



PR: Better Bang for Buck

In an uncertain economy, public relations is bringing more bang for the buck. Why? Ad campaigns are great, but a well-designed strategic communications plan cuts a broader swath, putting your message in front of more prospective customers with a different—stronger—credibility than purchased advertising. The resulting increased awareness and enhanced trust in your organization is good news and good news, respectively.

More than a news release, the plan should include direct communication with consumer media, trade publications, online editors, bloggers and others who influence your industry and community. Planning the campaign is best done in partnership with a professional who has a thorough understanding of the media, is a skilled public relations practitioner and has a genuine interest in your organization and its mission.

The most effective plans begin with focused message development and comprehensive strategy, include a variety of tools and tactics, provide pre-interview coaching (media training), and are carefully executed according to a specified time table. Results and other feedback must be carefully monitored. Regular progress reviews and modification of the plan when necessary are essential. Good plans aren't one-shot undertakings, but dynamic, "living" strategies that evolve, gain momentum and provide results.

The momentum produced by a well-conceived and properly executed plan can also have immeasurable future results, in good times and bad. Long-term strategic communication builds "good will capital" among stakeholders, customers and the

public that is invaluable in the face of negative publicity. In a world of bloggers and 24-7 news outlets, bad news travels quickly. Recalls, lawsuits, rumors, innuendo and other untoward events can happen at any time to any institution. The organization that has already indelibly impressed its good reputation on audiences is on far stronger foundation to weather a storm. Savvy businesses, large and small, understand this and prepare appropriately.

Retaining the right communications firm means finding one with compelling storytelling ability, as well as the right mix of media savvy, PR skills and marketing know-how. The size of the firm is not as important as its fit with the client. Trust must be absolute. Experience, knowledge, maturity are also critical. Having practical media experience and insight as a working journalist is beneficial throughout the process, but especially during media training and in a crisis. Nothing is worse than meeting the media head-on and unprepared.

Whether you mount your own campaign or hire an expert, examine the big picture and commit to the long haul. An effective strategic communications plan will provide value through results that are both immediate and long-term, raising awareness and enhancing trust.

Dennis Dean is an Emmy-winning former journalist, public relations expert and media trainer. He can be reached at dennis@deangroup.com or 262-238-8740.