

CAMPAIGNS

What Is a PR Campaign?

Examples of Public Relations (PR) campaigns are traced back to medieval times, periods throughout history with religious wars, times when new countries and governments were emerging. Campaigns have always been a way to inform and persuade the masses. Specifically, in the United States, examples of campaigns are well documented beginning in the 1700s and 1800s as the United States was positioning itself on the world's stage, creating alliances and harnessing its own people to work as a collective against a common enemy. During the Revolutionary War, there are many who believe that the actions of Samuel Adams were strategically set to position the British in a poor light using terms like *Boston Massacre* and disseminating information to the public with a clear agenda.

Public Relations *campaigns* as we know them today have been around since the creation of modern PR practice, which began at the start of the 1900s. Historic figures in PR such as Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee and Betsy Plank all influenced how modern PR campaigns are conducted. In the 1998 biography of Edward Bernays by *Boston Globe* reporter Larry Tye titled "The Father of Spin," Bernays' career and accomplishments are well documented. In addition to creating an outline for propaganda techniques, ethics for practitioners and more, Bernays was very influential in creating the eight-step process to create a Public Relations plan on which most campaigns are loosely based. This process includes Objectives, Situation, Strategy, Audience, Tactics, Timeline and/or Calendar, Budget and Evaluation.

Modern PR campaigns present solutions to one goal. Throughout history, these *goals* often helped change the ideas of war, persuade the masses, build brands, impact outcomes, start movements, end conflicts and much more. Broken down into measurable objectives, the tactics used to create successful campaigns are skills practitioners constantly fine-tune.

A Public Relations Campaign Is:

- A PR campaign is a communication plan—a strategically chosen set of various communication media platforms—that seek to influence a specific target audience or audiences. Communication plans are simple, cohesive, power pieces of persuasion. They *build a case* on facts and insights that demonstrate to a client *why* the course chosen is the correct one to yield the desired results to the target audience.
- A PR campaign is conducted to solve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity. The issue solved or opportunity gained must benefit both the

organization and the public—meaning it's a *win-win*. The implication is that if the resulting situation is a *win-lose*, the outcome is often *lose-lose*. In other words, an organization is not likely to thrive long term without listening to and serving its public, both internal (employees, stakeholders, board of trustees, volunteers) and external (clients, customers, members) in the short term.

A Public Relations Campaign Is Not:

- A PR campaign is not an advertising *blitz*. Advertising is frequently associated with the word campaign, but remember that advertising is usually PAID. The PR campaign employs many methods of communication including media relations (utilizing tactical PR writing such as media advisories, media alerts, media pitches, press releases, etc.), social media, publicity and other methods, all of which are not paid forms of media. An effective PR campaign typically utilizes a range of traditional and non-traditional media and employs influence by opinion leaders and the community.
- A PR campaign is not blind propaganda. In modern political discourse, there is almost always an underlying thread of propaganda and influence of mass audiences. Propaganda, at its core practice, relies on generalizing the appeal to the audience evoking collective emotions, is often devoid of facts, evidence, or reality and relies on defamation. PR campaigns require credible facts that the public can understand, evaluate and utilize. The target audience is free to choose and accept the information and therefore act or deny the information. The success of the persuasion is based on action or inaction.
- A PR campaign is not spin or hype. *Spin* usually refers to efforts to tilt the public perception in ways favorable to a political candidate or product. Unfortunately, it has a negative connotation and is often synonymous with the practice of PR. When used, spin usually means the twisting of the truth to only highlight the positive and “dizzy” the audience. The term *hype* is derived from *hyperbole*, which is an exaggeration to impress and evoke a strong response. No legitimate PR campaign achieves successful goals and hits the marks with the objectives using spin or hype. Do successful campaigns based in hype exist? Of course. But it's important to differentiate that in the age of digital information, flash and buzz do not create a long-term lasting campaign. Weak arguments and tools aiming to just bewilder or bedazzle are not going to create a lasting impression that has measureable results in the long-term. What practitioners often see is *glitz* and *buzz* are often followed by nay-sayers and contradiction, which puts the client in the center of confusion or worse a cloud of controversy and ultimately never leads to success.
- A PR campaign is also not a PR program for a company. A PR program is a long-term strategy that should incorporate the ethics of an organization, strategies for rolling-out new information, handling a crisis and sticking to a brand. Within a PR program, a company can often have one or several PR campaigns a year for various reasons—ultimately to achieve a goal. An example of this is M&M-Mars refreshing its brand in the 1990s and inviting the public to pick a new color for an M&M. The public voted to remove the tan M&M and create a blue M&M. This was an extremely successful campaign for the brand and led to another global search for a new color—purple in 2002; M&Ms characters in 2007; and in 2010 personalized M&Ms.

Types of Campaigns

What brings about a campaign in the first place? It is often the desire for change or the result of a needed resolution after an issue or problem comes to public light. These are marvelous opportunities to advance the organization. Some changes are sweeping and incorporate thousands of people, such as the suffrage movement in the 1920s to approve the amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote. The spark can ignite a fire or a flame; either way, all PR campaigns follow a similar path from inception to execution.

Before any of the PR campaign is created, it's imperative that everyone understands what type of campaign is being built. The most common categories for persuasive PR campaigns are commercial, educational, political, reputation and social change.

Commercial campaigns roll out a new product or service for sale to the public, or it revitalizes awareness of existing products or services. PR campaigns can precede an advertising blitz through media channels. The PR campaign often educates the public to the product and/or service and informs members of the public of key words needed to discuss this product and/or service properly. At the time of the launch, the public already understands the term *smart phone* as opposed to *cellular phone* and the differences. The public knows what a *touch screen* means and has already had their concerns recognized and addressed through the PR campaign messaging. By this point, all the advertisers have to focus on is the cost and where to purchase the product. Commercial PR campaigns create tactical PR materials, pitches, demonstrations, events and trials for the press to deliver third-party reviews and analysis of the product and/or service.

Example: In September 2009 Starbucks broke successfully into the \$21 billion global instant coffee business by introducing *VIA* within the cafes. This was rapidly followed by pep-rallies, a cocktail mix-off, a nationwide road trip, taste tests and much more, including PR materials educating the public on *ethically sourced* products.

Educational or informational PR campaigns seek to raise public awareness of issues, organizations, products, or services. These are also known as *public awareness campaigns* due to the level of awareness it offers on a specific subject. These campaigns are often utilized by nonprofit organizations to help people better understand, relate and activate. Most of the public has a loose understanding of the term *learning disabled*. But through a PR campaign, an organization can work to replace harmful words used in spoken lexicon, explain the various types of disabilities and shift attitudes and behaviors. These are among the most common type of PR campaign because elements of education and/or information exist in ALL PR campaigns—efforts to help people better comprehend the underlying causes and how that might connect to their beliefs and so on.

Example: In 2010, the U.S. government began nationwide educational initiatives to combat the rise in incidents related to bullying: National Bullying Prevention Campaign. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Bureau targets tweens—those ages 9 to 13 years of age—and the adults who are responsible for these tweens. The multiyear PR campaign included bullying prevention resource kits, a national launch event, advice for young people, PSAs, a website filled with data and other materials and more. The campaign used animated characters to depict bullying scenarios in entertaining *webisodes* and PSAs. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) launched a parallel PR campaign driving home to parents that it only

takes 15 minutes of time talking and listening a day to have a positive effect on behavior. The PR campaign raised awareness, recommended action and created talking points for parents to start conversation and red flags for them to watch for to prevent bullying behaviors or outcomes.

Political campaigns are something of a horse of a different color in that most of these are either focused on the candidate or the issues and then have an element of persuasion, education and/or information and salesmanship layered on top of the base. Political campaigns are best when handled by a team of people, which includes a PR expert, but where strategy and political connections and/or adeptness are equally important. The candidate's ability to appear capable, relatable and genuine seems to be crucial to the voters with the integration of various mediums that are largely on 24-hour news cycles. People are able to obtain information from these sources with little-to-no understanding of validity of facts.

Reputation PR campaigns center on a *brand* and aim to change the reputation of that brand through a series of strategic messages, PR stunts, positive press, social media banter and more. Not all reputation PR campaigns are aimed to *polish* a tarnished reputation. Some are created to breathe life into a wilting brand, shift the demographics of a once-loved but forgotten brand, or realign the values of a brand. Reputation PR campaigns are often best used for well-established organizations and are also interested in long-term results. It is implausible to believe that reputation adjustments are made in short spans of time; rather, it is more likely that these campaigns have steps measures.

Example: In 2014, the relatively *young* brand of Air B&B launched a reputation PR campaign introducing *The Bélo*, which asked users to interpret the logo or symbol by adding colors, decorations, backgrounds and so on. The brand wanted users to interpret the symbol to something meaningful to them, which is a way to connect the brand to each user. This moved the user base from those who viewed Air B&B from the youth-based market to something for *everyone*, which was not part of the reputation the brand had previously.

Social change PR campaigns are movement-based and are aimed to target large segments of the public and push for something *bigger*. Social change PR campaigns often incorporate large percentages of education and information-based PR campaigns. Most of social change is compelling a person or groups of people to take action, it also requires that the person or group of people *believe* to some extent in the action they are taking. It is difficult to harness thousands of people to march against ___ for the right to ___ if that group of people doesn't believe in what they are literally marching for. Social change PR campaigns are unique in that they can be quick and from inception to execution can happen in 60 days or they can be something that builds for years.

Example: In January 2017, the Women's March was a worldwide protest in Washington, D.C., held the day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. During the campaign, tensions rose following statements made by Trump and his camp that many considered to be anti-women and offensive. The Women's March on Washington was streamed live on social media platforms and drew more than 200,000 people to the nation's capital. Other marches were held worldwide and in cities throughout the United States with an approximate total of more than 4 million people participating in marches. It was the largest single-day protest in U.S. history.

TEAMWORK

Working in Teams

Throughout college campuses and within the business world, the word *teamwork* usually evokes fear, panic and frustration. At minimum, it strikes a negative connotation. The reality, however, is that in the modern workforce, teamwork is collective thinking models and shared workloads is more common than ever before. Employers are moving further from the traditional or formal organizational structure of the pyramid hierarchy in lieu of a more horizontal structure. Changing the perception of the teamwork or group work begins with explaining the process and choosing a team or group configuration that maximizes the labor force and optimizes time and resources by playing to strengths.

The Real World

In PR, the ability to create, plan, implement and evaluate a campaign is the cornerstone of your skills. Regardless of the industry in which you work, it is unlikely you will ever develop a complete campaign alone. It is more common that you will be asked to work in a team or even lead the team.

The campaign process is such that it is divided and split any number of ways to share the work equally, capitalizing on talents and/or strengths and pooling resources. When working in a classroom environment, the instructor may choose a less conventional method of dividing labor or may opt to have the students select teams or groups themselves. The latter situation can lead teams that are not well balanced, but are comprised of teams of friends.

The Division of Labor

For the purposes of this worktext, I have opted to proceed as if students are working in two or more teams or groups to complete a full PR campaign within a semester or trimester. As such, I have provided a few steps and options to assist the course instructor or professor or team leader in dividing labor and responsibilities. This process lays the groundwork for teamwork in the course.

Step One

The first step is to identify the strengths of each class member. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, but if time is of the essence, an easy way is to bring in copies of past classwork and assignments to compare and contrast with a universal or classwide scale to quantify each student's abilities. If the university or college offers an upper division writing or publications course, the materials created in this class are the suggested examples to use for this process. The simplest way for the professor to judge the work is to use a grading rubric looking for:

- AP style
- Clarity and/or brevity
- Content and delivery
- Paragraph structure and transitions
- Proper use of formatting
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation

Another option is to have the faculty member assign the teams within the first two meetings. This allows the instructor the chance to gauge strengths and weaknesses and team dynamics (personalities). A final option is to select team leaders and then allow the selected students to pick the rest of their teams. I do not recommend this option because it often results in teams based on friendships, popularity, or perceived *smarts* or good grades. It is also unrealistic because in the workforce, teams are rarely selected by the team leader.

Step Two

The second step is to determine *how* the class is to accomplish all the tasks needed to create a campaign efficiently. This translates into determining if teams are sufficient or whether groups should be added to further divide tasks and responsibilities.

For a large class (15 or more students), it is possible that creating three teams of five students each is enough to accomplish a full campaign within a semester—assuming each team has a different *focus*, such as a different target audience or objective. In this option, each team produces an entire campaign proposal or plan, instead of working with the other teams to create one overall campaign. The result is that the client receives three different campaign proposals or plans. This might be ideal for some clients who wish to have ideas to choose from. Many times, the resulting work from the *competing* campaign groups' or teams' strategy is that the teams push each other to think outside the box and to push the other team and/or competition.

For a smaller class, or in a PR agency environment, I suggest a blended or multi-layer option that combines the use of both teams or groups and *division*. In this model, the team or group has an individual focus (such as the target audience, outcome, etc.) and divisions are divided by function (i.e., writing tactical, graphic design, research, etc.). Using this option allows students to work together across teams in creating one unified plan; it is especially attractive because they are exposed to more students' collaboration, ideas and talents.

Examples of teams:

Team A: Target Audience is Millennials

Bobby (Tactical Writer)

Maritza (Graphic Designer)

Marquis (Researcher)

Tamara (Plan Writer)

Team B: Target Audience is Generation X

Aimee (Graphic Designer)

Jake (Researcher)

Kenneth (Plan Writer)

Theresa (Tactical Writer)

Team C: Target Audience is Baby Boomers

Alexa (Researcher)

Cristeena (Plan Writer)

Kale (Graphic Designer)

Yvette (Tactical Writer)

Communicating in a team-based environment can be challenging. Most people feel it is hard to *manage* a lot of personalities without upsetting any one person. The reality is that instead of focusing on how to manage others, most people just need to learn how to manage their own communication interactions.

As a communicator in a team, are you a leader or follower? _____

Are you aggressive, assertive, or passive? _____

When confronted with a conflict, do you get defensive or submissive? _____

“I” statements are the best way for you to communicate your own feelings with others, especially in a conflict. It eliminates blame and reduces confrontation. Change the following examples into “I” statements.

“YOU” Statements

“I” Statements

You did the research all wrong.

You have missed every deadline.

You are the main issue we are having.

Your tardiness has caused our team this issue.

Part IV: People skills are a life-long lesson.

A lot of why people do not like working in teams is that it forces them to confront their own weaknesses (usually pointed out by others). People who approach perfecting their people skills as a life-long lesson usually have a more fluid idea that they are always a *work in progress*.

What are some issues you’ve faced working in teams in the past you wish to resolve with this project?

What do you feel is your biggest challenge working in teams? How do you plan to tackle it?

What takeaways have you already mastered from previous experiences that make you a better teammate today?

Your life-long journey begins with this project. This will be stressful and bring out your hot buttons. How do you plan to prevent your hot buttons from harming your team and/or teammates?
