

## Introduction To Public Relations

### What is Public Relations?

There are a large number of definitions of public relations. The following three are a useful collection of ideas:

*“Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends”*

*London School of PR*

*“Public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.”*

*Institute of Public Relations*

*“Public relations is the systematic promotion of organisational goals, products, images and ideologies”*

*Kotler & Scheff*

From the wide range of definitions, the following are common themes:

- PR involves mutual understanding and relationships – it is not one-sided
- It is considered to be a management function and requires commitment and resources in the same way that financial and business planning do
- PR covers a number of ‘publics’ and is required to meet the needs of a variety of groups rather than one
- It should be a continuous process to create and sustain impact and not used sporadically and purely as a reactive tool
- PR has a number of differing purposes within an organisation rather than simply one.

## What is the purpose of PR?

- Public information
- Selling
- Education and raising awareness of issues/causes
- Promotion of a product or a company
- Raise money
- Support other marketing initiatives
- Crises management

## Characteristics of PR

From Adrian Palmer, 'Principles of Services Marketing'

- **Low cost** – it is a cheap way to reach a large number of people. Costs are mainly associated with staff time rather than costs associated with purchasing advertising space etc. This is why it is popular with small organisations.
- **Audience specificity** – if the right media is used, messages can be targeted to very small and specific groups.
- **Believability** – communications secured through public relations activity is seen as credible in contrast to much advertising. It appears to be impartial and non-commercial.
- **Difficult to control** – it is difficult to ensure that material and information supplied is used or used in the way it was intended. The information could be mis-interpreted and result in negative publicity.
- **Competition for attention** – there is a limited amount of space in a competitive area which means for pr to be successful it needs to be of a good quality.

## What does 'public' mean?

The earlier definitions mention 'publics', highlighting the range of groups that an organisation need to communicate with as follows:

- Attenders
- Regular customers
- 'Friends'
- Artists
- The community
- Funders
- Non-attenders
- Suppliers
- Businesses
- Arts industry

## Types of Public Relations Tools

There are a range of public relations tools as follows:

- **Press release** – most frequently used method for press relations, commonly used to announce events, news items or new appointments with the aim to secure editorial space
- **Education and training** – this can include open days, taster sessions or training events targeted at specific groups
- **Exhibitions** - Organisations often attend exhibitions in order to raise awareness of their existence and their products and services
- **Special Events** – organisations may arrange a special event in order to attract media attention, such as a launch event at the start of a festival or a reception to celebrate an achievement.
- **Lobbying** – this is a commonly used tool targeted at influencing key decision makers and can be at a local, regional, national or international level. Using lobbying to raise awareness of issues is not as extensively used within the arts as in other sectors but offers considerable potential.

## What Makes a Story

It might seem like a simple idea but the key to successful pr is the ability to identify and communicate the story. Journalists are busy and inundated with a wide range of things to cover. Making sure there is a genuine story with an angle will secure their interest and make their job easier.

In reality, anything does constitute a story, but what is important is finding the right angle or 'hook' for it, in order to make it worth looking at and interesting. A good story should contain at least one of the following:

- **Topical** – something that happened very recently or is happening shortly will be relevant. Something that will happen a long time in advance has much less impact and fights against the immediate pieces of news.
- **Relevance to national issues and agendas** – a story that links to national events or issues and gives it a regional or local angle are usually popular, especially with local press.
- **Community concern** – if something is relevant to the local community then people will want to know about it.
- **Quirkiness** – anything unusual or out of the ordinary will generate interest
- **Human interest** – people are generally interesting and when an individual person can clearly be identified the story is strengthened.
- **Action or drama** – this always attracts interest
- **Uniqueness** – if something is new or groundbreaking it will attract more interest. Being another fireworks display on November 5<sup>th</sup> is not enough to generate significant interest.

## Know your Media

It is essential to look at, and listen to, the types of 'stories' in your target media to gain an insight into the kinds of things they report and cover and the approach they take. Some may often contain full-page features on local people and organisations, others may only ever contain small mentions of up-coming events. Knowing what different media is interested in will save time and avoid wasted effort.

The News of the World, The Times and The Daily Mail all have a different approach in editorial style, opinion and stories they choose to cover as do the many radio stations that exist.

**The easiest way to do this is to become familiar with a wide range of media through reading newspapers and magazines regularly and listening to the radio. There is no shortcut to this and it is an essential part of successful public relations.**

## **Tools of the Trade**

In order to establish and maintain an effective public relations strategy it is essential for your organisation to have an up-to-date and useful press list. In the form of a database a press list should hold all of the relevant information relating to your press contacts and be able to be accessed and up-dated easily and regularly. It is the most valuable resource for an organisation that is serious about using public relations.

## **Essential Information**

Outlined below is a summary of the key pieces of information that a press list should contain.

- Category/type
- Publication/programme name
- Contact name(s) and job title(s)
- Postal address
- Phone number(s) and fax number(s)
- Email address
- Frequency (eg weekly, monthly)
- Day(s) of publication/broadcast
- Copy deadlines
- Target groups/geographical area
- Sister publications/programmes
- Field for general comments

Particularly with local papers, you will often find that a few titles are produced from the same office and by the same journalists. It is useful to establish this and then send only one press release to that journalist with the relevant publications identified rather than sending three press releases!

## **How to keep the information**

Depending on the technology available within your organisation there are a variety of ways to keep this information. A basic list can be created in a word document which will enable labels to be generated for mailing. Email lists are also useful as increasingly journalists respond to emails.

An excel spreadsheet is a very useful way of holding the information and can be readily searched and information categorised. Additionally, database software, such as access, could be used and there are also pr software packages and press list services available. However, whilst highly sophisticated they are also highly priced and therefore not a realistic option for most small and mid-size arts organisations.

Categorising the information is one of the most important elements, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in targeting information. One or two well placed and targeted press releases to relevant programmes or publications can yield far more coverage than a blanket mailing to 70 contacts simply because they are on your press list.

### **When to update**

Like most information a press list is only useful if it is kept up-to-date. Once the press list is set up it is important to update it on a regular basis. However, in terms of the other demands on time, this may not be seen as a priority. There are no strict guidelines on updating information, other than doing it immediately you are aware a change has occurred. You may find out a journalist is moving on as a result of a conversation, you may notice a different journalists name covering stories similar to those you generate which may prompt you to call. A general good practice would be to check press contacts on a quarterly basis. Depending on your time commitments and size of press list, this could involve an afternoon on the phone or done on a rolling basis taking a few names at a time. This is entirely up to you but maintaining an up-to-date list is essential.

Once the press list is complete, you will know who it is you wish to target through your public relations activity.

### **How to contact the press is covered in Seminar 4.**