

A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH ON PRESS CONFERENCE

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Abstract

A press conference is an important tool of public relations. The primary role of public relations is to manage a company's reputation and help build public consent for its enterprises. The goal of PR is to develop and maintain goodwill with most, if not all, of its publics. Failure to do so may mean loss of customers and revenues, time lost dealing with complaints or lawsuits, and loss of esteem. A company's publics change constantly. Well-executed public relations is an ongoing process that molds good long-term relationships and plays an important role in relationship marketing and integrated communications. Companies often call press conference when they have significant news to announce, such as the introduction of a new product or advertising campaign. Although used less often by organizations and corporations, this form of delivery can be very effective. The topic must be of major interest to a specific group before it is likely to gain coverage.

Keywords

article; corporate advertising; press; press release; public relations

JEL Classification

M31

Introduction

The term *public relations* is widely misunderstood and misused. Part of the confusion is due to the fact that public relations cover a very broad area. Depending on the context and one's point of view, it can be a concept, a profession, a management function, or a practice. Every company, organization, or government body has relationships with groups of people who are affected by what it does or says. They may be employees, customers, stockholders, competitors, suppliers, legislators, or the community in which the organization resides. Marketing professionals refer to these people as stakeholders because they all have some vested interest in the company's actions. In PR terminology, each of these groups is considered one of the organization's publics. Because of the powerful effect of public opinion, companies and organizations must consider the breadth of impact of their actions. This is especially true in times of crisis, emergency, or disaster. But it also holds true for major policy decisions: changes in management or pricing, labor negotiations, introduction of new products, or changes in distribution methods. Each decision affects different groups in different ways. Effective public relations can channel groups' opinions toward mutual understanding and positive outcomes.

In short, the goals of public relations are to improve public opinion, build goodwill, and establish and maintain a satisfactory reputation for the organization. PR efforts may rally public support, obtain public understanding or neutrality, or simply respond to inquiries.

1. Public Relations Tools

The communications tools at the PR person's disposal vary widely, from news releases and photos to audiovisual materials and even advertising.

1.1. News releases and press kits

A news release (or press release), the most widely used PR tool, consists of one or more typed sheets of information issued to generate publicity or shed light on a subject of interest. News releases cover time-sensitive hard news. Topics may include the announcement of a new product, promotion of an executive, an unusual contest, landing of a major contract, or establishment of a scholarship fund.

A press kit (or media kit) supports the publicity gained at staged events such as press conferences or open houses. It includes a basic fact sheet of information about the event, a program or schedule of activities, and a list of the participants and their biographical data. The kit also contains a news story about the event for the broadcast media, news and feature stories for the print media, and any pertinent photos and brochures.

1.2. Photos of events, products in use, new equipment, or newly promoted executives can lend credence or interest to a dull news story. In fact, a photo tells the story faster. Photos should be high quality and need little or no explanation. Typed captions should describe the photo and accurately identify the people shown.

1.3. Feature articles

Many publications, especially trade journals, run feature articles (soft news) about companies, products, or services. They may be written by a PR person, the publication's staff, or a third party. As an MPR tool, feature articles can give the company or product great credibility. Editors like them because they have no immediate deadline and can be published at the editor's convenience. Features may be case histories, how-to's, problem-solving scenarios, or state-of-the-art technology updates. Other formats include roundups of what's happening in a specific industry and editorials.

1.4. Printed materials

These are the most popular tools used by public relations professionals. They may be brochures or pamphlets about the company or its products, letters to customers, inserts or enclosures that accompany monthly statements, the annual report to stockholders, other reports, or house organs.

A house organ is a publication about happenings and policies at the company. An internal house organ is for employees only. External house publications go to company-connected people (customers, stockholders, suppliers, dealers) or to the public. They may take the form of a newsletter, tabloid-size newspaper, magazine, or even a periodic size. Their purpose is to promote goodwill, increase sales, or mold public opinion. A well-produced house organ can do a great deal to motivate employees and appeal to customers. However, writing, printing and distributing can be expensive and very time-consuming.

1.5. Posters, exhibits and bulletin boards

Posters can be used internally to stress safety, security, reduction of waste, and courtesy. Externally, they can impart product information, corporate philosophy, or other news of interest to customers.

Companies use *exhibits* to describe the organization's history, present new products, show how products are made, or explain future plans. Exhibits are often prepared for local fairs, colleges and universities, and trade shows.

Internally, the public relations staff often uses *bulletin boards* to announce new equipment, new products, meetings, promotions, construction plans, and recreation news to employees. Many companies now maintain an intranet site where they can post their internal messages.

1.6. Audiovisual materials

Slides, films, filmstrips, CDs are all forms of audiovisual materials and may be used for training, sales, or public relations. Considered a form of corporate advertising, nontheatrical or sponsored films are often furnished without charge to movie theatres, organizations, and special groups, particularly schools and colleges.

Many PR departments provide video news release (VNRs) – news or feature stories prepared by a company and offered free to TV stations, which may use the whole video or just segments. Video news release are somewhat controversial. Critics see them as subtle commercials or even propaganda and object when stations run the stories without disclosing that they came from a public relations firm, not the station's news staff.

2. Press conference

This tool is rarely used in business situations, except in cases of major breakthroughs or emergencies. It is used in cases when a press release cannot cover all issues or when it is necessary to counter the possibility of negative impressions being formed. It also announces that the story is felt to be important, and this may lead to broader, more thoughtful coverage. The timing of the press conference should be such that it coincides with vehicle deadlines. Mornings are best for evening papers and television news; mid to late week is best for the weekly trade publications; afternoons work best for morning papers. Press kits should be available and should contain relevant photographs, the complete text of any prepared statement that will be read, biographies of any key individuals, and background fact sheets. Usually major accomplishments, major breakthroughs, emergencies, or catastrophes warrant a national press conference. On a local level, community events, local developments, and the like may receive coverage. Sports teams use this tool to attract fan attention and interest when a new star is signed.

Managing a press conference involves the following steps:

2.1. Preparing the conference:

- Choosing the right tasks that will be approached;
- Timing (date, day, time) and optimal venue;
- Drafting and sending invitations to the press;
- Developing teaching aids related to the exposed subject (such as media files, statistics and graphs).

The subject must be prepared by public relations specialists with the leaders of the institution. Thus, public relations specialists will research the subject and will achieve a score with relevant information for the press, that public institution leaders must take into account in their speech, which will help them in writing the message, will identify possible questions and appropriate answers, will establish with the institution leaders who will present its views. If timing of organizing press conference compete with other events, journalists will be attracted by what they consider to be more important and the conference might to be doomed to failure. The range of midweek (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) is best placed to organize the press conference

by public institution. Recommended deployment time is between 10.00 and 12.00 hours. The venue shall be identified easily and quickly found by journalists (are preferred areas or rooms that are already known). The meeting room is required to have good acoustics, to be well insulated from outside noises, bright, airy, with possibility of ventilation in summer and warm in winter; be also enough large to comfortably accommodate all conference participants. The ideal situation is provided for those rooms with sliding walls, the space can be increased or decreased rapidly, depending on the number of participants.

Preparation and invitations launching. Is answered by decisions and concrete measures to essential questions:

- Who is invited?; it is important to be in the meeting room specialized journalists directly interested in the topic of the conference;
- When? (Usually, the invitations are sent 3 weeks before, but it is estimated that for the Romanian market, the term is too distant, being preferable an invitation to 12-14 days in advance, at most).
- How? Preferably on letterhead (public institution name, address, phone, fax).

It contains:

- a. Date of issue;
- b. Title: "Invitation" + explanatory title, which contains the name of the institution and the reason for organizing the conference;
- c. The person or organization which is inviting (usually invitation is made by the mayor or chief prefect institution; their name is written in full, and the function is presented in detail);
- d. Conference theme (importance, interest, novelty of themes on the agenda);
- e. Leading representatives of public institutions that will participate in the press conference;
- f. Date, time, place (possibly a map or a plan of the city and of the venue);
- g. The schedule (detailed in hours);
- h. Who will participate;
- i. Response coupon (response indicating the deadline);
- j. Name, position and signature of the person which made the invitation;
- k. Address, phone, fax press office and name of the person who can be contacted for further information or to confirm participation:
- l. Existence (if any) of a lunch or cocktail after the conference.

To attract leading journalists are recommended: adding a personalized letters; providing transportation / accommodation; arranging the schedule (the possibility to come later); promise of favors: some news exclusive, interview with the mayor, the prefect or president of the County Council. Media representatives are invited to a press conference public institution, not summoned. As a result, the tone should be warm, friendly, polite, but without excess of politeness formulas. It will be used short and concise sentences, the invitation should be clear, complete and motivated, able to arouse the interest of journalists and the willingness to participate in the press conference.

Preparations of the interventions and documents: Public institution brochure, press file, mayor/prefect speech, photographs, slides, brochures, posters (for the presentation); administrative organization logo custom objects (most used are pens and notebooks, as can be directly and immediately used by journalists, also effective are more special items that can be stored long-term journalists - clocks or wall port documents, pens, possibly with screen printed name / logo of the public institution. In order to carry out systematic interventions, it will have to be established in advance the following:

- Who speaks (the order of the interventions will be given by the importance of the personalities);
- What they say (anticipating questions, especially for sensitive subjects, possibly suggesting sending questions in advance - delicate and often no chance of success);
- As they say (observations are logically structured, not exceeding 20/30 minute speeches, direct, informative, persuasive): usual vocabulary, short term; normal flow (140-170 words/minute); using anecdotes; simplification; alternating personal pronouns (I/we + your avoid impersonal).

Institution leaders speech must be prepared by public relations specialists especially for the press conference. It's good to be short, clear, fluent, and easy to read, with a concrete language without generalities; to express a definite point of view, a clear position on the topic addressed. It is also advisable to have no more than 3 pages, so they can be read or spoken within 10 minutes. When exceeding this length, there is a risk that journalists get bored and leave during the conference, and the message will not reaching the public.

Organizing the venue. Under normal circumstances, it is desirable to have enough space for all guests, to ensure an efficient layout tables and chairs so that journalists not to bother each other and have easy access, to exist and to be functional microphones overhead projectors etc. The conference room will be ready from a technical standpoint, the best sound system and light; will eventually be equipped with video if it shows graphs, maps, surveys etc.

2.2. Conference proceedings

Checking on the press conference will consider:

- To be a reception desk journalists and guests throughout the performance of the conference;
- To have a person responsible for the activity display and enrichment media file;
- It provides identification badges;
- Need for organization and management of waiting in the hall of the delay;
- It will offer small gifts, samples, objects logo etc.;
- Media files are distributed.

From press conferences organized by public institutions, journalists expect:

- Interesting news for the public;
- Timely, real, sincere information;
- Clear, concise, direct information (should work KISS- principle "keep it short and simple");
- Timely information released until the closure editions or until the installation space schedule.

Journalists hope also that they will be able to learn unusual or contacting officials in the public and expect some form of written messages. In general, the press conference starts with addressing by the spokesman of a message of welcome for journalists and a very brief presentation of the topic and participants at the conference. Next will be one of the leading public institution speech on the theme of the conference. The speech can be read or spoken from memory, italic, aloud, but without irritating the audience, in a tone that emphasize ideas that wants to be underlined. It is recommended that the speech will be distributed to journalists in writing after completing the press conference. It will take into account that during the conference, gestures will be carefully controlled, avoiding wide gestures, tics etc.

To efficient disseminate the message to public institution is recommended that, representatives, leaders and specialists in communication:

- To be relaxed;

- To be honest;
- To adopt a direct addressing to the journalists;
- Do not use jargon or technical terms elements;
- Do not qualify journalists' questions ("Yes, your question is interesting ..." or "This question is not appropriate ...");
- Do not use the words "no comment";
- Do not be defensive and to adopt a positive style;
- Have no ironic or violent replicas with the journalists;
- Do not disseminate information "off the record", because there is no certainty that journalists will take into account this recommendation, just because the information is communicated to the public;
- To keep their calm, smile, be communicative, not suspicious.

When the conference will be finished (the journalists are informed about duration at the beginning of the meeting), it can be considered complete. At this stage, a spokesman makes a brief summary of the topic, pointing out the most relevant issues and thanking journalists for participating. If the discussion is still in progress and the issues are interesting for the journalists, the conference may be extended by no more than 15-20 minutes. At the end of the conference may be held informal discussions between journalists and public institution leaders, may be granted audiovisual media interviews. The optimal duration for a press conference should not exceed one hour.

2.3. The evaluation of the press conference.

This is done by the specialists in communication has primarily designed to assess its impact.

Communication specialists can assess whether the organization of the press conference was effective by analyzing its reflection by the media. In case the press will not give attention to the event (or it will be very low), the public institution marketers must determine the reasons why the message was not perceived as desirable and operate its communication strategy changes in public sector organizations.

Conclusion

An increasing number of marketing-oriented companies have established new responsibilities for public relations. PR takes on a much broader perspective, designed to promote the organization as well as its products and/or services. The way that companies and organizations use public relations might best be viewed as a continuum. On one end of the continuum is the use of PR from a traditional perspective. In this perspective, public relations is viewed as a nonmarketing function whose primary responsibility is to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its publics. In this case, customers or potential customers are only part of numerous publics. Marketing and public relations are separate departments; if external agencies are used, they are separate agencies. At the other end of the continuum, public relations is considered primarily a marketing communications function. All noncustomer relationships are perceived as necessary only in a marketing context. In these organizations, public relations reports to marketing. At the same time, for many companies the PR function is moving more and more toward a new role, which is much closer to a marketing function than a traditional one. In the new role of public relations, managers envision both strong marketing and strong PR departments. Rather than each department operating independently, the two work closely together, blending their talents to provide the best overall image of the firm and its product or service offerings.

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