Role of Public Relations Professionals in Non-Profit Organizations

Introduction

I originally chose public relations as my major because I wanted to develop more specific skills in the communication field. However, after my seizure related car accident, my passion became obvious to me. I realized how I could make a positive impact on the world. Through managing public relation campaigns for non-profit organizations, I can help people improve the quality of their lives.

Overview

As a public relations professional working for a non-profit organization, my role would be categorized as a "communication technician." This means that I would primarily focus on updating social media accounts, writing news releases, employee newsletters, writing web content, and managing media contacts. Most likely, I will have no part in strategic planning or decision making processes. Yet, I will be expected to explain the actions of the organization to employees and the media (Broom & Sha, 2013, pg. 31-34).

Modern External Communication

The most recent development that drives the tasks of everyday life for a public relations professional is the necessity to keep up with new technologies. The real focus is on social media

platforms, most significant being Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. These are important tools that can be used to run a public relations campaign. Websites and applications such as these allow an organization to reach multiple audiences, interact with followers, and can be used on-the-go.

Facebook is a relatively older staple in the world of social media. It was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg (Phillips, 2007). Along with personal accounts, businesses have also made use of the website by creating their own pages. Facebook developers designed settings that accommodate needs of businesses. As the most popular social media platform, 68% of all Americans have a Facebook account, of which, 75% are men and 83% are women (Pew Research Center, 2016). The age range with the highest percentage of users (88%) is 18-24 (Pew Research Center, (2016). However, 62% of people of the late ages of 65 and older also use Facebook (Pew Research Center, 2016). These statistics are important because it shows that people of all ages and gender are Facebook users. Establishing a brand's presence on Facebook will allow it to reach audiences from many different generations.

Coming in second behind Facebook is Instagram. It was launched on October 6, 2010 by its founders, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Lagorio-Chafkin, 2012). Instagram is a picture sharing smartphone application that is often used to showcase food or brag about being on vacation. It is most prevalent among younger users. In the United States 26% of men and 38% of women use Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2016). According to Pew Research Center, as of 2016, 28% of Americans have Instagram accounts. Again, the statistics favor the younger ages. 59% of people between ages18 and 29 use the popular application (Pew Research Center, 2016). It may be a reasonable question to ask if people who are above the age of 65 even know that Instagram exists. Only 8% of Americans who are 65 years or older use Instagram (Pew Research

Center, 2016). Using Instagram as a tool in a public relations campaign is especially effective in targeting younger age groups.

Naturally, Twitter follows the same trend in age demographics as Facebook and Instagram. Twitter is used by 21% Americans (Pew Research Center, 2016). Based on gender, 24% of men and 25% of women in the United States are Twitter users (Pew Research Center, 2016). The percentage of people who use Twitter slowly declines as they get older. In a study done by Pew Research Center it was concluded that 36% of people in the age range of 18-29 use Twitter, while only 10% of people who are 65 years or older hold Twitter accounts (2016). Twitter was founded in March of 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Noah Glass, and Biz Stone. Their brilliant concept of limiting posts to 140-characters forces messages to be straight and to the point. People consume more news and information every day because it takes less time and effort to process what they are seeing. This is probably a huge factor that makes the site popular among millennials. Millennials' brains have been conditioned to have short attention spans and minimal patience. If there are only have 140 characters to read, then the intended message will be better comprehended by millennials.

Finally, Snapchat newer than the other three social media platforms. It was released in 2011 (Mashable). The co-founders are Evan Spiegel and Bobby Murphy (Mashable). Snapchat allows users to take pictures and send them to friends, but after 10 seconds the image disappears. It is a strange feature, yet, it is a wildly popular application. Users also enjoy adding features that alter images to make them more entertaining. Unsurprisingly, Snapchat is also more popular among younger people. The distribution of age demographics of people who use Snapchat are as follows: 13-17 (23%), 18-24 (37%), 25-34 (26%), 35-54 (12%), and 55+ (2%) (Statista, 2017). The advantage of Snapchat is that followers can interact with each other and/or brands in real

time. People also try to be clever or funny when they send their snaps. Getting a message across with a laugh will make brands more memorable to the audience.

Non-profits can run successful public relations campaigns through social media. For example, the Epilepsy Foundation has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Their Facebook page has 133,605 followers (Facebook, Epilepsy Foundation, 2016). Their Twitter account has 1,303 followers (Twitter, Epilepsy Foundation, 2016). Their Instagram page has 9,663 followers (Instagram, Epilepsy Foundation, 2016). Unfortunately, the Epilepsy Foundation does not have a Snapchat account, which puts them at a disadvantage. I would consider their social media campaign to be a success because they obtained over 1,000 followers and are having a constant flow of activity on their page.

Internal/External Communications

The role of a public relations professional in a non-profit organization is evolving due to increasing competition for donations and a reduction in government subsidies (Broom & Sha, 2013, Chapter 18, pg. 380). The public relations role includes involvement in internal and external communications.

Internal Communication

The basic job of public relations departments that are in charge of internal communications is to create an environment where employees and bosses have mostly positive interactions. According to Glen M. Broom and Bey-Ling Sha's textbook 'Cutlip & Center's

Effective Public Relations, "Ideally, working relationships are characterized by at least seven conditions: 1. Confidence and trust between employer and employees 2. Honest candid information flowing freely up, down, and sideways in the organization 3. Satisfying status and participation for each person 4. Continuity without strife 5. Healthy or safe surroundings 6. Success for the enterprise 7. Optimism about the future" (2013). It is necessary that suggestions from everybody in the room is respected because collaboration can lead to innovative ideas.

These seven conditions can be applied to real life if the organization adopts the symmetrical worldview theory of internal communications. A symmetrical worldview adapts better to change. It is open to negotiation with not only staff, but with its audience (Broom & Sha, 2013, Chapter 9, pg. 192). The willingness to listen to what the people want can only improve the reputation of the organization. The reason an organization needs to understand which worldview they resemble is that it helps define which kind of category of organizational culture category describes their brand.

The organizational culture that is generally considered positive is participative. Participative organizational culture encourages open dialogue, teamwork, and input from employees and the brand's publics. It also strongly supports the integration of departments (Broom & Sha, 2013, Chapter 9, pg. 193). Organizations with these values is more likely to succeed than companies who do not share these beliefs.

However, there is always another side. The worldview that is generally considered a negative way to run a company is the asymmetrical view. This view simply wants what the organization wants: Money. There is minimal focus on the employees' opinions. A strong trait of the asymmetrical worldview is it is resistant to change. The CEO only wants to make a profit.

The power resides in the decision making, which is not made transparent to the public whatsoever (Broom & Sha, Chapter 9, pg. 192).

Of course, the organizational culture that matches with the asymmetrical worldview is rightly named, authoritarian organizational culture. Traits that define this culture are decision making is made by the highest ranked people in the organization, it emphasizes individual accountability, and there is a high division of labor. More importantly relating directly to public relations is that the communication in typically one-sided (Broom & Sha, Chapter 9, pg. 192-193). This makes the internal communications aspect of the public relations job much harder because they must find a way to break the barrier to develop two-way communication between the employees and employers.

External Communication

External communication is between the organization and its audience. Public relations professionals use external communication when they are talking to news outlets, posting on social media, and conversing with potential customers. Communicating externally is a challenge for public relations professionals because they must work with "uncontrolled media." This means that the news story needs to be pitched to the media. It is the professional's job to convince the media outlet that their story is newsworthy (Broom & Sha, Chapter 10, pg. 209). This makes it hard to compete with advertisements because they work with "controlled media." Advertisers pay for time and placement for their advertisement. They can control how their message is presented to the public (Broom & Sha, Chapter 10, pg. 209).

Responsibilities

There are five main responsibilities that public relation departments need to manage to maintain the positive image of an organization. These are especially important for non-profits because they need more help from the public than a for-profit organization to be successful. First, the brand must be defined so that the organization can build awareness, gain acceptance of its mission and protect its reputation. Second, they need to find ways to develop relationships with media influencers that allow them to reach target audiences. Third, the public relations team must develop strategies for fundraising campaigns. Fourth, they are obligated to support public policy that favors the organization. Fifth, it is their duty to recruit employees and volunteers.

Defining the brand is the first step and most important because it helps set the image that the organization wants to project to the rest of the world. A person should immediately know exactly what the organization does and what it stands for whenever they hear its name. It also establishes a reputation that can be maintained, especially in a time of crisis. For example, a commonly known non-profit organization is American Red Cross. Every single person generally has the same understanding when it is mentioned. The Red Cross holds blood drives so that people can donate their blood to help save lives. The Red Cross also helps bring aid to people in disasters all around the world. Unfortunately, in 2010 the Red Cross was involved in an international scandal while they were aiding people in Haiti after a massive earthquake. The American Red Cross spent 25% of its donations on internal expenses, which was much more than what was originally reported (Sullivan, 2016). Overall, the organization is still considered trustworthy because of its long standing positive reputation, but it will always be just a little bit tarnished due to the scandal.

There are several ways to develop relationships with media platforms. Advertisements can be placed in newspapers, although that is a relatively old strategy. Most modern mass media communication is done digitally. Getting television time can greatly increase the number of people that will see the brand's message. Using social media to interact with audiences can be extraordinarily effective. All major brands have thousands of followers on Twitter. For example, Walmart has 854,000 followers (Twitter, Walmart, 2016) and Best Buy has 862,000 followers (Twitter, Best Buy, 2016).

Developing strategies for fund raising campaigns is important for non-profit organizations because there are limits of how they can make money. Fundraising is used to minimize the financial burden that falls on the organization. The organization does not have enough of its own money to stay afloat without some help. Whenever there is a fundraising event, it helps both the cause and the organization. Usually a large percentage of the money donated goes towards the cause instead of internal organization affairs. Some common types of fundraising events are selling merchandise/tickets, auctioning items, fun-runs, hosting golf tournaments, and letting donors participate in contests.

Supporting public policies lets people know what the organization's values are. Some ways that non-profit organizations can support public policies are putting out news releases that tell the public where they stand on specific issues. The professional who runs social media platforms can easily post about the organization's support of proposed legislation. Attending or even hosting protests or rallies can be a form of showing support of a policy. For example, Planned Parenthood is extremely outspoken on Twitter. They have a total of 382,000 followers (Twitter, Planned Parenthood, 2016).

The only way a non-profit organization can work is if it has willing volunteers and a few employees. It is the job of the public relations department to recruit new people who are passionate about the cause. Using all of the tactics that were just discussed, awareness will reach the right people for the job. Every time a non-profit's message is exposed to the world, more volunteers will follow.

Bibliography

Broom, G. & Sha, B. (2013). Cutlip & Center's Effective Public Relations. (Chapter 2, pg. 31-34).

Broom, G. & Sha, B. (2013). Cutlip & Center's Effective Public Relations. (Chapter 18, pg. 380).

Broom, G. & Sha, B. (2013). Cutlip & Center's Effective Public Relations. (Chapter 9, pg. 190-193).

Broom G. & Sha, B. (2013). Cutlip & Center's Effective Public Relations. (Chapter 10, pg. 209).

Phillips, S. (2007, July 25). A Brief History of Facebook. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jul/25/media.newmedia

Greenwood, S., Perrin, A., & Duggan, M. (2016). *Social Media Update 2016: Facebook Usage and Engagement is on the Rise, while Adoption of Other Platforms Holds Steady.* (Report). Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/

Lagorio-Chafkin, C. (2012). *Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Founders of Instagram.* Retrieved from http://www.inc.com/30under30/2011/profile-kevin-systrom-mike-krieger-founders-instagram.html

Carlson, N. (2011, April 13). The Real History of Twitter. *Business Insider.* Retrieved from http://www.businessinsider.com/how-twitter-was-founded-2011-4

Mashable. *11 Things You Didn't Know About Snapchat's Founders.* Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2014/02/13/snapchat-founder-facts/#EXujBS56Fgqi

Statista. (2017). *Snapchat User Demographics: Distribution of Snapchat users in the United States as of February 2016, by Age.* Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/326452/snapchat-age-group-usa/

Epilepsy Foundation. (2017). *Followers.* Instagram. Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/epilepsyfdn/

Epilepsy Foundation. (2017). *Followers.* Facebook. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/EpilepsyFoundationofAmerica/

Epilepsy Foundation. (2017). *Followers.* Twitter. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/EpilepsyFdn

Sullivan, L. (2016). *Report: Red Cross Spent 25 Percent of Haiti Donations On Internal Expenses.* Northwest Public Radio. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/2016/06/16/482020436/senators-report-finds-fundamental-concerns-about-red-cross-finances

Walmart. (2017). *Followers.* Twitter. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Walmart

Best Buy. (2017). *Followers.* Twitter. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/BestBuy

Planned Parenthood. (2017). *Followers.* Twitter. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/@PPact