

PRAMOD KHERA'S VIEWS ON CHALLENGES OF PR IN THE IT INDUSTRY

Public relations has become part and parcel of the daily working of the industry and I would like share with you how public relations in the IT industry has benefitted the industry as a whole and Aptech in particular.

Global scope of public relations...

It is very important for all organisations whether they have an international presence or even if they are purely domestic to be able to manage their image and their perceptions globally. The media and not just the Internet, has made the world a global village. Satellite TV began the process and the Internet has just built on it and accelerated the process. Hence what you do in one part of the world can and will affect you in some other part. The PR professional has a very important role to play in managing the global perceptions of the organisation.

- *Media has seeped into every corner of the world connecting this global village even more*
- *With the immediacy of internet and the reach of news organizations such as CNN, the world is an increasingly small place for today's public relations professional*
- *As such, PR research must not only capture intelligence from around the world, but it must also interpret and analyze through the lens filter of local eyes*

Internet is all pervasivethat we all knowbut its impact is also all pervasive. The image caught and transmitted by the Internet can be both damaging and positive.

Because the web has entered our lives fully and completely, maintaining a favourable online corporate image becomes an important function of corporate communications.

Impact of communicating on the Web...

As a result of the tremendous impact that the Internet has on organisations– both positive and negative, a lot of time and effort is required to understand the medium. For example, a student from Aptech's centre in Sholapur may put up a complaint on a website which can be accessed globally. Since Aptech has training centres in 40 countries, this could affect the company's image globally. Organisations today are viewed not just by the service they provide but also how well they are doing financially. The web as it penetrates more households is going to become more and more important.

*Controlling
online
perceptions...*

How do you control online perceptions? The most important aspect is transparency and providing sufficient information about the organisation. It is important to communicate clearly to relevant constituents on what the organisation is doing and how it is doing so. Our analysis reveals that before anyone takes up a course with Aptech, more than 50 per cent visit our website.

It is also pertinent to constantly monitor the web to find out if there is anything being discussed about the organisation on the Internet, which could impact the reputation of the organisation.

Hence, potentially negative and damaging discussions among target audiences and stakeholders need to be monitored, analysed and acted upon in a more timely and intelligent fashion. Solid, demonstrable facts can be put together to show whether you are positioned correctly online versus your competitors and companies can correct misperceptions, by providing Netizens more information and even improving business practices

Online management of the perceptions of Aptech plays a very important role. This can be achieved through two important functions: (1) Frequently updating the organisation's website and (2) tracking competition through the Net – a function, which is taken care of by the public relations department.

*Tools to
combat
negative
impact...*

The tools or resources available today to combat negative impact of communication over the Internet are first and foremost, web access. Update the company sites frequently as the site is the face the organisation presents to its publics. In practice, there are very few companies that do this regularly. In addition, one can use media content analysis – there are vast amounts of content available on the Internet, which will prove difficult for a team of 3-4 people in an organisation to keep track of all. Certain IT tools are available that will pick out media content which is relevant for a particular organisation, such as information about competitors, the industry, or any factors that may affect the organisation. The important points to remember are:

- *Speed counts. With the accelerated pace at which decisions must be made, having instant access to media content and analysis has become a necessity*
- *Live dynamic databases that are updated constantly and consistently from points around the globe provide highly tailored, expert, near real time updates and analysis of news and trends affecting the organisation*
- *Media demographics databases now provide detailed readership, listener ship and viewer ship profiles of media around the world (i.e. lifestyle, product consumption and*

purchase habits)

- *The use of this demographic intelligence produces media plans that are more targeted, more meaningful and more productive*
- *In addition to media planning, such databases allow for more intelligent media evaluation*

Tools to analyse PR efforts...

Proper systems need to be put into place to analyse how PR efforts are impacting the overall brand image, brand equity, the sales of the organisations and measure the return on investment in PR activities.

New technology allows enormous quantities of electronic media content to be analyzed consistently, accurately and remarkably quickly at the rate of over 20,000 stories overnight. This tool is great because it allows you to track media coverage in virtually every part of the world right from your desktop computer. In this way a PR department cannot only makes notes on its corporate image but also that of its competitors.

Statistical models permit PR professionals to understand how media coverage interacts with advertising, promotions and other forms of marketing communications to affect awareness, brand loyalty and sales. Even, other sales drivers such as weather patterns, economic conditions and competitive marketing activity can be factored into the analysis

IT industry in India...

Coming specifically to the PR needs of the IT industry, it is important to be aware of the image of India as a country and the capabilities and the skills Indians and Indian companies have to offer services globally is viewed. Although the foundations are laid in the domestic market and extended into the global marketplace, there are a lot of wider implications that need to be factored in. For example, there are a lot of negative perceptions about products from India.

This is where public relations needs to play a crucial role and it cannot just be done by one company alone– it is a collective effort that an entire industry needs to take. This has happened in the IT industry with Nasscom, and CII to a lesser extent, playing a very important role in building an image of India Inc. and the IT industry. Dewang Mehta spearheaded the Nasscom movement for almost a decade. If any one could be described as a '**PR professional**' for the IT industry, it was him. He made a great deal of impact on the image of the Indian IT industry globally.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How do you customise content for an optimum online presence?

Pramod Khera replied that customisation was a challenge. There were techniques that were available such as separate home pages for different countries and if a hit came from a particular country, that page could automatically be displayed. What could also be done would be to have a common home page and then separate sections for different countries. For example, in China Aptech taught in Chinese, while in Latin America in Spanish. Cultural differences too were important and Aptech had different products for different countries.

Streamlining the work culture – this is an issue with all companies, IT or otherwise.

Aptech had a centralised PR department. However both within the country and outside, the company has dedicated staff who are handling PR as part of their duties. External agencies are also employed and the company uses the intranet extensively. For example, when a release is sent out, it is sent via the intranet to Aptech's overseas branches where it is translated into the local language. This is a very effective means of communication. Even though it relates to India, Aptech feels that domestic inputs are very important as it provides the external market information on Aptech in India. Aptech's corporate website is updated daily and is visited by all journalists. All changes are conveyed through this website in a most transparent way.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Pramod Khera, CEO Training & Education Business, Aptech Ltd., at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on June 14, 2001)