THE EXTENSION OF THE COMMUNICATION
AND PUBLIC RELATIONS THROUGH NEW MEDIA

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Abstract

Interactive communication based on the new media is constantly developing in various ways, unimaginable a few years ago: information users migrate from traditional media to the online ones, a growing number of them access content on their mobile devices wherever they are and whenever they want, thus adding yet another variable in the demographic mix of the electronic content consumer. In the process of adapting to these market changes, publishers have now the opportunity to reach an entirely different audience. Facilitated by web analyses, this evidence-based approach helps organizations involved in media to focus their efforts and to have success with their electronic versions.

Keywords: communication, public relations, new media, information, electronic texts

1. Characteristics of Communication in the Current Period

The revolution of the media based on computers affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, handling, storage and distribution; it also affects all types of media - text, static images, moving images and sounds. In this context, multimedia is the result of the combination of three innovations of the last century: telecommunications, broadcasting and micro-computing, allowing simultaneous processing of text, digitized sounds and images.

Multimedia communication is interactive the user being able to change what he receives. New multimedia technologies are seriously preparing the conditions for communication in the virtual world generating three-dimensional forms and synthetic images.

Unfortunately, the process of developing modern means of communication has less pleasant effects such as: the limitation, but not the complete elimination, of the organizations' power to control communication with the majority of members and collaborators; the rapid spread of negative information, which affects the image of some organizations; "the theft" of confidential information; "the attacks" on computer networks etc.

Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned aspects underlay the emergence of an integrating concept - "new media", a concept which refers to the result of the convergence between the traditional media system (television, radio or print media), telecommunication, digital technology and information and computer systems. These media are new both in terms of technology development and in the sense that they display special characteristics and require a different way of thinking about communication and society.

It is obvious that interactivity has become a concept used in the new media being supported by the rapid expansion of the Internet access points, by media digitization and convergence. As a matter of fact, the model of mass communication "from one to many" has been replaced with the "from many to many" one. Therefore, the convergence of new

communication methods with new technologies changes the mass communication model and significantly restructures the ways in which people interact and communicate.

Most technologies included in the "new media" category are digital, with the possibility of becoming manageable, networking distributed, compressible and interactive. The best known examples are the Internet, the websites, the computer multimedia, the video games, the DVDs etc. On the other hand, "new media" do not include television programs, magazines, books - even if they contain technologies which provide digital interactivity. For example, Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, combines Internet accessible digital text, images and video with web links, with the creative participation of contributors, interactive feedback of users and with the creation of a community of editors and donors for the benefit of readers who are outside this community. In addition, Facebook is a model of social media in which most users are participants as well.

All in all, the new media are constantly changing and redefining due to the interaction among users, emerging technologies, cultural changes etc.

2. The Online Environment – A Support for Interactive Communication

The Internet is becoming the basic infrastructure of modern society. Some future plans of various organizations from the field of communication aim at creating a super-network including not only PCs but also TVs, cell phones, ATMs, ticket vending machines, cameras, domestic appliances, thus trying to create a global system. Cyberspace has become a new frontier in social relations, people making friends, colleagues and even opponents on the Internet.

Undoubtedly, this means of communication changes the way of thinking and perceiving the world, the way of relating to the surrounding reality and people's behavior. Being an interactive environment, the access and use of information are based on this context. Internet-based collaborative technologies will transform our daily activities, not only at work but also in our homes, schools and other places of social activities.

The Internet information space is unified, it covers many topics and different resources are published in various formats by different services. Thus, in locations such as "chat rooms" and online discussion forums, "online communities" have various kinds and sizes, ranging from virtual communities that connect people who live far away and have not known one another before, but share similar interests, to sites that mediate the interaction among networks of friends or family members and community networks which focus on issues relevant for a particular geographical area.

In the communication process developed online, the Internet has other important features:

• It is a very quickly environment - things evolve very fast, and the information appears instantaneously. Likewise, it is an environment which changes very easily. An interesting aspect is the emergence of new tools - software and hardware development is incredibly fast and smart. There is always news – commercial services bring more and more users, and Internet service providers are growing every day.

• Those who use the Internet expect to find as much information as possible and, especially, free information, the most appreciated thing about a site being its content.

• For the practitioner who uses the Internet the most interesting perspective is that it provides a cheaper, faster and easier method to achieve certain goals than any other technology.

Moreover, the "one-to-one" marketing on the Internet has the advantages of the relational one because it has a specific and customized target group based on:

- efficient identification of the target, the list of contacts being self-selective and pre-qualified;

- a deep and lasting relationship with the customer;

- cheaper costs than those implied by the relational offline marketing, using e-mail, for example;

- the use of personalization techniques to modify the content and to initiate a dialogue with the customers in order to learn their preferences.

3. Public Relations Supported by New Media

Much of the organization's success in the online environment depends on its ability to put itself in the place of the members of the public. Equally, close relationships with the media depend on the willingness to adopt an "outside inside" approach. Such an approach involves understanding the types of information required by journalists which refers to facilitating the events worthy of news, offering uncensored and complete information.

By means of building a website, for example, companies have already become part of the media, because at least in theory the Internet allows the sending of the message without the support of intermediaries such as journalists, editors, publishers and producers. In practice, however, supporting a certain brand depends on solid and mutually beneficial relations with the media.

The organizations are experimenting and diversifying their approaches to reach niche audiences and use public relations to meet goals related to communication. Thus, computers, Internet, e-mail and wireless networks facilitate the use and decrease the costs of research, writing, publishing or printing and, in particular, those generated by the distribution of written materials as well as costs those generated by the use of graphics or multimedia presentations.

• *Media Research*

Before deciding on how the information about the organization will be presented, it is necessary to put forward details about the potential recipient. In order to do this, some research on media is required and the potentially interested publications need to be identified. The elements which should be taken into account include: reports regarding the competition, websites lists, commercial publications, the public's interest.

Those persons responsible for websites selling advertising space, products or subscriptions are concerned with the optimization of the keywords and the so-called "search engines". They provide a clear starting point, being almost impossible to follow, read and interact with all appropriate media for a particular site. Using keywords related to the field, they allow the elimination of the insignificant sites.

Internet search engines such as Google find and bring forward situations around the world. Global exposure of such cases, press releases and websites through search engines results in new readers for publications and new customers for organizations.

• *Making News*

Both public relations and traditional journalism are the result of the new digital era. Besides the additional pressures generated by deadlines, the way in which the news is made has become more and more complicated. For example, the titles have to facilitate the online search and those of the news published on the web and printed (which are subsequently posted on the Internet) should be more exciting and direct or there should be two variants (an intelligent title on the front page meant to attract the readers of print publications and a literal, descriptive one on the second page meant to attract those who are looking on the web).

Meanwhile, public relations initiatives tend to be more and more creative because a decade ago only one or two different media channels were used to reach the set target audience.

The media and the public have high expectations regarding the accessibility and speed of response. Management and media expect that the public relations experts, the spokespersons of the organization or those who write public relations materials can be contacted at the same time by phone, e-mail or even messenger.

• *Behaving Fairly Towards the Journalists*

Media requires easy access to structured, meaningful, credible and topical information. Likewise, it requires the owners of websites to be prepared to offer what is wanted. A favorable editorial about the organization will be always more effective than an advertisement in the same publication.

The Identification of the Journalists' Requirements

Journalists have different requirements in terms of not only the type of information they receive, but also the means of coming into its possession.

The Adaptation of Correspondence

Journalists receive information adapted to their own interests and writing styles: there are economic reporters, authors of feature articles, columnists specializing in finance, journalists dealing with technology issues etc.

The Presentation of Facts

In press releases, journalists need tangible facts, not subjective opinions; they need data, financial information, names, website address, statistics and research results.

• *Making Public Relations Materials*

The organizations' sites can be used for broadcasting, especially materials for external audiences (media, customers, contributors, financial community etc.), namely those groups of particular concern for corporate communication. In particular, organizations have discovered that a website can provide real-time tracking of the customers' behavior, their preferences and opinions. The carefully written online opinions or the surveys to identify preferences can supplement testing through focus groups or marketing materials such as promotional websites, advertisements and trailers for movies.

On the Internet the consumers' answer to the open questions proves that individuals who find themselves in the online world are less hesitant in expressing their opinions (especially the negative ones) than those participating in face to face groups.

We will further elaborate upon the most important public relations tools that can be used on the Internet.

Online Press Releases. The transmission of press releases via the Internet offers some advantages in comparison with the traditional format. This method allows a degree of interaction impossible for traditional static press releases. Likewise, it is more convenient and efficient.

In general, the topic of the press releases should be the same, whether these are printed or transmitted in electronic format. However, there are some differences regarding the editing and layout of a press-release on the Internet:

- the synthetic presentation of the information;
- the condensation of significant information at the beginning of the press release;
- the use of concise descriptions of the company;
- the delivery of links to sites, of the e-mail addresses of each contact person from the press;
- avoiding excessive formalism.

Online Press Conferences. They represent an excellent way to counter negative publicity. In this way, there is a good chance of solving any misunderstandings. Other advantages of having a press conference via the Internet include:

- convenience, unlike in the case of a traditional press conference where attendance is required;
- international and unlimited participation;
- open access for customers, experts in the field, investors and other audiences.

Hosting a press conference on the Internet requires the setting of an electronic discussion system which involves the running of special software. In order to ensure participation an e-mail should be sent to the journalists long before the conference to announce the event and another one the day before to remind them of the event. These messages should include the topic as well as the time and date of the conference.

Newsgroups are becoming more and more often the main source of information. They are used by investigative journalists when researching a traditional organization or one with activity on the Internet. In their turn, consumers use online newsgroups to find information about products or services they intend to buy. Monitoring these groups the organization's employees will be able to correct the erroneous information about their own website.

Media kit, called "press kit", is an organized package which includes information about the client. Articles vary depending on the recipient, but standard content may include: press releases with various topics, a section of questions and answers, biographies or professional experience, a list of products, photos of products, accomplishments, received awards or video and audio recordings. Sometimes, media kits include annual reports, brochures or publications. Finally, media kits include CDs or DVDs with materials about the customer sites, including past articles, videos, photos from the headquarters which a publication can use.

Convincing Presentations by E-mail. Another way to contact editors and journalists is sending an e-mail suggesting an article. The advantage of this approach is that it may be more familiar than press releases. Presentations should take into consideration the interests of every journalist in question. Submissions by email have two basic forms: firstly, you can send an

e-mail to a journalist suggesting him to write an article about the organization; secondly, you can send an e-mail to an editor suggesting him that the article could be written by the person who sent the e-mail.

Electronic Brochures, completed in the ".pdf" format, can be quickly downloaded from sites and can replace the product catalogs, travel guides, travel agencies brochures, training manuals, financial reports etc., being useful in training sessions, presentation of products, sales or business meetings. Typically, brochures are distributed through the organization's website, but on demand, they may be sent by e-mail or on CDs. The advantages of using electronic brochures are: low costs of publishing and distribution, substantial information, permanent update etc.

Turning the Site into a Media Resource. To gain continuous recognition for a website you need to build mutually beneficial relationships between its administrators and the media. Thus, one of the best ways is to turn a section of the site into a media center, an archive of press releases which will involve providing journalists contacts and important information.

Webinars, abbreviated form of the phrase "web seminar", consist in online lectures, workshops and courses for the presentation of ideas, techniques, products etc. The essential characteristics of such seminars are: interactivity, the ability of participants to exchange impressions and information, although they are distributed worldwide.

Video News Release. The audiovisual equivalent of the written press release, Video News Release is a useful tool especially for televisions because it provides both the information itself and the images that may illustrate it. There is also the possibility to broadcast audio releases, intended for radio stations. A Video News Release is usually a client-sponsored video, showing a control message using a new angle and a new transmission.

Communication through Events or Special Programs includes exhibitions, competitions and special contests, festivals, supporting cultural and humanitarian activities, youth programs etc. Because the Internet allows permanent access to information, an event in progress may be sent to the world in seconds. On sites you can find information about the organizers and participants, you can download press releases, you can watch photo galleries from various events, you can chat in special "rooms" or join the forum, you can even purchase some promotional products etc.

Conclusions:

On the Internet, a certain organization is a part of the press; as a result, each online activity falls under the "umbrella" of public relations. Similarly, everything that appears on the web or is sent via e-mail has the potential to influence public relations.

In many ways, Public Relations on the Internet are more direct than in the real world. Instead of sending messages through an intermediary, such as a journalist, the information can be delivered quickly and concisely.

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