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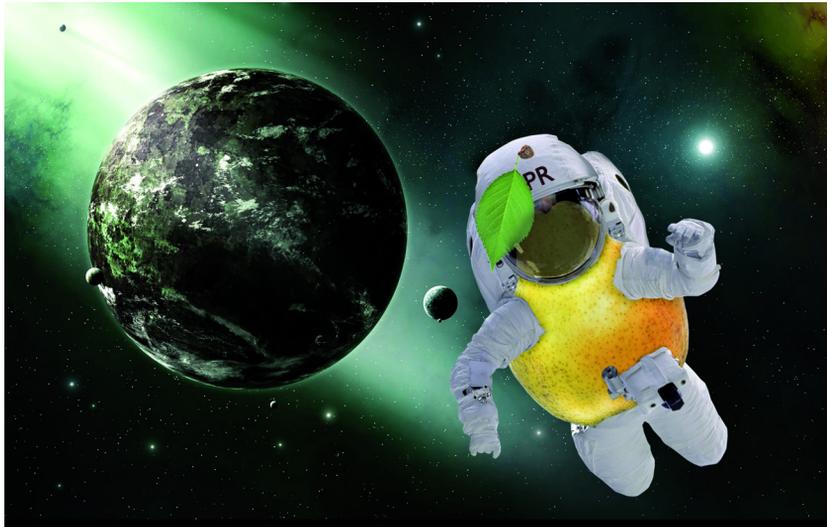
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***NEW TECHNOLOGIES
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NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

The article includes an analysis and presentation of selected examples of communication tools, which are used in companies to create and maintain relationships with internal and external environment. The problems related with definition of public relations were also discussed. The article presents the advantage and negative consequences of the use of modern tools of PR, as well.

Keywords: public relations, tools of PR, technology, one-sided communication, two-way communication

Defining public relations in new communication reality

In the literature sources as well as in the academic, and not only, discourse there is a high degree of misunderstanding and confusion over the use of many basic marketing concepts including those of public relations, advertising or marketing. So prior to discussing issues directly connected with the subject matter of this paper, the author deems it worthwhile to sort out language-related difficulties in defining the key concepts relevant to this discussion. According to the definition adopted by the International Public Relations Association¹ "public relations is a management function of continuous and planned character which contributes to an organization's securing and sustaining the understanding, sympathy and support of entities that this organization is interested in now or may be interested in in the future. This is achieved through studying the target audiences' opinions about the organization in order to align these opinions with organizational goals and activities and also for the purpose of achieving — through planned, wide dissemination of information, better co-operation with an organization's environment and effective accomplishment of its business objectives". Public relations are also defined as a set of activities planned and undertaken for the purpose of ensuring systematic communication of an organization with its environment, intended to elicit desired attitudes and behaviours². An important element of this definition is the word systematic. This word emphasizes that PR activities should be understood as long-term and consistent efforts. Obviously, there are situations such as image crises that require a swift reaction in a relatively short time, often immediately after a problem has occurred, which is dictated by the need to protect an organization's image. In the majority of cases, however, what is needed is providing information on a regular and consistent basis, and, in consequence, building understanding and expected attitudes among target audiences.

Given Ph. Kotler's classification of PR activities as an element of the promotion mix which is a sort of addition to "more serious promotion activities", it is useful to look at the definitions of advertising vs. PR since these two notions are often mistakenly treated as equivalent or complementary. There is a significant but commonly overlooked difference in that the goal of PR is to make people understand

¹ A. Szymańska, *Public Relations w systemie zintegrowanej komunikacji marketingowej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza UNIMEX, Wrocław 2004, p. 79.

² L. Garbarski, I. Rutkowski, W. Wrzosek, *Marketing. Punkt zwrotny nowoczesnej firmy*, PWE, Warszawa 1992, p. 329.

while that of advertising is to make people buy. The aim of public relations by a company is to make the target audiences in the internal and external environment fully understand and accept a certain point of view about this company and its activities. Advertising on the other hand aims influence people in making a purchase. The present paper uses the above definition of Public Relations as substantially different from advertising, marketing or, eventually, manipulating. Apart from deliberations on the nature of Public Relations, the paper will focus intensely on communications issues in the light of the modern tools and possibilities offered by the virtual world.

The dynamics of changes occurring in communications processes seems to be inevitably leading to changing expectations and requirements towards communications professionals. PR is something more than theory. PR tools and techniques have long been established in the economic practice processes not only as support for promotion activities, as postulated by Ph. Kotler, but also as an autonomous element of managing an organization. Hence Fraser Seitel³ has defined Public Relations as an autonomous management function which helps to initiate and sustain a two-way communication process, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its environment. According to Seitel, as well as helping to manage problems, PR is also of service to the board of directors in obtaining information about and reacting to opinions of an organization's environment.

It is also interesting to consider Public Relations in terms of human resources, which represent a major influence on the quality of business operations in general. It is imperative for an organization to actively engage in communication with its stakeholders. Hence the importance of personnel trained in communication project management, possessing in-depth knowledge and experience in employing modern tools in communications processes. The above competences are required from candidates for serving in positions with a responsibility for building and maintaining a company's image. Unfortunately, universities do not meet these expectations and employees still commonly gain the biggest proportion of knowledge required to do their jobs well at work rather than at school.

This paper aims to prove that it is imperative for a modern organization to focus on the possibilities offered by modern telecommunications and IT tools. Without understanding capabilities offered by new technologies an organization will not be able to favourably position itself against the competition in the net. Unfortunately, it must be

³ F. Seitel, *Public relations w praktyce*, Felberg SJA, Warszawa 2003, pp. 10–11.

noted that a significant number of entrepreneurs have not been responding to the trends and changes occurring in the economic reality, which is bound to adversely affect their financial results in the near future.

Advantages and disadvantages of exploiting new technologies in PR

Prior to the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of employing new technologies in PR, it is worthwhile to look more closely into the benefits and downsides of using the Internet in marketing communications processes. The major advantages include the possibility to access internet resources at any place and time via a computer or a mobile device, low costs of reaching out to target audiences compared to other channels and large information capacities — the possibility to offer detailed information. Other benefits include the possibility of updating content in real time and quickly responding to users' activities. Furthermore, presence in the Internet offers image enhancement opportunities through accentuating features such as an organization's being modern, receptive to new technologies and flexible in adjusting to changing market conditions. Of importance is also the fact that the Internet facilitates the effectiveness measurement of communications efforts. Still another advantage of executing activities with the use of the Internet is high demographic selectivity or the possibility to reach out to a precisely defined target audience. It is worth noting that presence in the Internet significantly heightens consumers' awareness of the company's existence at the same time facilitating interaction and dialogue.⁴ Unfortunately, alongside the opportunities for business development there are also drawbacks associated primarily with the sheer amount of information accumulated in the Internet. Overwhelming quantities of data cause the situation where it may be quite difficult to reach or select the most valuable information from a company's point of view.

Modern PR involves a form of communication that makes use of solutions offered by information and communication technologies. New ICT solutions are forcing PR specialists to continue to improve their competencies and to keep abreast with new trends and changes on the market since it is true that our knowledge of the Internet today may become outdated tomorrow before we even begin to understand the new

⁴ J. Adamczyk, *Internet jako narzędzie komunikacji marketingowej* [in:] *Komunikacja marketingowa kształtowanie społeczeństw konsumpcyjnego?*, ed. T. Gobana-Klasa, Wyższa Szkoła Handlowa w Radomiu, Radom 2006, p. 370.

rules.⁵ The advancement of new technologies brings about tangible benefits. These concern, first and foremost, heightened opportunities for building an organization's desired image due to a dramatic compression of time needed for sending, receiving and analyzing data. Cost reduction is another benefit resulting from exploiting new technologies in PR processes.

For example, an online press office is effectively superseding fax or e-mail messages traditionally used by a company spokesperson. Technologies of the future give the possibility of online contact with journalists, allow for shortening action and reaction times bringing about measurable benefits in the form of time and money savings. New technologies contribute to raising the effectiveness and efficiency of PR tasks and processes for example through using an online press office mentioned above. New technologies guarantee a company spokesperson fast and easy access to the chosen media where information sent is welcome rather than treated as spam, e.g. systems offered to journalists by the Polish Press Agency. Consequently, new technologies raise communication quality and effectiveness.

Alongside the benefits that result from exploiting new technologies are also problems. Firstly, the need for round-the clock online availability may pose some difficulties. Although analysis and continuous monitoring of all internet content is impossible, it can be greatly aided by new solutions such as brand24 or media monitoring services offered by e.g. PRESS-SERVICE Media Monitoring or the Media Monitoring Institute. It is convenient for spokespersons and PR specialists to work with relevant information sourced from the Internet by means of predefined keywords. But still, despite all the technological innovations available, it is neither possible to receive all information which might be of interest for us nor to track each relevant topic appearing in the Internet, a constraint inherent to the use of new technologies. PR people who do not use new technologies, have no profiles on social networks, or use IT solutions once in a blue moon may appear to enjoy the enviable peace of mind. But in fact communication professionals are obligated to keep abreast with new technological developments both in theory and in practice.

⁵ H.G. Lewis, R. Lewis, *E-marketing, handel w internecie*, Wydawnictwo Profesjonalnej Szkoły Biznesu, Kraków 2001, p. 57.

One-way vs. two-way communication

Prior to analyzing possibilities offered by the developments in the area of communication it is worth considering the definitions of one-way and two-way communication. The first type of communication involves sending a message to a recipient without obtaining any feedback information that would confirm whether the message has reached the recipient and whether it was interpreted properly. The examples of this type of communication include radio news, newspaper articles, posters, film projections or lectures which are not followed by the question-and-answer sessions. One-way communication by definition allows for no interaction and blocks any possibilities for asking questions, expressing opinions or making a discussion. In consequence, recipients are left to their own devices to interpret a message sent.⁶ One-way communication is characterized by information flow from the sender to the recipient, without any possibility for obtaining feedback information about the way in which the message was interpreted by the recipient.⁷ On the other hand, two-way communication makes it possible for the recipient to be actively involved throughout the communication process by asking questions, entering a dialogue, and gaining new knowledge through debating and discussing issues. Undoubtedly, this type of communication fosters creativity, encourages gaining new insights and offers message recipients a broader perspective on the issues in question.

One-way communication over the Internet occurs when the sender does not direct the message to a specific recipient and does not expect to receive a reply to the message sent. The tools that use one-way communication include web pages, databases, electronic press, or application manuals. Two-way communication over the Internet involves interaction of at least two people. Interactive communication can be either synchronous or asynchronous. The latter occurs with a time delay e.g. through e-mail or discussion groups. Asynchronous communication is constrained in terms of the sender's possibilities to modify the message according to the feedback received. The recipient also encounters difficulties as s/he is not able to obtain additional information or clarify his/her doubts. Synchronous communication occurs in real time through e.g. chats or internet communicators.⁸

⁶ B. Kozyra, *Komunikacja bez barier*, MT Biznes, Warszawa 2008, p. 33.

⁷ Materiały szkoleniowe Kancelarii Premiera Rady Ministrów, *Efektywna komunikacja ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem sytuacji kryzysowych*, <http://dsc.kprm.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/47.pdf>

⁸ K. Pistol, *Psychologiczne aspekty komunikacji za pośrednictwem sieci komputerowych*, Kraków 1998, <http://www.nacisnienie.med.pl/konferencja/prace/pistol/cmc44.html> [in:] *Komunikowanie się w Internecie — narzędzia, specyfika i właściwości*, B. Aouil, [in:] *Komunikacja społeczna w świecie wirtualnym*, ed. M. Wawrzak-Chodaczek, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2008, p. 15.

It should be noted that the majority of internet technologies offer the possibility of interactive participation in the process of creating a message. Although this feature is certainly appreciated by communication participants, there are some concerns that the quality of communication may be compromised. This might be due to frequent tabloidization of forum discussions and exchanges on various social networking services as well as because of the perceived impunity of those who violate the code of online conduct. It is important to be aware of threats to the quality of two-way communication alongside its obvious benefits.

Growth perspectives for modern communications technologies

The world is heading towards a rapid replacement or complementation of traditional forms of communication with those based on new technologies. Although no one doubts that new technologies play an important role in the contemporary world it is quite difficult to predict the exact pace of growth of technological advances. The fifty years that have elapsed since the first network was created for the purposes of the US army⁹ may not seem to be such a long time but it nevertheless represents a gigantic leap in communications capabilities. History has shown that we can't imagine what even the not so distant future holds for us. New solutions are being developed day by day and their implementation is limited mainly by adaptation possibilities to marketing and image-building activities.¹⁰

The Internet of today is a powerful communication tool. The role of the traditional mail is being taken over by e-mail, Skype or Facebook. The average inhabitant of our globe has no difficulty in using e-mail. Where is the world heading? It is difficult to identify the exact directions as various solutions are being tested (appearing and disappearing) but it is certain that new technologies are going to play an increasingly important role in communications processes with more and more resources allocated to research and development. Indicative of this trend are the EU programmes dedicated to entrepreneurs who undertake systematic efforts towards developing new solutions aimed at raising the effectiveness and speed of communication. Most importantly, with each passing day we are going to be closer to and more intimately connected with messages that are sent to us and by us.

⁹ J. Adamczyk, *Internet jako narzędzie komunikacji marketingowej*, [in:] *Komunikacja marketingowa. Kształtowanie społeczeństwa konsumpcyjnego?* ed. T. Goban-Klas, Radom 2006, p. 367.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 368.

Communication with the media via new technologies

Research shows that nearly all PR professionals rely on the Internet in their work.¹¹ PR specialists are well aware that communication based on ICT systems is a natural component of media relations, which represent one of the most important areas of professional public relations. The low cost and speed of internet communication cause more and more companies to take advantage of new ICT solutions. It is standard practice for a company to have a website, which serves to build its recognizability and a source of information for the media. A well-designed web page may be addressed to the general public or be completely individualized to fit in with the needs of a particular customer. The latter solutions include personalized welcome, remembering customer preferences and similar product offers.¹²

Blogs, Facebook profiles, newsletters or discussion groups are invaluable sources of information. As well as offering knowledge about customers, they also allow for interaction. Interestingly, the effectiveness of internet communication can be more easily measured than that of traditional communication with the use of different types of statistics such as visitors count, click count and others.¹³ One of the most important tools for communication with the media is the online press office. Its main task is to offer the media information about the organization and its products.¹⁴ The press office is a sort of press centre, usually designed as a component of the web page and directed mainly to the news media. Online press offices, besides standard press releases created by PR specialists¹⁵, also include archive materials and materials to download such as photography, logos, and company data. Whatever a journalist may need is gathered in one place. Some online press offices may have communicators enabling real-time contact with the media and offering the possibility of information clarification or asking and answering questions. Sometimes contact with media via the online press office can involve video messages. As well as allowing transmitting communications, video also makes it possible for interlocutors to see each other, watch a presentation together or obtain clarifying information. This is of great significance because the press office should function as

¹¹ S. Gawroński, *Media relations. Współpraca dziennikarzy i specjalistów PR*, Wyższa Szkoła Informatyki i Zarządzania, Rzeszów 2006, p. 231.

¹² A. Potocki, R. Winkler, A. Żbikowska, *Komunikowanie w organizacjach gospodarczych*, Difin, Warszawa 2011, p. 127.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ J.P. Szyfter, *Public Relations w internecie*, Wydawnictwo HELION, Gliwice 2005, p. 56.

¹⁵ S. Gawroński, *Media relations...*, op.cit., p. 232.

a platform for establishing direct contact with company employees responsible for publicizing information.¹⁶

Online press offices also contain sections dedicated to building and maintaining relationship with investors, regarded as the most challenging type of communication.¹⁷ Directed to current and prospective investors, they are also often used by the media. Listed companies are obligated by law to release updated information on their activities, financial data, statistics, presentations, and reports, frequently used by the trade or economic media. Since this type of information must be provided quickly and on a regular basis it makes sense to incorporate investor relationship management into the online press office structure.

Positioning of companies in the media

Organizations are increasingly expecting that the results of activities undertaken in the area of media relations will enhance their presence in the internet. Traditional media perish quickly while information they carry, although conspicuous and fast-spreading tends to be short-lived. In contrast, information placed in the Internet will live for ever. The Internet does not forget. Every piece of information remains there for ever due to the high dissemination potential of the Internet. This feature of the web-based information can be used for the benefit of an organization that undertakes activity in the net. The most popular positioning tool is a traditional web page. It is hardly possible to find an organization that wants to be recognizable online and offline but does not have the basic communication tool in the form of a company website. It is true that designing a company website requires a certain level of programming and graphic design skills but there are so many companies offering website design services that the problem really comes down to the scope of clients' expectations and price.

Once a company has its website up and running it is usually interested in positioning it favourably in the net. And here digital solutions come in handy. One of them is the system for conducting business analysis www.sabiz.pl — a tool developed by the Institute for Development of Information Society dedicated to the overall evaluation of the content and structure of internet services. Once a company

¹⁶ J.P. Szyfter, *Public Relations...*, op.cit., p. 57.

¹⁷ M. Macierzyński, W. Macierzyński, *Public relations instytucji finansowych i giełdowych*, [in:] J. Olędzki, D. Tworzy-
dło, *Public relations. Znaczenie społeczne i kierunki rozwoju*, PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 265.

website has been put in place, efforts concentrate on its favourable positioning in the Internet. The first step is to choose the domain name for the website. Here many companies encounter the problem of unavailability of desirable domain names such as .pl, .com.pl, or.com, which are considered to carry the highest promotion potential. Companies try to overcome problems related to domain names unavailability. For example, when the owners of Południowa Grupa Kapitałowa found out the desired domain name www.pgk.pl had been already taken by a different business entity they came up with www.pegieka.pl and www.poludniowagrupakapitalowa.pl. Unfortunately, domain names made of newly coined words are also hard to come by in consequence of domain name speculation. However, there are more and more domain names compiled of project titles such as www.kongresprofesjonalistowit.pl. Such domain names are more often used in promotion of projects rather than companies. Apart from top quality domain names, companies compete for better online visibility in Google, one of the largest and most important search engines worldwide. It is worth noting that the search engine optimization process often takes years while the first effects are visible in several months' time. Some companies may even allocate higher resources to search engine optimization than to advertising in the news media such as the radio or newspapers. Other companies may use Google AdWords, an advertising service offered by Google that places the company ad at the top of the lists of results that Google displays for a particular search query.

The above examples illustrate just a few of multiple possibilities open to companies that have decided to rely on the Internet as a source of competitive advantage. As well as offering the convenience of speedily reaching out to target audiences, the presence in the Internet also considerably facilitates marketing effectiveness measurement, which is the final and vital stage of any advertising or communications campaign.

Summary

The Internet is a source of potential opportunities as well as threats. Serving as an invaluable source of information, the Internet is also a system for instant data and information transfer and a major breakthrough in the communications process. It is also a fascinating technological and civilization fact.¹⁸ For public relations practitioners

¹⁸ Szyfter J.P., *Public Relations...*, op.cit., p. 5.

confronted with the present-day dynamic growth of communication technologies, the Internet represents an opportunity to reach out to target audiences.

It is a commonly held conviction that in the future business activity will be conducted via electronic channels. In business, effective communication has always played and will continue to play a critical role. The Internet has made communication of uppermost importance for business success.¹⁹ Organizations which are unprepared to embrace the new trends and dynamic changes occurring in the economic sphere and which are unable to tap into the potentialities offered by the Internet and technologically advanced tools for reaching out to target audiences are at risk of weakening their position in the marketplace. Hence the vital importance not only of keeping track of the change but also of active participation in it.

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¹⁹ Ibidem.

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