

Public Relations Versus Propaganda

Is it a PR Spin or Propaganda?

What's the difference between PR and Propaganda? Is there any difference at all? In today's world, between the two, which communication model is more effective? This article will help you understand the battle for molding opinions and perceptions in the modern world.

Propaganda is not new, its origins are said to be as old as human history notes T. Ranklins in his publications. By definition, it is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist, wikipedia.com.

Propaganda is generally an appeal to emotion, not intellect. It shares some techniques with advertising and public relations though differently. Hitler a well-known propagandist had this to share to his stewards during the world war:

"If you are going to tell a lie, don't tell a little one because it will be recognised as a lie. Tell the biggest and most unthinkable lie. Keep on telling it and people will think it must be truth and believe it." He went further and concluded: "The greater the lie the more effective it is as a weapon."

Public Relations on the other hand is a management tool used to create goodwill between an organisation and its publics (both internal and external). Various communication instruments are adopted to further this interest. Media relations, stakeholder relations and crisis management to name a few, are part of public relations.

Like propaganda PR is systematic, serves to achieve set goals and involves management of perceptions. Both models use various media platforms to reach different audiences.

If what you are "spinning" has a solid basis in fact, you're doing PR. If not, it's propaganda, plain and simple. For instance our client Botswana Insurance Fund Management (BIFM) is the largest asset management company in Botswana, that's a fact, it is the oldest in the business, that's a fact, it pioneers trends in that market that's a fact. Sharing this information with various publics is not 'propagandising' it is simply sharing facts. Just like stating that Botswana is in Southern Africa and is rich in minerals.

Propaganda's efforts are not sustainable in the modern world. It takes the public for granted assuming it is gullible and passive in consuming information. Well-trained journalists 'spike' news releases that are biased and not news worthy.

Standard Bank (our client) and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (which owns 20 percent of Standard Bank) are bankrolling Morupule B Power station project in Botswana. This is expected to promote the country's energy self-sufficiency and boost the economy. This is newsworthy. Shortage of power is affecting many countries around the world. Our client's involvement in providing a solution is commendable. For this reason (fact and truth) we had good media coverage for the event.

To maintain good relations lies are definitely not an option. Propaganda thrives on misinformation. In the world where credibility sustains relationships propaganda is self-destructive. The media will shun Propagandists pretending to be PR Practitioners.

In a crisis for instance a PR Practitioner will obtain all the facts and urge the business managers to draw up a convenient plan for recovery. This could include a clearly laid down strategy and how this could be prevented in the future. A statement will be issued to the media or a press conference held to address the problem. Propaganda may deny any such thing happening.

At Hotwire we believe it is relationships that create business prosperity. As the country's largest PR firm (fact) we can only thrive on providing sound, sustainable solutions in communicating.

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