Victoria Massey

March 22, 2011

**Research**

Public relations professionals use a four-step process to reach their objectives of the organization or business they represent. The process described by the acronym R.A.C.E., stands for research, action, communication and evaluation.

The first step in the public relations process is research, which is the function that provides content and information to the PR professional. Researching information is vital to understanding what they need to know to be able to perform specified tasks. Before the research process begins, the professional needs to know what they are looking for, how much it will cost, if they need to outsource to get the information and what specific information is needed. PR professionals recognize research as a tool to help them gain understanding of their audiences, to achieve credibility and to see where their audience lies.

There are two different kinds of research; there is primary research and secondary research. Primary research is original information that comes directly from the source of information conducted by the business or organization. Secondary research is information obtained from a different source and is not conducted by the professional’s company or organization. Quantitative research is a particular way a company does research and involves different methods of collecting the data needed. This includes hard data, surveys and face-to-face interviews. Another way is called qualitative research, which focuses more on the individual’s perspective. There are many methods of conducting research, but among the most popular are content analysis, interviewing, focus groups, copy testing, scientific sampling, telephone surveys and personal interviews. Each method has it’s pros and cons; for instance, mail questionnaires are inexpensive, but they provide low levels of responses; telephone surveys provide immediate responses, but the telephone numbers of prospective participants are hard to obtain. Research is a crucial part of R.A.C.E because it provides the information needed to understand specified audiences and provides the information to start the rest of the PR process.

**ACTION**

The second step in the PR process is action. This function involves strategic planning to obtain marketing and mission-oriented goals of the company. Planning involves assessing the situation and the gathering all of the research obtained from research part in the process. A PR professional has to then conceptualize the idea of where they want their company to be in the future, which allows them to effectively plan for their message to be conveyed to their defined audience.

The first step in action and planning is to write an extensive plan stating what is to be done and how they can go about achieving the goals of specific campaign or the company itself. The written plan outlines each aspect of the PR campaign and can serve as a planning device for the duration of the campaigning process.

The eight basic elements in the planning process are as follows: The first is the situation and understanding what is involved in the issue at hand and why a PR campaign should be formed. Objective is the second element and involves the company’s mission and also actively stating the needs of the company or organization, There are two kinds of objectives: informational, which involves increasing the awareness of the company or organization and motivational—persuading the audience, eventually leading to a change in behavior. The third element is specified audience. The audience is usually defined in the research part of the PR process, but should be identified in the planning stage for further reference. Strategy is the fourth element and that includes the specified plan of how the organization will reach its objective. Tactics are the tangible part of the planning process and is the action part of the strategic plan. Calendar and Timeliness are the fifth element and are one of the crucial parts of the planning process. This part determines the timetable of the campaign and how long it should last. Budget is the seventh element and usually comes from the organization’s executives. The written plan is given to the executives with the budget in mind and the executives determine how much is spent on the campaign. Lastly is evaluation, which determines if the objectives were reached, how well the message was conveyed to the audience and if the message was effective.

**COMMUNICATION**

The third step in the PR process is communication. First and foremost, public relations professionals should know what communication is, the perceptions of the audience, how the audience uses media and what media are most effective. Five objectives of communicators are to get the message across, to effectively convey the message, for the message to be accepted by the public, to persuade and to change behavior.

The media uses and gratification theory describes the role between the media and its audience. It states that the communication process involves two-way communication. The relationship between the communicator and the audience should be interactive—they should be able to send and receive messages between each other. The communicator’s objectives are to persuade and to successfully convey a message to an audience and the recipient ultimately wants his or her needs to be fulfilled.

There are two types of audiences; passive and active. The passive audience is not as attentive and tends to want more entertainment and creativity rather than actively seeking information. The active audience is pursuing an interest and is seeking out information that will fulfill their personal needs. It is important to remember that eighty-three percent of learning is done through sight; therefore, it is important to create something visually that an audience can actively identify and relate to the campaign.

To effectively communicate a message, the writing must be clear and concise, which means to get the point across in the easiest way for the reader to understand. The source must also be credible, so that the audience can trust the organization or the business. Finally, acting upon words is the most important part of the process. The organization must do what it says if t is going to gain credibility and have an positive effect on the audience.

**EVALUATION**

The final step in the PR process is evaluation. The evaluation process allows the organization to assess how effective the message was transmitted to the audience when analyzing the end results. The evaluation function allows the company to ask themselves if they reached their objectives and what they can do better in the future.

The most common methods for evaluation of PR campaigns are measurement of production and measurement of message exposure. The measurement of production includes counting news releases, feature stories and any exposure through the media. Although this is not a well-respected evaluation method, it is often used in the PR profession. The measurement of message exposure is the most popular and involves the compilation of press clippings and electronic mentions, but also analyzes the light in which the company or organization is portrayed.

Systematic tracking of a PR campaign is crucial to evaluation. This looks at market penetration, tone of coverage and sources quoted. PR professionals often use benchmarking, which is a way to track and view the coverage of the campaign. This helps the professional determine what medium is most effective for their particular organization. Most importantly to the executives and the PR professional of the company is the return on investment, which rates the cost of the campaign and compares it to the audience reached.

The final step of the evaluation function is determining how effectively the message was communicated to the audience, how aware they are of the organization or business and if the audience’s perceptions were changed after the campaign. The baseline pre and post campaign study helps PR professionals by seeking out changed perceptions and graphically shows the percentage of differences in attitudes

R.A.C.E is universally known and accepted throughout the PR professional community and is the most effective way to implement a PR campaign. It is vital to the professional community because it provides a step-by-step guide to creating an effective campaign.