



The
differences
between
three
business
essentials

Not understanding the differences between advertising, marketing and public relations keeps many business people from using the best communications tool for maximum results.

There is an old joke that highlights the differences between the three. Imagine you see a person you would like to get to know. Advertising is when you go up to the person and confidently talk about how you are the greatest person on earth and perfectly equipped to make every dream come true. Marketing is when you strike up a conversation and while you're talking, you explain how he or she needs a friend and you are the right person for the job. Public relations is when he or she comes up to you and says admiringly, "I've heard how wonderful you are and I'd really like to get to know you."

There are entire bodies of knowledge for each of these strategies and the clear-cut distinctions are disappearing as efforts become integrated. A basic rule of thumb is that if the end result is to match goods or services to a customer need (a marketing function), advertising and public relations become tools for the marketing function. But if the desired objective is to advance the entire organization (a public relations function), marketing and advertising become public relations tools. Working as part of an overall effort enhances each function, but here's a quick overview of the differences.

Advertising

Advertising is absolutely the best avenue to use if you need to control message delivery (often because you've got a totally sales-oriented message) or if you need quick results. Basically, if you've got enough money, you can buy the time or space to say whatever you want about yourself and your business — and sometimes even about your competition.

While you will build awareness, the trouble is everyone knows you paid for the advertising, and if you're too boastful, you can lose a bit of credibility.

Even at it's most effective, advertising can only induce your target audience to try you once. So make sure you're ready to deliver when the customers come calling.



PUBLICITY

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Marketing

The five basic components of marketing are: product/service attributes, marketing communications (this is where advertising, sales promotion and publicity can support the marketing effort), market research, customer service and sales management.

Marketing looks toward the future to determine which products or services should be aggressively promoted, which should be maintained and which should be abandoned. It also helps businesses decide whether or not to acquire or sell and establishes priorities for new product development.

In this process, companies investigate the product life cycle and analyze market share, segmentation, product line extensions, pricing, distribution, cost efficiency and so on. Companies also spend time investigating their own market for size, growth, competition, captive customers, barriers to entry, economies of scale, regulatory exposure and the opportunity to segment.

Public Relations

Public relations is about developing and maintaining beneficial, two-way relationships with the people who can influence your success — it's not just about writing media releases. Members of the media are a big influence.

But so are customers, employees, distributors, investors, analysts, industry leaders, government regulators, community leaders and others.

The tools of public relations are quite varied. They include media relations/publicity, customer relations, advisory groups, financial relations, employee relations, industry relations, speaker's bureau/speaker training, community relations, crisis communications planning, special events, sponsorships, and World Wide Web site promotion.

Public relations is hard to define, and that's why it's probably the least understood tool of the three. As with any other form of communications, public relations objectives that support the company's overall strategy should be determined before

plans are developed. But don't make the mistake of tying public relations objectives to sales. Take a longer-term approach and use the tools of public relations to establish credibility, increase awareness and build competitive distinction.

Always remember: If you are attempting to obtain publicity, you are at the mercy of the media outlet. You can't control what is said about you, which makes the message more credible.

Working Together

The best scenario is when all three of these disciplines are understood and used to support each other in an overall branding effort. Your corporate brand should convey the essence, character and purpose of your company and your products or services. Think of some of the world's mega-brands and what they mean to you: Coca-Cola, IBM, Nike, Disney and Ford.

The powerful corporate branding process affects all forms of communications and is the strategically thought-out declaration of who you are, what you believe and why your customers should put their faith in your products or services and not your competitors. All of these efforts require time and commitment, but they build the intangible, yet very valuable assets that can influence customer and employee preference, and ultimately strengthen the bottom line.

Rebecca Hart, APR, is a local public relations consultant who has worked with major national companies, as well as helping smaller, entrepreneurial companies build their image through strategic communications. To receive a free copy of *The Seven Bottom Line Benefits of Public Relations*, send an e-mail to theprpro@mediaone.net or fax (904) 220-7648.

AT A GLANCE

MARKETING: Matches products and/or services to consumer need.

ADVERTISING: Creates and places paid media messages.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Builds mutually beneficial associations with publics.