

MEENA VAIDYANATHAN'S VIEWS ON ASSESSING PR MODELS

Public Relations or Corporate Communications has evolved over a period of time since its early beginnings in 1990's. But even today, there are many organisations, both in India and abroad where PR is still evolving and the practice of PR exists somewhere within the three models by which one defines it.

Delivery model is when a managing director wants to talk about the company's new product, send out a press release, wants an article in the Economic Times as well an advertisement supporting it. The article does appear on page three of The Economic Times, but a competitor gets a bigger space on the same page and the PR employee gets fired. This ideally explains the delivery model. This is the state of PR across various organisations even today. As a PR professional, one is expected to design the backdrops for product launches, to decide whether the employee newsletter is well-designed and is sent out every two months and also expected to be a good host / hostess at customer dinners or organise them.

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Positioning Model - Over a period of time, management has started seeing value in having a nice backdrop at product launches, essentially fulfilling the value of positioning. "A product is not a product, but a service," and if one needs to be present in the market as a strong brand, then corporate communications should be aligned to the marketing plan, also clearly linked to business goals with very evolved messaging.

Strategic Model - What really lends value today in many evolved companies, is that PR is a part of the key decision making team in the company, where one decides whether the product needs to be launched or not, if yes, how it needs to be positioned and how should it be launched. PR also acts as a strategic counsel to the business and owns the brand, not the sales person. The sales person has to merely sell the product. It is the professional communicator who owns the brand.

*Define the
stakeholders to
communicate
effectively...*

In order to communicate, it is important to understand the target audience. For any organisation, irrespective of what the product or service that they provide, there are four basic stakeholders:

1. **Direct Customer** - who is the end user, dealer, distributor, vendor or business partner, or anybody in the channel that delivers the product or service to the customers.
2. **Employees**, who will make sure that they deliver the product or service to the customer, they could be either the management, headquarter employees, site employees or employees on deputation.
3. **Influencers** that include the regulators, the government, the shareholders and the analysts.

4. *Community*, which comprises of potential employees, competitors and the society around the plant site. It has become increasingly difficult to secure brand share at universities where people hire from or to poach from other companies.

If the end objective is to try and get a story in The Economic Times, it is very important that the communication to the stakeholders is very clear. To ensure that the right messaging and right input goes into the paper at the end of the day, it is important to understand the organisation's key audience and address each of the audiences at different points in time through PR programmes.

For communications to become a strategic business tool, it has to be extremely well defined and measurable. Business leaders understand numbers; they understand things that are quantifiable. It certainly is not difficult to make corporate communications a measurable function.

For communication to be recognised as a strategic business tool, it must be measurable and aligned to the brand...

For example, at *Monsanto*, one of the world's largest agricultural companies, strategic planning helped Monsanto to take a genetically modified product to the market even in the face of a crisis. What really worked was that public affairs and corporate communications were a strategic and integral part of the whole business team who were to launch the product. Instead of going to the media, the company got third party stakeholders, universities and regulators who felt positive about the technology to talk about the technology.

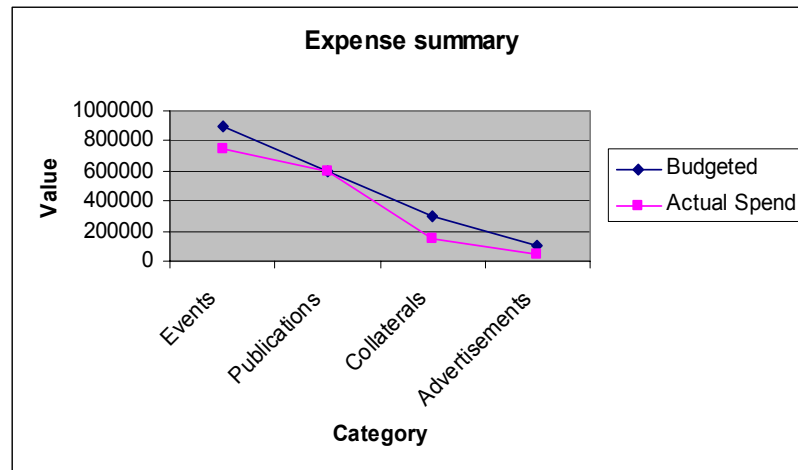
For communication to become a strategic business tool, it is very important to align with the brand all the time. All communications should have the same messaging. For example, at *Honeywell* there are several lines of businesses, from aerospace to automation, transportation systems, each with a different customer base. Each business is divided into business units, employing over 6,000 people in India alone and another 100,000 people across the globe. The challenge is therefore to talk consistently across geographies to employees, media and customers.

Measure PR to show its value and raise the bar of the function in the organisation...

It is very important to understand why PR should be measured. Functions that are directly aligned with businesses will add visible value. In the case of HR, there is no organisation where the HR head is not a part of making key business decisions. Another reason to measure is because only functions that add perceptible value can be considered "crucial for business". If a particular function or person is not considered crucial for business, he or she will be the first person to be removed in case of redundancy. If we talk about raising the bar of the function, we need to show its value to ensure that the organisational leadership consider it crucial for business. It is important to demonstrate the linkage between spends and return on investment.

How to measure? Key Result Areas (KRAs) and the deliverables aligned with the objectives are the first step in planning. Once three to four objectives have been identified, it is important to link incentives to deliverables. The deliverables could vary from reduction in plan costs to increase in ROI. Also PR must showcase its outputs at regular intervals, through sending out an MIS on key activities on a monthly or quarterly basis as may be possible.

Some measurement metrics... Some examples of measurement metrics that are used are; Expense Summary, Annual Activity Plan and Media Visibility Index
For example: Expense Summary



It is also important to track competition, so at every given point of time one can compare how an organisation has fared against its competitors. This becomes useful information for the marketing as well as sales departments.

The next step is to identify and prioritise goals for the function and for the team as professionals. It is important to raise the bar for the communications functions, by learning from fellow members of the fraternity and socialising relevant case studies within the industry and media. It is also very vital to insist on sound professionals for the job.

*The world today is about how one market's oneself. And therefore, it is important to **Communicate the value of Communications!***

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Meena Vaidyanathan, Director Corporate Communications, Honeywell India., at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on November 30, 2005)