the two children.

4. Evaluation of the humanitarian campaign “giving you will acquire”-solidarity with Iannis and Ayan

After the end of the campaign, it is found that 20,000 euros were collected, money that will be used for the therapy of the two children for one year. During this period, they will be able to benefit from the support of specialists to become more independent.

Given the results, we can say that this campaign was a success, achieved its goal and was effective. However, some things can still be improved: Internal communication, timelines, detailed planning, diversification, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The field of public relations is very vast and evolves more and more in recent years, becoming one of the fundamental fields in any organization. The public relations specialist has extended the scope of his competence, becoming part of the decision-making team together with the managers and being able to develop complex programs for the company. In order to have an effective public relations activity, it is very important to plan and organize it, to follow a set timetable and to involve all employees or employees of the company. Any public relations program must be based on the four fundamental steps: Research, planning, communication and evaluation. Public relations are closely related to the press and effective communication with the media. The media can support an organization by promoting its work if the organization also draws up materials suitable for the press and respects the format of the publication with which it collaborates.

Public relations campaigns are activities that take place in a team and involve several dimensions: The management team, the target audience, partners, collaborators, etc. The humanitarian campaign “giving you will acquire” was a successful campaign because it had a well-defined and understood purpose, but also because it was organized in advance, phoned and in line with deadlines. Any public relations activity, whether in the form of a campaign or other action, requires, first of all, an effective and authentic communication with all the stakeholders involved, and then a scrupulous planning and organization.

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