
DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT PR - THE ROLE OF PR IN MARKETING - THE UNIVERSAL DEBATE STILL CONTINUES -

On an educational platform defining the role of Public Relations in the Marketing Mix is simple: Communicate key messages to defined target audiences through third party endorsements. However, in reality marketing is still about counting bottom lines. So where does PR fit?

Lets look at an interesting survey conducted by Advertising Age (a digital weekly newspaper in USA) and Council of Public Relations USA. When marketers were asked in what roles they considered public relations effective, the discipline scored high marks on raising awareness (83 per cent), providing credibility (67 per cent), reaching influencers (63 per cent) and educating consumers (61 per cent). Only 22 per cent thought PR could help drive sales and just 28 per cent said PR was effective at promoting trial. When asked "at what point they brought in PR people during the development of marketing plans", about a third (35 per cent) said, at the very beginning of the project and 25 per cent responded, while strategy was being developed.

The fact that more and more marketers are realising and appreciating the value of bringing the PR team into the process early and with responsibility for multiple stakeholders is an extremely positive sign. 76 per cent of the respondents generally saw PR's value in supporting marketing but few were impressed in its role in supporting the Corporate Brand, Reputation Management and Crisis Management. Even though 67 per cent cited media contacts as an intrinsic support element that PR provides, a considerable 48 per cent and 45 per cent respectively, cited creative ideas and strategic thinking too.

In conclusion, even though senior marketers are still sharply divided about the role of PR in the overall mix, the outcome definitely has an optimistic note. Marketers indicated two areas of primary interest where contribution of Public Relations will make a difference - increasingly targeted communications and the online world.

Survey respondent quotes

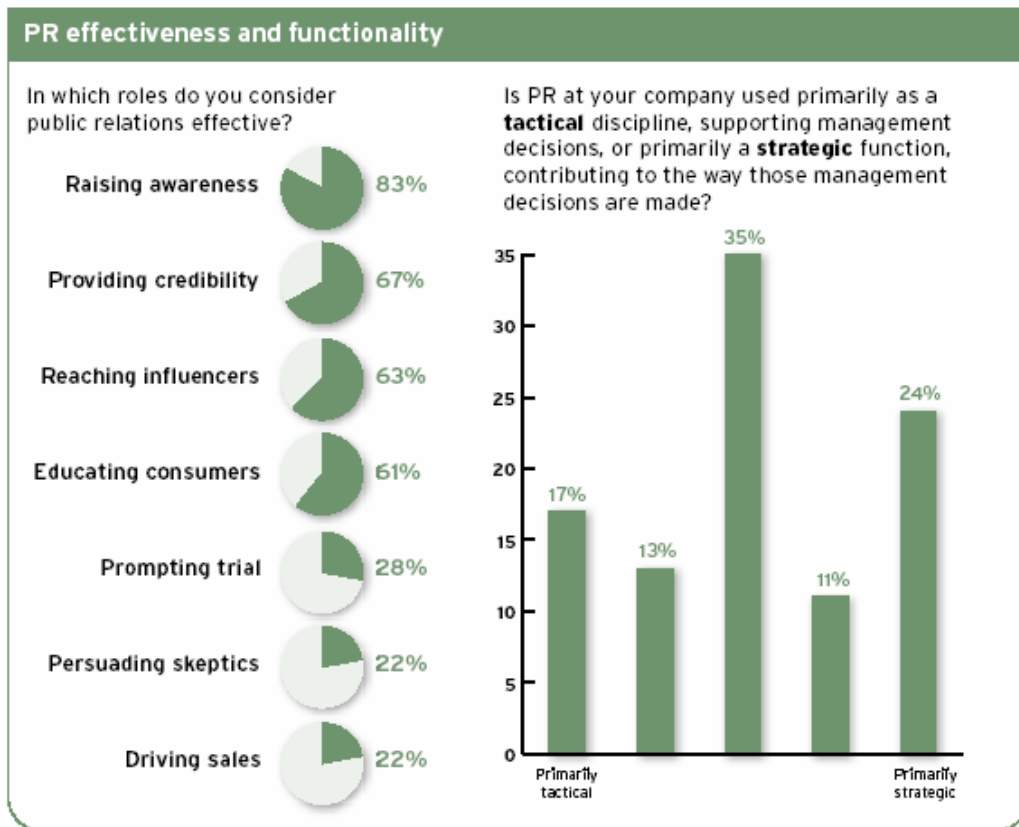
"Public relations is becoming a valuable part of doing business in a digital world," said one respondent. "Since it's easier and faster today to disseminate information, through e-mail marketing, blogs and online chat, a competent and effective PR agency or department is vital to managing all the publicity directed at or about any company, large or small."

Said another, "PR will assume responsibility for all Internet-based communications. Big media will become less critical as the target for PR initiatives as micro media proliferate."

Viral marketing was cited as another area of opportunity for public relations people. According to one respondent, PR is becoming "more important due to the fractionalization of markets and media," while another cited the fear that "advertising is becoming less and less effective at reaching mass audiences, creating new opportunities".

Others saw this as a signal for PR and advertising to work more closely together: "As media fragments and consumers gain more control of their time and media habits, PR and advertising need to merge or at least find common ground." Finally, "As many forms of paid advertising become easier for consumers to avoid, public relations, publicity and product placements will become much more important as part of any integrated marketing communications programme."

The survey was distributed to selected Advertising Age subscribers. Of the more than 130 respondents, 41 per cent described themselves as VP of marketing, 21 per cent as chief marketing officers and 17 per cent as president and/or CEOs. The largest group (39 per cent) came from the consumer goods category, with 22% in the industrial sector, 9% in healthcare and 8% in technology.



So what does the survey actually say?

The survey proved that the role of public relations in the marketing mix is likely to expand and the way in which public relations is practiced may change substantially in the future due to three main market forces

- Increased sophistication of the consumer and consumer expectations
- Improved media technologies which are shaping the market place
- Internationalisation of brands and marketing

PR in today's Business Climate

In the world of integrated marketing, the lines between advertising, communications and public relations have become almost non-existent.

Myth: PR is less certain than advertising. With advertising we know what we get from the start.

If one is viewing PR as solely media-related that's partially true. With advertising you have guaranteed placement, you know how much it will cost and you know how many will see your message. But certainty of outputs doesn't mean that your audience will absorb the message. If you were to use PR and it were to generate

editorial coverage there's plenty of research to show it will be more believable than your advertising and have probably 3-4 times the impact with consumers. And it will come at a much lower '**bang for buck**'. Surely these days it's more important to think about how many different ways you can reach your consumer. So can you afford not to look at whether PR might be able to create media publicity for you?

Myth: PR's role is pretty much limited to using the media or holding events.

Wrong. Using media or holding an event are simply tactics that are often used. However PR's primary task is to reach opinion formers and influencers whose views/opinions are important to your consumers. PR's task is to make sure that the environment is as right as possible for the mainstream and traditional marketing tools such as advertising and POS to work. Equate PR with the scouts that used to range far and wide beyond the main body of cavalry. Part of their job was defensive - to make sure the cavalry wasn't ambushed. But the other part was offensive - to try and find opportunities to surprise their opponents. **Marketers these days can ill afford to go into battle without PR on their flanks.**

CASE STUDY

PR CAMPAIGN TITLED - A STRONGER WAY TO SELL APPLIANCES

Situation Analysis:

Jenn-Air makes high performance, beautifully designed kitchen appliances. Just like Wolf, Sub Zero, Kitchen Aid...the list goes on. In late 2002 and 2003 Jenn-Air sought a new way to differentiate the brand's line of top-notch kitchen appliances from the competition. With the help of its agency of record it reached the doorstep of "Share Our Strength" (SOS), a national anti-hunger organisation that taps top chefs to cater high-ticket charity benefits. In SOS, Jenn-Air saw an opportunity to enhance its brand while turning SOS's stable of top chef into Jenn-Air ambassadors who would help sell appliances. It signed on as a presenting sponsor of Share Our Strength's Taste of the Nation event and asked its agency to help accomplish two tasks: create a point of differentiation by publicising the sponsorship and help use this sponsorship to sell appliances.

Research:

Jenn-Air conducted a segmentation study to analyse market share, target audience and consumer trends. The findings:

- The target responds well to experiential sales initiatives, such as cooking demonstrations and events
- Charity affiliations are well received among high-end consumers

Planning:

- Positioning
- Jenn-Air enhances the style and performance of your kitchen

Objective:

- Generate 100 media placements about the Jenn-Air partnership to help build loyalty, goodwill and point of differentiation among target audience
- Turn cause initiative into a 5 per cent increase in appliance sales

Strategy:

- Create a splash for the Jenn-Air Taste of the Nation sponsorship through a high-profile charity auction
- Generate media and attention for Share Our Strength's Taste of the Nation events

Execution:

Strategy 1 – Create a high profile, initial splash for the Jenn–Air Taste of the Nation sponsorship

- The Charity Auction – announced the sponsorship by holding a charity auction for a one-of-a-kind Jenn-Air Luxury series refrigerator designed by a well-known fashion designer.
- Provided national visibility and opened access to the product to people throughout the country by hosting the auction online on ebay.
- News releases were disseminated announcing the auction
- Launched the auction by hosting a reception for kitchen designers

Strategy II – Generate media attention and attendee attention at the Taste of the Nation events

- Jenn-Air cooking equipments used at the Taste of the Nation media launch event, in which chefs from across the country come to sample the regional cuisine
- Cooking stations included Jenn-Air branded kiosks
- Created goodwill among Taste of Nation attendees by auctioning the appliances used in the demo
- Distribution of news releases

Strategy III – Bringing the benefits of the partnership to retail

- Created a retail aspect to the charity event by involving one local dealer at each event
- Hosted influencer/consumer events with them
- Tapped Taste of the Nation chefs to give cooking demos at the events

Evaluation:

All objectives exceeded

Conclusion:

A case in point which emphatically proved PR's role, which went beyond media relations. The creative inputs and its ability to influence the influencer's was also amply showcased.

The ramifications of Public Relations are manifold. It can complement other marketing disciplines, it can be used in isolation as the only marketing tool, or it can target a discrete audience quiet separately "below the line". It is therefore vital to understand the concept of integration with other marketing disciplines. For instance, public relations can be employed to promote an advertising campaign by launching it through editorial coverage. In order to do so, however, the campaign must have some element of newsworthiness, e.g. celebrity endorsement or an element of controversy. Public relations can also be used to extend an advertising campaign by

taking a celebrity appearing in the advertisement and using him or her as a product model or spokesperson in editorial terms.

However integrated, the sum should be greater than its parts, producing a more powerful message through greater volume or share of voice. The final effect should be seamless. Mr. Don Apruzzese, Senior Director of consumer marketing and a member of the marketing operations leadership team at AstraZeneca shared the same sentiment at a recently held Roundtable discussion of some of America's top Marketers in New York. He said:

"...You can't ignore the interaction between the different (marketing) elements, because often the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. And often PR is one of the things that ties together some of the other elements...and allows interactions to work better"

Audiences are fragmenting. Marketing messages are proliferating. That the consumer is moving towards a knowledge-based society cannot be argued; the only debate concerns how swiftly developments will be adopted.

Myth: The opportunities to use PR in marketing are limited.

According to a recent Yankelovich (a research company) study, about two thirds of American consumers have a much more negative opinion of marketing and advertising than a few years back. 59 per cent felt most marketing and advertising has little relevance to them; 64 per cent are concerned about the practices and motives of marketers and advertisers; 61 per cent felt marketers and advertisers don't treat consumers with respect and 69 per cent were interested in products and services that would help them skip or block marketing. How annoying it is when you pick up your cell phone on a Sunday morning or when busy in an important meeting or just relaxing, to hear an unrecognisable voice of a company call centre at work. Does the message then get delivered?

Understanding the role of PR

- Capturing the consumer's attention
- Building trust
- Optimising usage of media vehicles
- Integrating all the above

To capture the consumer's attention marketers need to be more creative than ever. But to earn the consumers trust requires more than creativity; it requires authenticity. That's why public relations is poised to become an increasingly important element in the marketing mix.

Authenticity is not, of course, the exclusive domain of PR. The best advertising is—always has been—authentic, true to the essence of the brand. But public relations is all about authenticity, because it depends upon third parties to deliver the brand message. Those third parties—typically reporters, but increasingly other key influencers—are just as skeptical as the consumers they represent, they can spot inauthentic messages a mile away, and if the story that public relations is telling is not credible, it won't get past those gatekeepers to the ultimate target audience.

Says Harris Diamond, chairman of the Council of Public Relations Firms and chief executive of Weber Shandwick Worldwide, "Increasingly, marketers understand that what appears in the editorial pages can deliver something different than what appears in paid advertising space; in many cases it can deliver information consumers are willing to act on."

Public Relations is playing a vital role in making marketing messages more credible. It helps companies deal with myriad issues that can come in-between a brand and its key audiences.

"Today's consumers are too elusive to reach with any one discipline," says Pamela Talbot, president of the U.S. operations of international PR firm Edelman. "They have to be chased and wooed in a variety of places and in a variety of ways. Surrounding them with layered messages delivered through multiple vehicles provides the surround sound that breaks through a noisy environment."

Case Study I: Gillette's launch of Passion Venus razors for women in 2003

The Research:

When Gillette introduced its new Passion Venus razor in 2003, it worked with PR agency Porter Novelli to conduct a search for the woman with the best legs in America.

The Outcome:

The search got its kick-off at an event in Miami featuring dancer-choreographer Paula Abdul and offered prizes including a Cadillac convertible and the chance to star in a Venus commercial. This activity earned media coverage for the kick-off, which included segments on "Entertainment Tonight" and "E! Entertainment News."

As the event toured 10 cities around the country it generated 87 million impressions, culminating in a placement on "Oprah" for the announcement of the winner. A follow-up contest in 2004—tied to the launch of the Venus Divine—generated 136 million impressions and helped Gillette capture the majority share of voice against competitors. More important, sales were up 7% in the quarter the campaign ran.

The Conclusion:

"PR was the lead discipline that helped drive the 'Legs of a Goddess' campaign," says Michele Szynal, communications director at Gillette, who says the programmeme "helped continue to build the Venus brand."

CASE STUDY II: ICICI'S CAMPAIGN OF "ITS YOUR LIFE"

In spite of the vast potential, the retirement solutions category remained virtually untapped by the Indian Insurance players - until ICICI Prudential decided to build and explore this hidden goldmine. The following case study discusses how ICICI Prudential used smart marketing strategy to exploit this opportunity to its advantage.

Market Scenario:

With increasing life expectancy on one hand and rising inflation and medical costs on the other, the need for planning one's retirement was emerging as an important one. However, it was quite surprising to know only 11 per cent of India's total working population was adequately covered for post-retirement life. **This was mainly due to low awareness of and attitudinal barriers with respect to these issues among consumers.**

The Opportunity:

About 90 per cent of the working population in India was without retirement cover. Of this, a sizeable portion belonged to the age group of 30-40 yrs - a big market left unexploited so far.

The Challenge:

- To re-position the traditional concept of retirement planning and thus create relevance for it among the 30-40 yrs age group.
- To change behaviour, inducing consumers to invest in retirement planning early in life.

The Strategy:

A media mix to garner the best result

- **Television:** This was the main medium for reach, impact and demonstrate the emotional pay off.
- **Print:** Press reinforced the rational benefit of saving early to cushion retirement by highlighting the product's comprehensive features.
- **Radio:** The new FM channels launched in the previous year were explored to reach audiences out of home.
- **Outdoor:** A high visibility-high impact outdoor strategy was implemented across 21 cities.
- **Internet:** Used innovatively to seek responses via click-throughs.
- **Direct Marketing:** Mailers and brochures played the dual role of educating the consumer on the rationale behind planning early for retirement and the advantages of ICICI Pru Retirement Solutions
- **Public Relations:** *Was effectively used to educate consumers on early retirement planning, making them more receptive towards the brand's communication.*

Evidence of results:

- To begin with, the campaign triggered a large number of consumer response calls and e-mails (35000 calls and 3000 emails)
- Helped change attitude - The average age of a person investing in ICICI Pru retirement solutions dropped to 38.5 years.
- Gained market share

We can conclude by saying the role of PR is dynamic and ever changing with the environment. As so rightly claims a PR agency...

**“To change the way others see you,
Change the way you see yourself.
Change Minds”**

(Excerpted from the workbook of PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on November 30, 2005)