THE ART *of* MARKETING *and* PR

Kittima Sethi *and*
Pacharee Pantoomano

The Art of Marketing and PR

By Kittima Sethi & Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

Table of Contents

Preface

Thank you for downloading the e-book The Art of Marketing and PR

We have enjoyed creating this e-book and are happy that it has caught your attention.

This e-book is a compilation of articles that we have written over the years on a wide range of topics within the fields of marketing and public relations drawn from years of extensive professional experience, knowledge and expertise in this industry in Thailand.

Whether you are a marketing or PR professional or an entrepreneur looking for some advice, we hope the articles will provide you with some tips and tools that you may use on your next marketing or PR campaign to make your business thrive. Most of the examples we have provided in our articles are related to our experiences in Thailand and we hope you enjoy reading them. After all, the principles of marketing and PR remains the same universally, but is adapted to fit the cultural and behavioral norms in various domestic and international markets.

Brand Experience

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

My family and I just spent the day at Disneyland Paris. I've been to several Disney parks in the past, but this was one of the most exciting trips for me because it introduced our little girls to the enchanted kingdom. I have to say Mickey and Minnie lived up to their promise and made it magical. Visiting Disneyland Paris is more than just a day's entertainment for me. Disney and all the characters bring back the innocent years where an elephant can fly and a princess lives happily after with her prince.

When we got back to our hotel, I reflected upon the brand experience I have had with Disney through the years. When I was a kid, there were the traditional Disney cartoons on TV. These were reinforced by other touch points such as a Disney character in a Happy Meal and a Disney puzzle in a cereal box. I had countless t-shirts and shorts with Disney characters. As I got older and outgrew the cartoons, I watched Disney movies. These ranged from Roger Rabbit to Pirates of the Caribbean.

A brand experience is produced when the consumer engages the brand and both are active participants. Marketers have long recognized the importance of creating deeper consumer and shopper engagement. In the recent years, Effie Worldwide created a new category for its award; the brand experience category is the most-entered in its entire competition since its inception in 2009.

The 2011 winners of the brand experience category were Starbucks and Old Spice. Starbucks took a social approach by emphasizing its role in the community and igniting community action. The campaigns ranged from voting and getting a free cup of coffee to donating part of its sales to the Red Charity which fights AIDS in Africa. The P&G Old Spice brand was much more playful and light hearted. Leveraging on the "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" advertising campaign which went viral on social media, the P&G team and its agency filmed 186 responses to fans and celebrities via youtube.com in real time. It made the response campaign one of the most talked about brand experience.

Company Culture's Impact on its Brand

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

A wise man has said to me that company culture eats strategy for breakfast. I couldn't agree more. A strong company culture coupled with a solid internal communications is the way to engage the team that drives the company's success. An involved team member is more likely to be happier at work and happiness is contagious. The result is an effective and efficient team who are doing their best. This helps the company to keep its brand promise to its customers. The opposite is true for an unengaged employee. Disenchanted with the company, these employees often feel unvalued in the work place. Some may purposely sabotage the company's effort. Ultimately, it can cause problems with service to the customers and have a negative impact on the bottom line.

Why is your brand promise important internally and externally?

The promise that your brand makes comes into contact with every part of your business. If your team doesn't believe in the promise the company's product or services makes, you can bet that those who have come into contact with your company feels the same way. Sooner or later, others will hear about it, like that of the infamous Honda CR-V case in 2005.

Honda espouse that its core values are superior customer service and high quality product. This was not the case for Duenphen Silaket, who professed that she had aspired to own a Honda CR-V and saved up for it. Unfortunately, when she did get one, the red-licensed plate vehicle had many mechanical problems. The blasé attitude of Honda executives escalated the matter. She called the media and publicly smashed her new car. It resulted in media frenzy with pictures of Duenphen splashed across numerous media. There were a number of copy cats too. Eventually, the matter was settled but not without some wear and tear to Honda's brand image.

Lessons from the companies voted as being the best work place:

Google: The company is well known for giving its employees many perks and some of these include gourmet restaurant that serves all three meals for free plus medical and dental facilities. Plus, it offers employees a leave of absence for up to 5 years and USD150,000 in educational funds.

In reality, Google does more than provide great perks for its staff. The main reason it is a great workplace is because the company believes that treating people well is more critical than making a lot of money. Google does this by respecting its team members, supporting their creative endeavours, and following their motto of "Don't be evil".

Zappos: According to Tony Hsieh, the CEO of mega online shoe retailer Zappos.com, “A company’s culture and a company’s brand are really just two sides of the same coin.” Unlike other companies that defines happiness as a result of profit, Zappos views happiness as a key business driver. Hsieh boils employee’s happiness down to four things, 1) perceived control, 2) perceived progress, 3) connectedness (number and depth of relationships), and 4) being part of something bigger than yourself. He adds that “It actually doesn’t matter what your core values are. What matters is that you have them and commit to them. And by committing to them, you’re willing to hire or fire based on them, independent of actual job performance.”

You don’t have to be a billion dollar company to start a company culture and internal communications program. What is important is that you define the values most central to your organization. Once these have been established and communicated, build activities to support it.

As a communication agency, we value exchanges, ideas, team spirit and a job well done. Once a week, we treat our team to lunch. While dining, we talk about personal as well as professional matters. To keep everyone updated on the on-going project, we also do a weekly review of all the projects. At the same time, team members can update us on issues they may be experiencing. It gives us a chance to work on a solution as a group. We also have the bell of awesomeness which we ring regularly to summon more positivity into our work place.

Creating a Successful PR Event

By Kittima Sethi

Companies organize various events throughout the year as a way of interacting with their target audience, clients or the community.

These events may be income-generating events such as booths at a shopping mall. They may also be publicity events to either launch a product, introduce a product brand ambassador or reward customers. Other events may include official opening of a company, press conferences, seminars, workshops, speaking engagements, participation in a trade show or a company's anniversary celebration.

Regardless of what type of event the company is organizing, it is important to remember that each event reflects the company's brand and image.

A successful event requires detailed planning, good coordination and behind-the-scenes organization. The scale of the event will determine how much time ahead companies require to begin planning.

Here are a few tips in creating a successful PR event:

(1) Identify the purpose of the event.

The objective and goals of the event must be addressed as all the elements of the event will revolve around this objective. Make sure that everyone involved in the event is aware of this. Is there a theme to this event? Is this a publicity awareness event? An event to celebrate a milestone? A launch? An important announcement affecting stakeholders or consumers? What do you hope to accomplish through this event?

(2) Budget.

This is crucial to any event as the budget will determine the scale and size of the event. You may have a great idea for an event, but you have to be able to finance it. Identify how much money and resources are available and allow for contingency for any last minute requirements.

(3) Research your audience.

Make a list of who you want to invite, why you want to invite them and what impression you want them to have when they leave. These may be your existing or potential clients.

(4) Determine the date, time and location.

If organizing a publicity event, it is important to ensure that there is no conflicting event taking place during the same time, as this affects media and guest attendance. Select a venue that is suitable to the theme of the event and one that is easily accessible by public transport, has adequate parking and can accommodate the guests. Be mindful of holidays, long weekends and other popular events taking place. If holding an outdoor event, check weather conditions and create a contingency plan, i.e. tents.

(5) Prepare a check list and internal agenda.

Planning any event requires close attention to details. A checklist is one of the most efficient planning tools that keep you organized and focused. This includes every detail beginning from invitations, guests lists, mood and tone of the event, backdrops, productions, light and sound, performances, venue, F&B, media, security, etc. Creating an internal agenda with time line ensures that all tasks are completed as scheduled by the delegated person in the team.

(6) Back up plans.

No matter how much preparation has been done, always be prepared for the unexpected and for challenges that may arise. Be flexible and have backup plans. Most importantly, review this with the team involved on the project, should the need arise to switch gears.

Even though lots of energy and efficient planning are required to make an event a real success, planning can be a lot of fun. When all preparations carefully planned and all the people involved have been thoroughly briefed, then the event should run smoothly.

Once the event has ended, conduct a follow up and evaluate the results. As in any kind of PR campaigns or projects, this will help you assess whether the objective was achieved and improve the planning process for future events.

CSR...More Than Window Dressing

By Kittima Sethi

Several years ago, one of my media friends who covers news on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) said that in December every year, there would be piles of press and photo releases on her desk and her inbox would be teeming with emails. Suddenly, every company and their families and neighbours were participating in a tree planting activity or making donations to old people's homes. Many companies would send these releases, hoping to get media coverage. Clearly frustrated, she questioned why companies wait until the end of the year to showcase their CSR initiatives. "How many photos of tree planting activities am I going to publish?" she asked exasperatedly.

CSR, or Sustainability, the word popularly used by businesses today, has become an integral part of many businesses which spend millions of dollars annually on numerous CSR programs. These are either in the form of support to the local communities, donating products to support people in need or investing in ways to reduce environmental impacts, among others.

CSR has evolved during the years and is no longer just tucked away under corporate communications only to be pulled out at the end of year to be added to a report or published as a media release.

CSR reflects a company's core business strategy and is focused on creating positive social and environment changes. This is why CSR should be aligned with a company's mission, vision and values and engage both stakeholders and employees so that they feel a sense of pride working for a company that is not just after profits but is committed to improving the community's wellbeing. It is no longer just about writing a cheque to an orphanage or a one-off donation to a local charity.

The Body Shop is regarded as a pioneer in modern CSR. It is one of the first companies to publish a full report on their CSR initiatives thanks to founder Anita Roddick's passionate beliefs of environmental protection, animal rights, community trade and human rights. The company started The Body Shop Foundation, which supports innovative global projects working in the areas of human and civil rights and environmental and animal protection. Because The Body Shop adopts an anti-animal testing stance, it has a substantial loyal customer base.

In 2013, The CSR RepTrak® 100 study, which measures 100 of the most highly regarded companies across 15 countries, named Microsoft as the company with the best reputation for CSR for the second year in a row.

Microsoft gave more than USD900millon in cash and software to non-profits worldwide back in 2012, reduced its carbon emissions by 30 per cent per unit of revenue compared with 2007 and made the company's biggest ever investment in overall employee compensation.

Closer to home, L'Oreal Thailand partnered with the Office of the Vocational Education Commission, Ministry of Education, to launch a professional-hairdressing skill-development programme for underprivileged people in Thailand.

Companies involved with CSR are likely to receive more job applications as people want to work with them. According to a Deloitte survey conducted in 2012, 70% of young Millennials, those ages 18 to 26, say a company's commitment to the community has an influence on their decision to work there.

CSR also has a positive impact on the consumer, as more are paying attention to business philosophy. The end result includes increased customer loyalty, not to mention opportunities for branding and public relations. In some countries like Thailand, there are also tax incentives for companies that support CSR projects.

Back to my media friend's grievance, here are some suggestions on how you can increase media coverage and garner publicity for your company's CSR initiatives.

(1) Do not write off CSR as another PR or marketing campaign.

CSR programs should be a long-term commitment.

(2) Demonstrate how CSR initiatives are being implemented

In publicising their CSR programs, companies must demonstrate how these initiatives are being implemented and what impact it has on the company and community instead of simply bragging about it.

(3) Communicate the success of the program and its impact on society.

If you have provided training to some organization, share the result that this training has had on the people and get their testimonials. Include relevant facts and figures, i.e. how much carbon footprint will the new sapling reduce in the 10 years. People are also interested in the human interest stories that companies can share as part of the CSR campaign.

(4) Make sure that you regularly report on achievements.

Regularly report on achievements of the CSR programs and periodically highlight some of the ongoing CSR efforts, instead of randomly selecting an off-the-shelf activity in an attempt to make it a front page story.

(5) Add a "human element".

Adding a “human element” or sharing testimonials can be powerful and resonate with the readers. Has it affected any individual and brought about some drastic changes? Relating it to a current affair can also attract media attention.

There are many ways companies can give back to the society and it does not have to be a large campaign. Simple activities like a collection drive, donating used office equipment, donating time to volunteer in an NGO or donating your expertise to assist communities can help make a big difference.

Cutting Through the Clutter with Guerrilla Marketing

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

Did you visit major malls around town during the holiday season? Like the majority of Bangkokian, I spent a bit of time in the malls buying presents for my husband, kids, mom, brother and extended family in France. I noticed that the front of Central World was completely full of installations from various companies. All decked out in Christmas themes, some of the companies included a mobile service provider, an insurance company and a camera manufacturer. The setup was warm, inviting and encouraged lots of photo taking and posting on social media.

Our family took a break in Hua Hin over the New Year's. I also observed that areas frequented by visitors had many installations too. Toshiba had a 3D illusion laptop on the ground of Cicada Market. The Sam Phan Floating Market featured a human sized Coke fountain bottle. The spray was nice and cool on a hot afternoon walk. It also helped that there was a Coke stand selling drinks and snacks next to the fountain.

Speak of Coca-Cola, a friend has posted a YouTube video of NUS students in Singapore hugging a Coke machine to get a free Coke. The video showed individuals as well as groups hugging the Coke vending machine to get a can of soda. After checking out the NUS video, several more Coke hugging videos popped up in locations around the world. I couldn't help and watched a few more. Just as I thought it was enough YouTube gawking, another video caught my eye, "Coca-Cola Happiness Machine for Couples". The vending machine was installed in Istanbul for Valentine's Day. Couples who showed that they were a couple got a couple cans of Coke. Again, another cute feel good campaign that makes you smile.

Installations at malls or on a busy street are an inexpensive way to advertise and engage customers and the general public. This is also called Guerrilla Marketing. The practice has been used around the world. The term was coined by Jay Conrad Levinson, an advertising executive. In 1984, he published a book by the same name. Today, guerrilla marketing is considered one of the best marketing books ever written. It is available in 62 languages and is a required reading for a marketing course. Focusing on low cost creative strategies, the aim of guerrilla marketing is to engage the audience in a unique and thought provoking way. The result is PR buzz.

In 2002 at a major rugby event in Telstra stadium, 2 streakers ran into the field wearing only a Vodafone logo painted on their bodies. Burger King's hard-hitting campaign in 2005 had Ronald McDonald statues wearing Burger King t-shirts, footprints trail from McDonald's to Burger King, and signs on empty McDonald's benches that read "Gone to BK — Ronald." Guerrilla marketing isn't just for profit companies. Médecins du Monde, an international humanitarian organization, staged a campaign to draw attention to the issue of homelessness in Paris. Hundreds of tents with Médecins du Monde logo were

given to vagrant Parisians. The campaign caused a public outcry and the French government allocated nearly $10 million for emergency housing in Paris. The benevolent guerrilla marketing campaign by Médecins du Monde has been cited as one of the most effective campaign in the world to date.

If you are looking to start the New Year with a fresh outlook, consider implementing your own guerrilla marketing campaign. Do some brainstorming with the team and gather up creative ideas that you could use to engage your target audience in a relevant way. Have fun, do something surprising, innovative and boost your brand in the process.

Diversification and Entering New Markets

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

As a business owner, there will come a time where you'll consider adding products or service to compliment your existing offer. While some find the process of diversification challenging, others revel it in it and leverage it as part of their business strategy. Below is a story about a little Korean company who did just that and made themselves a household name around the globe.

Founded in 1938 by Lee Byung Chul, Samsung got its humble start as an exporter of fruit and dried fish. Three decades later, the company participated in the government's industrial push and it ventured into electronics, petrochemical, machinery and construction. Soon after, the company became known for budget air conditioners and low-end TVs.

Lee Byung Chul passed away in 1987 and was succeeded by his son, Kun-hee Lee. Educated in Japan and the US, people thought of Kun-hee Lee as a playboy. By the 90s, the company continued to diversify and expanded into the mobile phone market. As a New Year gift, the Samsung factory sent Kun-hee Lee its first wireless phone in 1995. The phone didn't work and the CEO decided to pay a visit to Gumi, home to Samsung largest plant.

Though some underestimated Kun-hee Lee, they soon learned that he had grand ambition for his father's company. At his order, the factory bashed and incinerated USD 50 million of equipment ranging from fax machines to cell phone. As part of the purifying ritual, the staff wore headbands labelled "Quality First". In front of the equipment funeral pile hung a banner that read "Quality is My Pride", the company's new motto. At the end of it all, staff wept and Samsung was re-born.

In the early 90s, the most innovative brand was Sony and it was the brand that Kun-hee Lee wanted to beat. Sony had moved into movies and music. It was not so focused on electronics. Samsung stepped up to fill the gap.

For Kun-hee Lee, design and quality was key. He understood that design was essential if Samsung was to win the heart and mind of the consumer. He looked for inspiration from Japan and hired a Japanese consultant to create Samsung's design philosophy with a touch of Korean values. It was later announced that the company's designed slogan would be "Balance of Reason and Feeling".

Kun-hee Lee design revolution was halted by the Asian economic crisis in the late 90s. It started with the memory chip market taking a nosedive and the Korean won, losing half its values. Interest rates went through the roof. Samsung, deep in debt, was unable to secure new loans and it faced an uncertain future.

The company took evasive manoeuvres. Kun-hee Lee cut capital spending to reduce its debt. Bucking the Korean chaebol expectation, it shed 30% of its workforce and closed down dozens of businesses. One major business flop was the automobile venture, which it later sold to Renault. Korean wages were too high for Samsung and it moved some of its manufacturing to other countries like China, Brazil and Slovakia.

While the company was paying down its debt, it was also building its superfast memory chips (SDRAMS), the staple in personal computers and the customized version were sold to Sony and used in the PlayStation 2. Being a global networked manufacturer that's vertically integrated, Samsung can churn out its own gadgets and sell components to its competitors at the same time. It's a win-win for Samsung.

By the end of 1998, Samsung was focused on new technology and invested heavily into flash memory devices, liquid crystals displays and more custom memory chip. Coming out of the crisis, the company was poised to take the lead as its competitors went into cost cutting mode.

The timing was perfect for Samsung to move from an engineering to a market based company. For this metamorphosis, Kun-hee Lee brought in Eric Kim, a Korean-American marketing whiz. Kim was not welcomed with open arms by the senior management team. To prevent sabotage, Kun-hee Lee issued an edict that anyone that crossed Kim would be terminated.

Today, Samsung is a conglomerate that offers life insurance as well as home appliance and electronics. In 2011, its sales exceeded $135 billion. In a race to the top, Samsung has been embroiled in bitter lawsuits with Apple over patent infringement over its smart phones and tablets. In some markets, Samsung has won and in others it has lost against Apple.

True to form, Samsung is doing it again. In the October issue of The Economist, Samsung announced that it was moving away from electronics and into new and green technologies. For the next 10 years, it plans to invest USD20 billion in solar panels, electric-vehicle batteries, light-emitting diodes (LEDs), biotech drugs and medical devices. Samsung believes that health care and green technology is the new growth industries in the 21st century.

While it is not practical for the average company to reinvent itself as frequently and as drastically as Samsung, the Korean conglomerate success story reveals the recipe for success. Whether change starts from the bottom up or to top down, it is vital that the leader of the organization has the vision and the mission that direct the team towards a common goal. Timing is essential, the team must be ready to abandon the old in order to make room for the new to successfully diversify, capture new segment and market opportunities.

Donuts or Tires - Companies All Need an Effective Public Relations Strategy

By Kittima Sethi

In my previous article, I highlighted the differences between public relations and advertising. Both of these marketing tools are important in creating an effective and successful marketing communication campaign.

I want to talk about PR and how effective it is for companies; especially in creating good publicity and building a reputation with potential customers.

When the US donut chain Krispy Kreme opened its first store in Thailand in 2010, they announced they would give away a year's supply of a dozen free donuts a week to the first customer. This was doled out right up to the 200th customer.

Prior to the event, very few Thais had heard of this US brand. Thanks to the publicity stunt coupled with the use of social media like Twitter and Facebook, thousands of Thais of all ages queued up to buy the donuts. They were later seen carrying their sugary fried delights in boxes and bags with Krispy Kreme logo through the streets, on the BTS trains and in the shopping malls. Some customers took photos and uploaded them on various social websites as they wanted to show off the latest fast food trend. The end result? Krispy Kreme got loads of free publicity without having to splash out for a major advertisement campaign.

Public Relations is a result of what companies and individuals do, what they say and most importantly, what other say about them. PR is more than product launches or publicity stunts; it is a tool that supports the long term strategic marketing plan.

Because PR uses third party endorsement such as print, broadcast and online media, the consumers are usually provided with a more detailed and interesting angle of the company's product or services.

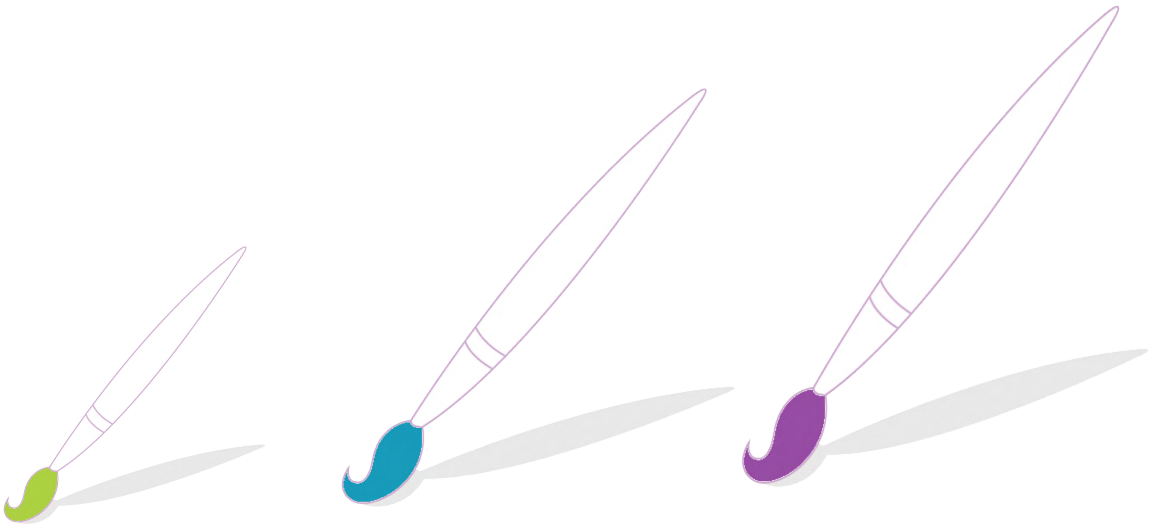
PR is often misunderstood to be just activities to promote a product or service. In fact, the role of PR has changed significantly in recent years and has become an in integral part of brand building.

PR is used to build product awareness and in opening new markets. Companies who want to introduce a new product or service or are re-launching an existing product or service resort to PR to generate consumer's attention and awareness. This could be achieved through creative events or campaigns. During one of the PGA Tour, golfer Tiger Woods was seen using a particular brand of golf club, after which the manufacturer received enquiries from all over the world.

PR is also used to provide consumers with detailed information about products or services. This could be done through articles and other collateral materials to help consumers understand the product. For instance, during the rainy season, car companies may provide tips for driving safely during the rainy season and discuss about changing car tires or wipers. Hospitals could provide information about diseases outbreaks.

PR can also be seen as attracting competent employees into the company as they want to be part of a successful company. Companies with a positive image also attract major investors and shareholders.

These are just some examples of the role of PR in a marketing campaign. Before embarking on any PR campaigns, companies must be specific with the goals they want to achieve.



How Product Placement Works

By Kittima Sethi

I was watching an Indian drama on cable TV when I noticed one of the leading characters holding a bag of a popular brand of Indian chips during one scene. She held on to that bag throughout the 5 minute scene and even mentioned its name. She talked about how her life was full of twists and turns, much the same way as the shape of this chip. Now that was well scripted!

That drama is watched not only by millions of Indian households but also to an international audience around the world. Imagine the brand exposure that was created from this single scene.

This is called product placement, when a company pays for its product to be featured on television or movie to increase or reinforce brand awareness.

This form of advertising is common and I am sure many of you have come across this in movies. Close up shots of leading actors driving a particular brand of car, wearing a particular model of a watch or sunglasses or carrying a particular brand of bag is all so very common. Several seconds or a minute of this exposure can lead to an instant boost in sales and interest in the product.

This is also why many luxury companies offer clothes, shoes and accessories for movie stars to wear during music and movie awards. Some even pay a presenter to wear their clothes during a TV show. Media are quick to mention the name of the designer and magazine pages are splashed with photos of these stars and the products.

Product placement also serves as a secondary source of income for movies and TV shows. Several satellite TVs do not allow advertising and many digital recording videos (DVR) offer ad-skipping features, which enables viewers to black out ads on the TV shows that have been recorded. This makes product placement even more attractive to advertisers. As viewers we do not realize this subliminal advertising.

Certain products are featured more than others and these usually include automobiles, electronic gadgets, alcohol and beverages. Sports events, video games and concerts also feature product placements.

Some of the successful product placement campaigns include the following: Manolo Blahnik and Jimmy Choo shoes that are constantly featured in Sex and the City; in the American comedy series Modern Family, one episode revolved completely around how one of the actors wanted only an Apple iPad for his birthday and viewers watched the family standing in the Apple Store lines trying to get the product.

In the US, the Brand cameo Product Placement Awards tracks product placement and brand appearances in every film that finished #1 at the US box office. Several awards in

different categories are announced annually. Their 2011 Award for Overall Product Placement went to Apple, whose products appeared in 17 (or 42.5%) of the 40 films that were number one films at the US box office in 2011. The 2011 Award for Product Placement Achievement in an Oscar-Nominated Film went to The Help, which featured two brands. The first is the bottles of Coca-Cola over which characters share a heart warming moment of racial transcendence. The second is Crisco, where the actress Minnie says it is "the most important invention since they put mayonnaise in a jar", and goes on to say "Got gum in your hair? Squeaky door hinge? Crisco. Got bags under your eyes? Wanna' soften your husband's scaly feet? Crisco. It's best for frying chicken. Fried chicken just tend to make you feel better about life."

One of the ways to measure the success of product placement is brand recall. Others are sales, traffic into the store (if it is a retail product), and tracking social media conversation on that product or brand after the product placement has taken place.

There are rules and regulations on what types of products can be placed in TV shows, where it is allowed and how they can be featured. These vary in different countries.

However, companies have to exercise caution when they are weaving products into the shows. Overdoing product placement campaigns may deter consumers who are quick to notice. Companies also need to lay out an effective product placement strategy to ensure that the product is relevant to the movie or show's content. This may include either featuring the brand or product briefly on the show or having it scripted into the story.

How to Plan a Successful Marketing Campaign

By Kittima Sethi

I am sure you have heard of the saying "if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail". This expression applies to planning a successful launch. Like any project, a marketing and PR plan involves many members of the organization. When bringing a team together, a project brief is required so everyone gets on the same page and moves forward at the same pace to see it to completion.

Prior to the creative process, a solid foundation has to be created and to do that, market research is required. Market research gives us insight into consumer preferences and behaviours. As many research will tell you, consumer preferences is constantly changing and is a moving target. There are two approaches 1) quantitative and 2) qualitative. Market survey, or quantitative research, is deductive and it tests a hypothesis, which is identified before research begins. Qualitative research, or focus group, is inductive and a hypothesis is not required to start the research process. For many companies, market research is an annual process, especially in the area of customer satisfaction.

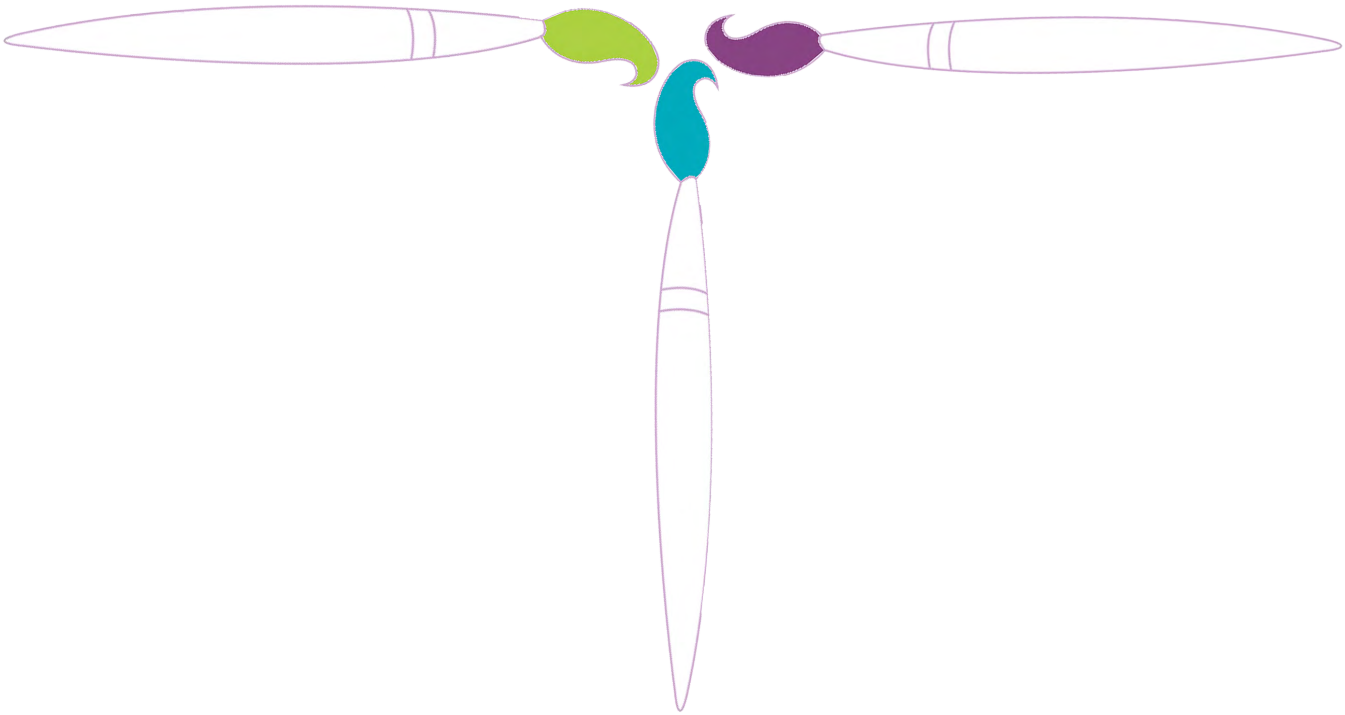
As part of the research, the brand will also conduct a self-evaluation and create a SWOT(strength, weakness, opportunities and threat)chart. The same is also created for competitors that makes and offer similar products or services that addresses the same target market. At this stage, potential challenges are identified. It's an opportunity for you and the team to create contingency plans. It is through this process that brands will carve out its unique positioning and selling point which gives its product or service distinction.

The next step is to determine the objective(s), budget, milestones and the return on investment your organization wants from the campaign. Every company measures their success by a different yard stick. For some, it is about gaining more share of voice and brand awareness in media. Other companies may select to measure the number of business leads the campaign generates for the sales team. How you plan to measure will determine both the above and below the line activities carried out during the campaign period.

For example, a media relations blitz will create awareness for your products and service. However, it may not likely generate sales leads. If your product is low touch, an advertising campaign with a call to action could be the ticket to generating sales leads. If your service or product is high touch, an event is a good forum for you to engage your target audience. An event gives you time and opportunity to present and address inquiries from the potential customers.

As with every plan, periodic reviews should be scheduled to review the milestones. The milestones help the team to evaluate if the campaign is on course or if the campaign

should be adjusted. The earlier the issues are detected and address, the better. It keeps things on track and assures a successful outcome.



Identifying Your Company's Brand Ambassadors

By Kittima Sethi

If you feel you are seeing the same face of a certain model or presenter in several billboards, BTS train wraps, TV ads and posters plastered around town, you are probably not wrong. In Thailand, it is not uncommon for the same person to be featured as a presenter for several products at the same time, or even in competing products!

Welcome to Thailand's brand ambassadors' bandwagon, where companies are constantly on a surveillance, keeping vigilance on not just the next big Thai actor or actresses, but even celebrities or winners of the next reality game show or talent competition who could potentially endorse their products or services.

Brand ambassadors are employed by companies to increase brand awareness and to strengthen the customer/product relationship to increase consumption and sales. Because brand ambassadors act as the company's spokesperson, they play an important and proactive role in adding value to the business. This is why identifying the most suitable brand ambassador is crucial for companies. Brand ambassadors must have a thorough understanding and knowledge of the product and brand so that they are able to answer any queries form media or consumers. They must appeal to the brand and the product's target audience. Most importantly, they must be passionate about the brand or else they will be appear be inauthentic.

Psychology plays an important factor in the relationship between a brand ambassador and the product or service he or she is representing. From the consumer's perspective, the brand ambassador must be emotionally engaging, convincing and motivating.

International watch maker Omega selects ambassadors that embody their values, which is: unparalleled class, bold style and elegant performance. Some of the ambassadors include star athletes, award-winning actors and successful entrepreneurs such as actors George Clooney, Nicole Kidman and swimmer Michael Phelps.

Nike is known for focusing on the greatness of the athletes who they appoint as brand ambassadors and in building their image to sell products. Take NBA player Michael Jordan, (MJ) for instance. After appointing MJ as its brand ambassador, Nike created a series of Air Jordan brand of basketball shoes which still continue to be a hit with fans today.

In Thailand, Thais are fascinated and obsessed with TV soap stars and celebrities, who are poached to become brand ambassadors of multiple products. This brings to mind the question of how authentic and passionate they are about the products they represent.

Take Thai superstar Atiwara "Toon" Kongmalai of the band Bodyslam. He was appointed as a presenter for Pepsi. Prior to that, he was appeared in a TV commercial for the M 150 energy drink. He was also selected to represent Dutchmill, a milk producer, which surprised many reporters, considering his rock and roll personality.

Most Thais tend to show loyalty to a brand and product based on their attraction to the brand ambassador. Unilever Thai Group of Companies, reported that their Walls' Magnum ice cream enjoyed a 400% increase in sales. Actor Ananda Everingham and other celebrities acted as their brand ambassador. Coca-Cola Thailand has announced the launch of its first herbal drink, Habu, in Thailand, introducing popular comedian Charoenporn 'Kohtee' Onlamai and actor Tanawat 'Pope' Wattanaputi as their two brand ambassadors.

Instead of approaching A-list stars, a company's owner or top management can also act as a brand ambassador. Having a celebrity status helps. If not, companies can begin to identify a spokesperson within their company and groom them by providing them with media training and PR opportunities. Having an interesting and exciting story to share is certainly an added value. Sir Richard Branson of Virgin Group, Air Asia CEO Tony Fernandez, Pepsico's CEO Indra Nooyi, and Thailand's Ichitan green tea founder Tan Passakornnatee are some examples.

Employees and customers can also be your brand ambassadors in the form of brand evangelist. Employees who are happy at work and treated fairly can be a company's most valuable presenters. It is important for companies to effectively communicate their brand values to their employees and keep them engaged. Employees can humanize a company and project an image you would like to be communicated to the outside world. If they have a blog or are active on social media, they are likely to share their experience. According to the 2012 World's Best Multinational Workplaces published by Great Place to Work, the top 5 companies in their list of 25 included the IT Company SAS Institute, Google, Neap, Kimberly-Clark and Microsoft. Employees from over 5,700 companies around the world participated in this employee survey.

Likewise, if customers are impressed with your products or services, they are likely to share their experience with friends both online and offline. Such testimonials are powerful and priceless. This is a great way to gain publicity and promote a positive image to your target audience. Even a tweet by a satisfied customer can have an incredible and magnifying effect. Did you know that the Coke Facebook fan page, was not created by Coca-Cola, but by 2 Coke fans from Los Angeles in 2008?

While brand ambassadors are a great way to raise profile and add credibility to your brand and company, keep in mind that the key lies in selecting someone who embodies your brand and who can communicate effectively to your target audience. Do your research to ensure there is synergy between your selected brand ambassador and

product. Be mindful when selecting a brand ambassador from a star who is an "overnight success" unless you are confident of that person.

Remember to also acknowledge your employees and customers. If you can make them fall in your love with your company, you have succeeded in connecting with them and they can become your brand ambassador for life.

Who are some of your favourite brand ambassadors?

Importance of Media Training

By Kittima Sethi

In today's media savvy world, every company wants to be featured in the press to tell their story. However, when they are faced with the media, they often find that they are either misquoted or that they were unable to deliver the message they wanted the public to hear.

Remember that there is power in the words that is spoken. Whatever you say during an interview will be used by several media outlets (print, online and broadcast) and bloggers. News travels quickly in this age of digital media and there is no room for making errors.

This is why it is imperative to carefully choose words when speaking with media to avoid any awkward miscommunication. Make sure your statements and responses are well-crafted otherwise you risk facing the consequences and inadvertently damaging the company's credibility and reputation.

Many companies are eager to get exposure in the press but fail during the interview as they do not know what to say, how to say and when to say when asked questions.

This is where media training is helpful to avoid this type of situation. The key is to be prepared so that you can effectively present your message to the media to maximize this opportunity for media exposure. Media interviews go beyond just simply promoting your products or services. They educate the public about your background and inspiration in creating the product or service and also add credibility to your organization.

Media training is used to train a company's spokesperson on how to interact with the media to effectively to communicate the key message, thus gaining a positive coverage for the company.

Media training is not limited to just large companies. It is also suited for small business owners. Media training is a great tool in helping you understand what the media is looking for and to how to handle all types of media interviews.

During media training, a team of specialized trainers with backgrounds in media, PR and crisis management conduct either a half or full-day interactive workshop. It is usually provided to the senior management of the company and the spokesperson designated by the company.

The spokesperson of the company must have a strong understanding of the company's background, best represent the ethos of the company and is qualified to comment. This spokesperson could either be the company's CEO, senior executive or a public relations director. It is important that the spokesperson receives media training to develop skills

needed to convey a consistent message. Additionally, you want to make sure that the person will be comfortable and articulate in front of the media.

A media training covers a variety of communication topics. It includes both theory and hands-on practice of speaking to the media. It involves videotaped, simulated media interview sessions and role playing. Participants are provided with interview tips and strategies they can use so that they can feel comfortable, confident and in-control when speaking with a reporter. A media trainer will provide you insights into the media so that you understand how media works.

With media training, you will understand how to effectively share not only a company's success story but also to answer any tough questions a reporter may ask during a company crisis. You will be advised on how to organize your key messages, how to deliver them and how much detail to provide.

Taking part in a media interview doesn't have to be a stressful experience. The key is in preparation. Be prepared with facts and figures. Rehearse your messages and answers so you avoid stumbling when answering. Keep the interview simple. Avoid using too many jargons or industry-specific words or you will confuse people and risk being misunderstood or not understood at all.

Media training will train you with how to tackle some of the challenging questions and to help you prepared for the unexpected.

Take the example of the BP oil spill in 2010, where a pipeline was ruptured the beneath the surface of Gulf of Mexico, making it the largest oil spill in US history.

Bad communication coupled with a lack of transparency, honesty, and insensitivity to the victims drew heavy criticism from the media and general public.

CEO Tony Hayward clearly did not handle the situation well. He blamed the spill on the company that operated the drilling big and said it wasn't BP's accident. He also misjudged the size of spill, saying "I think the environmental impact of this disaster is likely to be very, very modest". During an interview, he said he wanted his "life back" and was photographed holidaying with his son on a yacht amidst the crisis.

Needless to say, this portrayed both the organization and the CEO is a negative light. A media training would have enabled Tony to handle even the most challenging questions gracefully.

It's Cheaper to Keep 'Em

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

Did you know that it costs 8 to 10 times more to get a new customer than to retain your existing customer base? With the hunting game, you have to spend time to get the attention of your prospects and educate them on your products and services. They may not buy the first time you contact them. By keeping in contact and presenting new offers, providing useful tips and sharing other customer testimonials, they may ring you up one day to do business. In the farming game, you work with your existing customer who has already decided to do business with you. The challenge is to provide a great customer experience so they keep coming back. That positive experience can also turn into good word of mouth and gets you more referred business. Though you farm your business, it doesn't mean that you don't hunt for new business. It simply means that you do more with your current customer and are able to optimize your marketing budget. Let's face it; all customers will eventually leave you. While they are with you, you can find ways to delight them and keep them loyal.

I have had the honour to interview some executives in the Bangkok market about the concept of retention for a workshop I'll be conducting in Kuala Lumpur at the end of May. All the executives are in the retail and service industry. The three common things they raised regarding customer loyalty were 1) customer engagement/communication, 2) surveying and measuring and 3) training.

One company with 400 employees implemented a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) program. There is a 15 seat call centre to service their customers. The CEO has rolled out an NLP (Neuro-linguistic programming) coaching program for its senior and mid-level managers. The system is set up to give monthly and quarterly reports on customer satisfaction and they internally review the weighted score and find ways to improve it. Another company which has two sister subsidiaries catering to the baby and toddler market, has simply implemented a logging system (read: pen, paper and Excel) which puts customer feedback into three categories: compliments, comments and complaints. They review the consolidated log weekly and monthly. In the meetings, they look for ways they can improve and feedback the changes they've made to their customers who raised the issue. If the issue is about people, they provide more training.

Creating customer loyalty isn't hard. It simply requires diligence. Management needs to persevere and resolve the issues to keep the customer happy. Whether you decide to implement an IT system to track or simply log it on paper, what matters is that management cares and there's a process in the company to support it.

Languages of Love

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

The first time I heard the sentence "The 5 languages of Love", multitude of images came to mind, a walk on the beach, a bouquet of flowers and a candlelit dinner. A friend who introduced the concept stopped me in my train of thought. He went on to explain that Gary Chapman's book outlines the 5 languages of love and these are 1) quality time, 2) gifts, 3) words of affirmation, 4) acts of service and 5) physical touch. From that discussion, I thought about how this pertains to our daily interactions with the customers, colleagues and their language of love. To find out more, I visited the website www.5lovelanguages.com and ended up to taking a quiz to see what my number one language of love was. Before revealing my answer, I want to share with you the interpretation of the language of love.

Quality Time

For some, quality face time is paramount. This is especially true for a new potential customer. To make these prospects feel secure and relaxed before solidifying the business relationship, multiple meetings, including some over a meal, may be required. After sealing the deal, consider scheduling recurring meetings to ensure regular quality time.

Gifts

A gift in the professional setting comes in many forms. You may want to send a hamper to your client for the holidays or give them something they could use in the office like a thumb drive or a store value card from the local coffee shop. Another kind of gift could be an industry report or a news article that's important to that customer. By taking this action, you're showing that you're keen to nurture the relationship.

Words of Affirmation

Generally speaking, everyone likes to be appreciated. Words of praise from suppliers, colleagues, and supervisor can do wonders for the person who values affirmation as a language of love. To make this person happy, give compliments or surprise them with a thank you card to show your gratitude.

Act of Service

This language of love is about being helpful. If a friend at the office is overloaded with short deadlines, offering a helping hand would mean the world to them. If a customer has forgotten a file in your meeting room, offering to drop it off to them on the way home insures that you have a loyal customer that will return to do more business with you.

Physical Touch

In Asia, physical contact is often considered taboo. In the course of doing business in Bangkok, instead of the wai, we sometimes shake hands. There are those who approach the shake with gusto and others who oblige with a few limp fingers. By doing the later, the person who values physical touch may think that lack of contact shows that you're cold and may be unwilling to do business, though this may be far from the truth.

In addition to the five languages of love defined by Chapman, there has been an argument to include food as a language of love. I tend to agree. Think of the expression "A way to a man's heart is through his stomach". In many Asian languages, a guest is often asked "Have you eaten?" For many families, a meal at home or out with friends and family is a way of showing love.

At this point, you may be wondering what's your partner's or key customer's language of love. To know, simply listen. Do they talk about the gifts they received from another person? Do they frequently ask for face to face meeting? Consider how they treat you and others. Your partner or customers will give love in the same way they want it reciprocated. As for me, my number one is Act of Service.

Maximizing Your Media Coverage

By Kittima Sethi

Every business seems to want to get in the news. They want media to pay attention to their business and to publish stories about their product or services. They see other businesses or their competitors in the news and they also want a share of that media coverage.

Remember that to earn that media attention and to get the PR coverage, businesses must develop a strategy on how to craft message that is newsworthy and informative. This is the key to successful PR, making it far more cost effective than advertising. Having your company's name featured in the news provides great credibility and may also bring your business to the attention of potential clients, in a positive way at no extra cost.

Media is in the business of selling news to their readers. They want to stimulate, entertain and interest readers and are always looking out for stories that are newsworthy and new sources that can provide attention-grabbing and exciting news. If you want to grab the media's attention you must have a compelling story to share.

Canadian Blake Dinkin made headlines around the world with his Black Ivory Coffee because of its unique production process. The Arabica beans are fed to Thai elephants and plucked by mahouts a day later from their dung, before they are washed and roasted. Dinkin explained that the natural fermentation process in the elephant creates the unique and distinct coffee flavour. Since approximately 10,000 beans are picked to produce 1 kg of coffee, Black Ivory is the world's priciest cup of coffee.

The media also has a checklist that determines if the story is newsworthy or not. Timing is very important. If you are able to link your product or service to a current trend or tie it to the topic of current news, then you are likely to get the media's attention. If you want to launch a product or service to coincide with a holiday or celebration, then find out the lead time when the publication goes for print and send your release in advance.

Your product or service must also be of some significance. For instance, has it changed people's lives in anyway? Does it affect a large number of people? Does it reflect a human interest? Is it a feel-good story? Is there an emotional attachment to that product or service?

In February 2013, the Associated Press featured an article about a teacher in Pennsylvania who replaced students' chairs with yoga balls. According to the teacher, sitting on the these balls kept the kids more alert and comfortable in class. A professor of movement science added that there has been research linking physical activity with better learning. Once confined mostly to gyms and fitness centres, these yoga balls,

priced at US$5(Baht 30) must have enjoyed a windfall after the article was shared with other schools and adults.

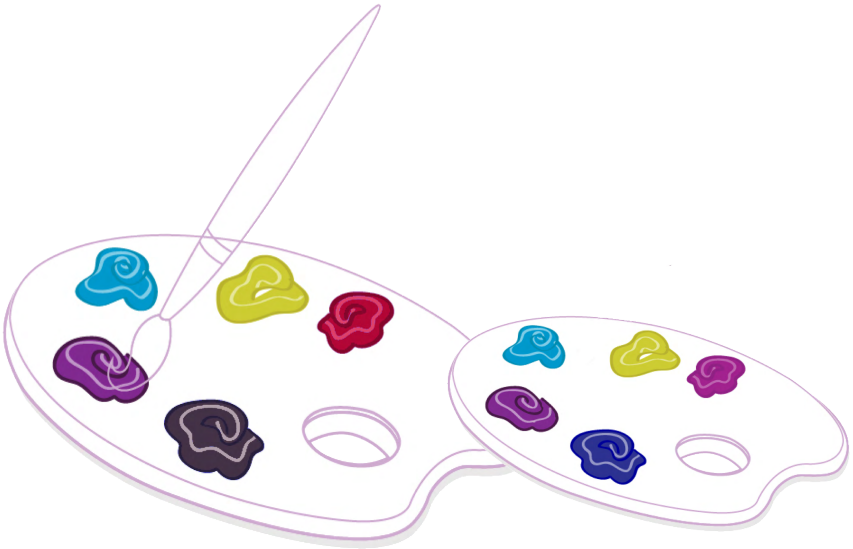
Developing various story angles of your business can also help in getting media coverage in various publications.

To get a wide media coverage you have to cast your net wide. If you have a publication you want to be featured in, browse through the various sections and see how you can develop your product or service specific to that section.

Create multiple press releases that feature various angles to increase your chance of being featured in several publications.

A leading US conglomerate has launched a new version of one of their multigrain snacks in Thailand. With a competitive snack market, the product was targeted at health conscious consumers who loved to snack, but still wanted to maintain their health and appearance. In addition to the official press release announcing the product launch, several PR angles were featured in various press releases to promote the product. These included a lifestyle angle, which touched on the benefits of selecting healthy snacks, especially those that are baked and include fibre. Since the product was represented by a celebrity ambassador, who is a also a dancer, several entertainment angles were also incorporated. Some of these included sharing the celebrity's tips on keeping fit through exercise and making smart and healthy snack choices; a popular duo band who wrote lyrics to a song that was especially composed for the product launch; a music video featuring the song, artists and the celebrity; and a dance contest featuring the product and the celebrity.

The examples above provide you with the opportunity to promote your business and to maximize media coverage. If you provide a story that is targeted to the readers of the various publications, is timely and has some significance, you have a better chance of coverage.



Media Relations

By Kittima Sethi

Media Relations is simply defined as your relationship with the media. If used correctly, it can be one of the most effective ways of reaching your target audience. It can even change your target audience's perception on your product, services, practice and policies.

Media is in the business of selling stories to their readers. So in addition to featuring hard core content on truthful facts and figures, they are also looking for content that can stimulate, entertain and interest their readers. As a business owner, your role is to educate the media about your product or service so that they are interested in featuring it in a story.

It is crucial for companies to build and manage relationships with the media to get the exposure that they want. One way is to maintain regular contact with the reporter who write about your industry and send them updates on your products or services. Likewise, reporters also to know that they can rely on you for honest or any in-depth industry or product information you can provide them with.

Here are some helpful tips in managing a successful relationship with the media.

(1) Know your reporters.

Do your research and get to know the reporters and editors that cover your industry. Call the publication and enquire or read that publication to see which writer is covering your industry news. For instance, if you are pitching a story on a recent medical breakthrough, you should be contacting the reporter covering medical and health issues and not a financial reporter Alternatively, you may also want to contact the lifestyle reporter by pitching the story from a lifestyle angle. It is possible to present different angles of the same story to reporters of different sections of the same publication or a different publication. Remember your goal is to maximize the coverage of your product or service. Keep in mind that if you have offered exclusivity to one publication, you must honour that or else you risk ruining your relationship with the media.

(2) Offer to make comments or statements

Offer to make comments or statements about current news that may be relevant to your products or services. If you are able to share an insight or expand on current affairs news, then this is your golden opportunity. Here is an example. In January 2012, the Thai government embarked on a campaign announcing the importance of English language in the approaching Asean Economic Community (AEC) 2015. Wall Street

Institute Thailand, an English language institute, took this opportunity to announce its new campaign in persuading the Thais to recognize the importance of improving English skills for AEC. Furthermore, it announced its expansion plans to build 2 more language schools and to introduce specialized courses for using English in professional situations – all in line with the government's objective.

(3) Be a trustworthy and responsive source for media.

If the media knows you are an expert in a certain field and if you have regularly provided articles and comments to them, they are most likely to call you for further information. Having you quoted in their article, adds great credibility to you and your organization. Because media works on tight deadline, you must be able to respond to their queries and provide the information they want quickly. This is the only chance you have to build a relationship with them. Ask when their deadline is and get all the information. Remember that if you have promised to get back to them, you must do so and follow up.

It takes time to build and cultivate relationships with the media, and in the same way, it takes time for the media to trust in you and your credibility. Remember that media relations in not advertising and you should not attempt to hard sell to reporters. Offering yourself as a credible source and showing how a product or service is going to improve or have an impact in daily life will likely get the media's attention.

The Psychology in Marketing

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

Since the dawn of commercialism, marketers have been trying to influence customers to choose their products and services. The challenge is that customer's decision making process is based on a vast number of factors. It is virtually impossible to influence them all. The smart marketer usually aims to establish a balance by appealing to the emotional as well as the rational side.

If you're interested in the field of psychology and the role it plays in marketing, consider reading Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion by Dr. Robert B. Cialdini. With more than 2 million copies sold and available in 26 languages, the book was named one of the Smartest Business Books by Fortune Magazine. Often on the required reading list of marketing students, the book has been on the New York Times Business Best Seller List. The reason for the book's phenomenal success is the concept of the six pillars. These pillars govern our social behaviours. So whether you eat noodles with a fork and call it spaghetti or like your noodle in a soup bowl and call it ramen, the concept works across multiple cultural terrains.

Pillar One: Reciprocity

A common application of reciprocity is when brands give free product samples. From the consumer point of view, they are assessing how much they like the actual product. At the same time, the invisible social force of reciprocity is taking place. In the subconscious mind, the free sample is a form of a favour. Naturally, the recipient wants to reciprocate and return the favour by purchasing the product.

In our interconnected world today, engagement and great customer service works in the same way. Many companies give away tips to solve problems, white papers, research report, free prizes and lucky draw. These types of actions often set reciprocity into motion.

Pillar Two: Commitment and Consistency

Most of us wants to be seen as "walking the talk", essentially being consistent with our beliefs and actions. When we promise to do something, verbally or in writing, we are likely to follow through. Some sales people use this to their advantage and add the extra after the sales process has been complete. They know that many customers will not cancel the order despite the changes.

A subscription-based opt-ins that requires the user to register on a website is a way to leverage commitment and consistency. Free trials are an effective way to get user to commit to your product for a period of time. Once the period is up, the customer feels obliged to pay to continue.

Pillar Three: Social Proof

Cialdini, the prominent social psychologist, says that human beings regularly make choices about what to do and think, based on the ideas and actions of others. Simply put: We like to follow the group. This is called social proof.

In the past, all a company had to do was to show models and actors using the products to establish social proof. Now a days, consumers are less susceptible to pandering. With the growing usage of social media, brands are now expected to step up and provide a unique customer experience and engagement. The ultimate goal is to gain brand evangelists. These advocates or fans will freely tell their network of family, friends and the world how much they just love the product.

Pillar Four: Authority

Socially, most of us have been conditioned to trust and follow the instruction of an authoritative figure. Marketers have put this to use by using CEOs and other trusted authority figures as the spokesperson for the brand. Endorsements from men and women perceived to be experts in their fields often have a greater impact than any sales slogan and it also adds more depth.

There are authority figures in nearly every field. The key is to find the ones that matter to your brand and seek their sponsorship or review. If you sell an energy saving product, a positive testimonial from a prominent green association creates the authority effect.

Pillar Five: Liking

It’s no surprise to know that people emulate those they look up to and like. Many fans buy products simply because their favourite celebrity uses them. Behind every commercial featuring Areeya Choompoo or Aum Patcharapa telling you to buy a particular product, there is a savvy marketer. However, not all brands canvass fans adoration in the same way. Some leverage it via product placement and social media.

Consider getting connected with the social celebrities and icons of your industry. Find who your target market follows and pursue their social sponsorship. The effect of reaching your audience in this way can be staggering.

Pillar Six: Scarcity

Have you seen a banner advert saying “last condo unit for sale at a special price”? Perhaps you have seen, in a newspaper or a friend’s Facebook, a photo posting of a shop with a massive queue. Perceived shortage of something almost always generates demand. This is the reason why mega sales only happen over a weekend, coupons have expiration dates, and websites put a count down on their discounted offers.

You don’t need to go as far as having a countdown clock on your website to create the scarcity effect. For your next event, let the potential customers know that seats are limited and only a few would be available within a short time frame. Those who are sitting on the fence will spring into action and book their ticket!

Using Press Releases to Keep Your Company in Sight

By Kittima Sethi

Back in March, I wrote about maximizing media coverage. I provided some examples of how companies can develop various story angles of their products or services to garner interests of the reporters and have their stories appear in media.

I am going to share with you the benefits of a press release, an essential element in every company's public relations strategy.

If you think press releases are an old-fashioned and an obsolete way to send news, you are mistaken. While in the past, press releases were sent to specific media and usually as hard copies, today, thanks to the internet, the outreach incudes worldwide media outlets, individual reporters and editors, search engines, websites and online press release distribution and syndication services.

A press release is an inexpensive way to get visibility and capture media attention. It is an opportunity for companies to share news about their products or services to their customers, employees, investors, competitors and interested stakeholders. It also keeps the industry that they are in, informed of any recent developments.

If you are wondering why certain products or services are regularly being featured in the media, it is probably due to the constant stream of press releases being sent to media. However, keep in mind that content is the also the key element to having news published. Press releases must contain content that is newsworthy, factual, timely and relevant. It must capture the editor's attention and stir his or her interest to cover the subject further.

Crafting a press release with a catchy and compelling headline followed by informative content increases the probability of securing coverage. Remember to also make the content concise and to the point.

We assisted an international school, following the Singapore national curriculum, in launching their new campus in Bangkok. Press releases were sent to various local and international media based in Bangkok. The press release captured the interest of a renowned Singapore-based news channel which sent their reporter to cover the campus. Similarly, a financial publication based in Hong Kong came across a press release we issued about a Thai private hospital's investment in a US healthcare information system. The publication was working a story about this hospital's plan to list in the stock exchange. Although the press release did not mention news about the hospital's listing, it provided an update on the hospital's development.

Below are some of the benefits of press releases:

(1) Press releases create credibility.

Press releases create credibility for your products or services. By regularly developing newsworthy content and distributing it to your targeted audience, you can achieve your goal in creating confidence in your audience as well as increasing recognition of your product or service. You have probably heard of the phrase "out of sight, out of mind". To survive in today's ever-changing marketplace, you need to continuously provide updated and relevant news about your product or services and to educate the public about what you do. Notice how IT and FMCG companies are regularly featured in the news. They are either announcing launches of new products, additional features, new packaging or looks, new presenters, sales promotions, or even CSR activities they have been involved in.

(2) Press releases reach a global audience.

As mentioned earlier, a lot of publications republish press releases from online press syndication. This widens the distribution network and increases the chances that your news will be seen by more people. Remember to include links to your websites so readers and reporters can learn more about your company. Make your press release Search Engine Optimization (SEO)-friendly by using keywords and other techniques to attract major search engines like Google or Yahoo.

(3) Regular press releases establish you as an expert in your field.

For instance, if you are in the education industry and are constantly sending news on issues and trends in education and learning, it is more likely that a reporter will contact you if they need a comment on an education-related story they are writing on. You could eventually become the media's "go-to source" and this is a great way for people to notice you and your company. The more people read about you, the more trust you build.

Once you have created a press release, the next step is to pitch to the media. As I mentioned in my earlier published articles, research, get to know and call the reporters and editors that cover your industry. Find a creative way to convey your product or service. Visiting the media increases your chances of coverage as you get to meet the reporters face-to-face and pitch your story. Remember your goal is to maximize the coverage of your product or service.

Do not limit the content of the press releases to just making announcements of your products or services. It could include news about your company's CSR programme, a survey or statistical report your company has compiled, news about awards received, testimonials from clients, a talk or seminar you are hosting, making a statement or comment about current news related to your industry, financial results, new executives and other accomplishments.

The list is endless and the key is to be creative and tie its relevance to current news or trends. If your content is interesting and informative, your press releases will also likely be followed by people in other industries.

Keep in mind that sending just one press release is not going to create an instant publicity blitz. The best way to get noticed is to create regular well-written press releases, use an effective distribution services and incorporate all of the above tips provided above.

What's the Difference: PR vs Advertising

By Kittima Sethi

As a PR consultant, I have often been asked what the difference is between Public Relations and Advertising. These two areas of marketing are often misunderstood as being the same thing. Both of these are used in Integrated Marketing Communications, yet they are very different.

Advertising is an attempt to persuade consumers to buy their products or services by highlighting the benefits and showcasing the attributes. Public relations, on the other hand, use several tools and methods, such as events or press releases, to create awareness and build a positive image of a company.

Advertising is a paid advertisement space in a media, whether it is a publication (magazine, newspaper, or journals), radio, TV or online. Since clients have paid for this space, they have complete control over the content, design and timing of the advertisement in the publication. They know when the ad will be published or aired and can repeat the ads as long as their budget allows.

In Public Relations, you must earn media attention. PR is focused on getting free media exposure for the company's products, services or even executives. PR encompasses photo releases to press conferences. While you may have control in creating the message, there is no control over how the media views and presents your message. The media is not obligated to publish your news. A pressing news story may get priority and your PR article may be shelved. The editor will always have the final say.

However, if your PR news is newsworthy, it may appear in different sections of the same publications and presented from different angles. For example, a new story about a well-known sportsperson opening a restaurant may appear in the lifestyle, sports and even the front page section.

However, a key to getting the media interested lies in how creatively you craft those messages and their relations to current affairs or public interest. It is important to have an interesting hook or an exciting angle. This is the part where the PR consultant plays an important role. A PR consultant must be able to creatively package the message and maintain good relationship with the media and community.

In advertising, advertisements may be repeated, with the intention of increasing the recall rate of the messages intended to be delivered to the audience or target group. With PR, you have just one chance to submit a press release about the company and the media will publish this only once.

Both advertising and public relations are important elements in creating an effective and successful marketing communication campaign. Both reinforce the message clients

want to convey to consumers. Neither is “better” than the other. It all depends on what results the client wants to achieve.

What's Your USP?

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

My favourite sports shoes are Asics. I started running back in 2010 and it is something I enjoy doing several times a week. When a friend suggested that I try Asics shoes. I bought my first pair and have used them religiously. When I wanted another pair of sports shoes, I didn't look at other brands; I went straight to the Asics display and got another pair. What's the unique selling point (USP) of Asics? It's the gel inside the shoes that's able to absorb and disburse the pounding action, minimizing damage to the runner's feet.

A USP is what makes your product or services stand out among the crowd. USP draws in interested customers, close sales and helps you with word of mouth. Your happy customers will tell their friends and that kind of marketing and PR is priceless.

To give you another example, Bangkok is a haven for foodies. There are a plethora of restaurants and bars. For the most part, prices are reasonable. You can dine out most nights in Bangkok without breaking the bank. The places that stand out in people's mind are the place that has something unique. It could be the food specialty, ambiance, friendly service, convenient location or a combination thereof. For us, we enjoy awesome crab cakes at Bourbon Street and once a week we treat ourselves to mouth-watering spaghetti and meat balls at our cosy Greek hangout, Olive.

As a business owner, you may be thinking about your own USP. To help you define your USP, check out your competitors. Review their marketing messages. What do they do to distinguish themselves from others in the market and makes them successful? After considering the competitor in the market place, put yourself in your customer shoes and see things from their point of view. Analyse the customers' motivation and decision making process; get to know why customers buy from you as oppose to your competitors.

Creating a USP requires soul searching and originality. Know from the start that you can't be everything to everyone. That is, unless you're the owner of Walmart. Avoid the trap of becoming a "me too" brand. You want to carve out your own authentic niche. When you've made a choice that resonates with you and your stakeholders, it will reverberate with the customers you attract. If you're looking for inspirational reading on the subject, check out this book: Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne.

Word of Mouth

By Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

It can make or break your business

You may have heard of the old saying, a happy customer tells a couple friends about their experience and an unhappy one tells everybody. With the help of social media, we're telling more and more people about the good, bad and the ugly. It is as simple as click and share.

On a daily basis, we make many choices about things we buy and consume. In the past, we relied upon a third party to tell us if the food at a restaurant was any good or if a newly released movie was worth seeing. Now days, many of our decisions are based on word of mouth. We check out what our friends "like" and what they share on their wall. When we want suggestions, we post it on discussion forums. Recommendations from our friends and peers are considered more credible. We're inclined to see ourselves like our friends. What they like and approve, we tend to be more open to it.

In Q1 of 2012, it is estimated that the average Facebook user has about 245 friends. If we assume each Facebook user shared an experience and 245 people saw it and shared it, the experience would have created 60,000 impressions. These impressions would have created a positive or negative bias towards your product or service.

Word of mouth is like a pebble dropped in a pond. Once set into motion, the ripple can create a dramatic result. In 2009, Oliver Beale took a flight from Mumbai to London on Virgin Airline. He found the food so appalling that he wrote Richard Branson, the CEO, a complaint letter. Beale's letter was tongue in cheek, hilarious, and it contained pictures of the meal he described in the letter. It went viral in a more traditional way, via email. It was picked up by the media and reprinted. Branson contacted Beale to apologize and thanked him for raising the issue.

On a different note, Psy, the Korean pop singer, has had an amazing two month with his hit Gangnam style. The music video was first uploaded in July and within two months it has been viewed by more than 260 million people. Throw in the live performances, parodies, mashups, and video responses — Gangnam has garnered over 350 million views. Unlike other K-pop bands, Psy, comes across as authentic and funny. Describing his video as dress classy and dance cheesy, PSY has signed with School Boy Records, which represents Justin Bieber and Carly Rae Jepsen.

Word of Mouth is not new. Technology has simply given us a new way to share. It has changed how often and how many people we share information with on a daily basis. With this in mind, consider giving your customer something positive to talk about.

Pacharee Pantoomano-Pfirsch

An international marketing and communications professional with over 20 years experience, Pacharee delivers winning solutions for some of the world's most influential brands. From brand management to direct marketing to internal communications and community relations, Pacharee's proven expertise and solid grasp of market communications come together with stellar results – leading-edge marketing strategies for her clients around the globe.

With business-to-business and consumer clients in retail, telecom, furniture and agency client service, Pacharee got her start in direct marketing as Database Manager for the US Desk & Furnishings chain.

In the late 1990's, after relocating to Thailand, Pacharee joined Lucent Technologies Thailand as a Marketing Manager, where she provided marketing communications support to eight business units, supervised the customer satisfaction program and collaborated with human resources for the internal communications programs.

Pacharee later joined marketing and communication agency MDK Consultants as a Client Service Director to supervise the DHL, Rolls Royce, Siam2you, Digital Internet Factory, and Passionasia accounts. As part of the WPP group, she also worked as a PR strategic partner with J. Walter Thompson, before telecom giant Alcatel recruited her for the position of Communications and Marketing Strategy Manager. It was here that Pacharee developed marketing communications plans to support the company's 10

business units, a critical element to the Alcatel's sales achievement of USD$500 million between 2000 and 2001.

To further build her brand management experience, Pacharee joined the auto industry as Ford Brand Manager in 2004. In her role, she formulated brand strategies, developed and executed integrated marketing communications program for the C-car. In preparation of launching the Ford Focus, Pacharee took on the Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Market Research and Customer Satisfaction Manager role. The driving force behind three critical campaign elements, Pacharee supervised the lead management centre, led direct marketing campaigns and contributed to the incremental sales volumes and increased customer loyalty/retention.

Today, in addition to serving her clients, Pacharee is the Chairwoman for the Bangkok Now, an organization she founded in 2003. Starting with just 30 members, this professional association now has over 4,000 members and is dedicated to supporting business in the Bangkok area. An avid supporter of Soi Dog, she regularly holds fundraisers to support the organization. Pacharee also serves on the Bangkok Mothers and Babies International committee and contributes articles to Bangkok Trader and BAMBI magazines.

Pacharee holds a bachelor in International Relations and Economics from The American University in Washington DC and an MBA in Marketing from the University of Phoenix.

Kittima Sethi

Kittima is a media relations and PR professional with over 20 years of experience in media and communications. A Thai national of Indian heritage, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Commerce from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi University, India.

She started her career as a journalist at The Nation, one of Thailand's leading English-language publications, covering stories related to education and youth. She quickly rose to become the Editor of NJ Magazine and NK Kids! propelling these publications to be one of the best-selling English-language youth publications in Thailand. She was later invited to join The Nation's broadcasting media, hosting radio shows on Nation Radio and appearing on Nation TV.

While working at The Nation, Kittima pursued three diplomas in advertising, marketing, and freelance journalism and authorship from the International Correspondence School, Pennsylvania, USA. Kittima continued to develop her copyediting and translation skills and expanded to work on other news desks, including business, features, sports, entertainment and others.

Continuing in the media industry, Kittima joined BEC-Tero Entertainment PCL, one of the country's leading entertainment company, working closely with the senior management team and assisted in handling communications within the department. This included planning, execution, sourcing, managing ticket sales, F&B, etc.

Kittima later joined M.R. Power Company Limited (now renamed to Mosdorfer MRP Co., Ltd), which manufactures overhead transmission lines accessories, serving contractors and utilities worldwide, including EGAT, MEA, and PEA in Thailand. Here, she headed the administrative management of the company, including HR & Training and customer services and liaised between the production team and customers.

Kittima continued to be a freelance writer, writing for various publications including Bangkok Post, The Nation, Expressions, Sawasdee, Travel&Lifetstyle, Education Living, and Masala. She has also copy-edited two books, a novel and a health guide.

As a PR specialist at Brand Now, Kittima heads the media relations unit. She maintains close ties with both local and international media, organizes media visits, press conferences, media briefings and one-on-one interviews. She is also responsible for writing press releases, speeches, scripts and advertorials.

Fluent in English and Thai, Kittima handles the clients' copywriting and translations for brochures, websites, press releases, books and other marketing communication materials for various industries.

Kittima is the co-founder of The International Parenting Network, founded in 2008. The organization is based in Bangkok and has 2000+ members, comprising of parents, teachers, educators and international schools interested in inspiring positive parenting.

She regularly hosts parenting networking events, conducts media training, gives talks on PR and marketing and contributes articles to local magazines. She also conducts cross cultural training for youth and for expat executives and their spouses. She is an avid supporter of Mae Tao Clinic in Maesot, Tak and is an active participant in various organizations related to expats and children in Bangkok.

More About the Authors

Now that you have made it to the end of this e-book, we want to thank you once more for downloading and, by now, reading our e-book. If you've enjoyed reading through this book and found it useful, we appreciate your help in spreading the word.

When not writing articles or publishing books, we run and manage Brand Now Co., Ltd., a Marketing and PR company based in Bangkok, Thailand.

Brand Now Co., Ltd. is a boutique marketing and public relations company with in-depth experience serving multinational and local companies in Thailand. The focus is on below the line and the services range from public relations, direct marketing to event management. Our clients have included Reckitt Benckiser, World Bank, Merck, PepsiCo, Viber, GrabTaxi and adidas, just to name a few.

Brand Now helps people and companies to develop an effective approach to interact with a target audience and create an exceptional brand experience. As a communication partner, the company researches and analyses the market opportunities and devises a plan to help its clients achieve their goals.

While managing Brand Now, we are constantly experiencing new things and continuously learning about Marketing and PR. Because we like to share, we put our experiences into articles and post them on our website.

If you are keen to read more articles, please visit Brand Now here.

We look forward to creating another e-book soon.

If you are interested to stay up-to-date on our activities or want to be the first to receive the next book, then please send us an email at **brandnow@brandnow.asia**.

Other places where we have settled down online are:

Visit our website

Like us on Facebook

Watch our videos on YouTube

Connect with us on LinkedIn

Follow us on Twitter

Locate us on Google+