

EXCERPT: PART 1: Think

The value of PR

The full value of public relations will only be realized when planned strategically and executed on a long-term basis in a way that's intentional, meaningful and sustainable.

This is when your entity — a business, nonprofit, government agency or your own personal brand — is a known quantity and has a strong reputation built on trust. This means that people understand who you are and what you do, and most important, they know what you stand for. If they've reached the point of advocacy, they will — on your behalf and with no prompting — publicly say positive things about your brand both online and offline. You cannot buy this level of trust and advocacy; it needs to be *earned* through strategic efforts over time. Indeed, it's a powerful lever for the types of commercial outcomes virtually all businesses and organizations are after in one way or another, such as:

- More leads, sales and customers
- More donors, subscribers or voters
- More engaged employees who become willing ambassadors of your brand

When you become a known quantity with a strong reputation built on trust, you enjoy the most powerful and enduring position any business, organization or individual can be in. It carries a halo effect that lifts your brand above all others in your space. We all know the benefits that come with that: increased marketplace visibility and influence, growing respect and enhanced affinity, loyalty and purchase consideration.

PR works for all types of brands

As I've said, it's not just businesses that can benefit from a savvy, ongoing public relations program. The following nonbusiness entities also benefit:

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) need public support for their cause, whether through personal advocacy, donations and grants, or both.

Government agencies often need to address issues within the broader community in order to change some kind of public perception or behavior.

Professional industry associations need to demonstrate leadership and relevance if they want to grow membership.

Politicians at all levels of government require a constant stream of positive media coverage and word-of-mouth buzz to keep winning the votes needed to hold their seat of power.

Public speakers and aspiring thought leaders require engaged audiences for their messages and ideas, while tech startups need users to sign up for their newly launched app, SaaS product or social network.

Let's not forget the battle for talent: We are all vying for top talent somewhere along the line. Growing businesses and organizations need to be able to attract and retain smart, reliable employees if they are to continue to flourish. Reputation plays a crucial role here.

A research paper from ManpowerGroup Solutions, among the globe's top multinational outsourcing providers, concludes that an organization's reputation can impact its ability to recruit young talent.

Manpower surveyed 4,500 global job seekers for its 2016 report, *Brand Detectives: The New Generation of Global Candidates*. It found that more than half of global candidates (56 percent) said an employer's brand or reputation was more important than in the previous five years.

The report states: "... today's candidates have more access to information about companies than ever before. The Google generation does not have to rely on what potential employers tell them about a company; they have instant access to news articles, social networks and employer review sites."⁶

Building the foundations of PR

A strategic PR program should provide a business or nonprofit organization with a solid foundation from which it can functionally operate more effectively in other areas.

Take sales and marketing, for example. If people need to be educated about your product, service or cause before they are willing to commit, PR can help pave the way. If people already know, like and trust your brand, this can help reduce the sales cycle.

The same goes for advertising and promotions. PR can work organically day in and day out, all year round, getting people talking about your brand and keeping it top of mind with consumers. It can fill in the gaps between intermittent paid-for advertising campaigns as well as build a solid base that will make your promotional activities work harder.

There are countless other scenarios that illustrate the benefits of public relations.

Positive word of mouth, fueled by PR activity, can help drive business growth through strategic partnerships and alliances.

Recruitment of talent becomes easier if people are drawn to your organization, thanks in part to your PR efforts. Employee retention, too, becomes easier. If people constantly hear positive stories about their employer or if they better understand it, thanks to transparent communication from the top down, they will generally feel better about working there.

You get the idea. I'm definitely not saying PR is solely responsible for all of these areas of operation. But done with conviction and strategic intent, PR can definitely play a significant, influential role over the long term.