

Assessing and Communicating Public Relations Effectiveness

Rae Goldsmith

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Handouts

www.louisville.edu/ur/case

- Presentation
- CASE Currents bibliography
- “Using Research to Position Your Institution”

Perceptions

Are you Mary Richards, the competent, likeable, maybe a little whiney colleague – you're respected, but nobody really knows what you do?

Perceptions

- Are you Cliff Huxtable, the always visible, fatherly adviser who is rarely seen actually working – which is a good thing because they KNOW what you do and would really rather not discuss it?

Perceptions

Are you Les Nessman, the lonely, misunderstood news guy who's always protecting his territory?

Perceptions

Are you Joe Friday, someone who shows up only when something has gone horribly wrong?

Perceptions

Or are you the Barney Fife of campus, generally viewed as a loveable waste of taxpayer dollars that could be better used to support the academic mission of the institution?

Perceptions and accountability

- Money
- Credibility
- Internal relationships
- Ability to do your job
- A seat at the table

Meaningful assessment

Set new expectations that truly communicate how you contribute to the institution.

Output: What you do

- Media coverage: how many, how much, what, where, attitude, value vs. ads
- Publications
- Web
- Special events, community relations
- Advertising
- Issues and crisis management

Output: What you do

“In my experience, 85 percent of public relations... can be done by a competent secretary.... Somehow, we believe that if we produce enough stuff, even good stuff, the boss will like us.... Stuff is not a ticket to the table to participate.”

*James E. Lukaszewski in Communication
World, June/July 2001*

Outcomes: Responses to stuff

Counting responses to your output

- Publications: response cards, tracking systems, web traffic generated
- Advertising: responses
- Web: hits
- Special events, community relations: attendance, feedback forms
- Issues and crisis management: feedback, ???
- Media relations: feedback, attendance, ???

Qualitative: What people think

What are your constituents' views about your institution, your competitors, your issues, your goals? How are you influencing these views over time?

- Measure changes in attitudes, perceptions, institutional reputation
- Focus groups, surveys: on-going
- External validation: councils, contests, consultants

Results: How people behave

What do people do in response to your stuff that moves the institution forward?

- Enrollment, demographics
- Endowment, alumni giving
- Public funding
- Rankings

Changing the assessment culture

- Build meaningful assessment into all of your short-term and long-term planning
- You don't need an assessment plan; you need a plan that includes assessment
- Every tactic needs to support an institutional goal; meaningful assessment values achievement toward the goal rather than completion of the task

Changing the assessment culture

- Set expectations: Lead discussion on how work will be evaluated and advance buy-in
- Build assessment into your budget
- Establish partnerships
- Communicate progress constantly, not only annually

Changing the assessment culture

Anticipate assessing in layers

- Immediate: Quantitative to track responses
- Short- and long-term: Qualitative to track attitudes
- Annual, long-term: Results to track true impact on the institution

Communicating effectiveness

An integrated marketing example

- Identify goals: build a focused image...and increase applications and enrollment from high-achieving students
- Identify ultimate assessments: ACT scores of new freshmen, applications, enrollment (18 months out)
- Develop plan, creative, tactics, interim assessment strategies

Communicating effectiveness

An integrated marketing example:

Phases of assessment

- Internal and external research to develop plan, creative concepts
- Focus groups to refine creative concepts
- Communication: Defining the plan -- including assessment -- for the campus
- Survey after initial advertising phase (letter)

Communicating effectiveness

An integrated marketing example:

Phases of assessment

- Counting responses to events (admissions)
- On-line web survey, web focus groups (letter)
- Internal survey (news coverage)
- Awards (letter, internal news outlets)
- Follow-up survey in second year (letter)
- Ultimate assessment: ACT scores, enrollment

Changing the assessment culture

- Be the first to talk about assessment
- Share credit for achieving ultimate goals through partnerships
- Present results widely, often, in many formats
- Don't forget your internal communications tools
- Communicate the good, the bad, strategies to address the bad
- Be visible

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