

## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN TOURISM ENTERPRISES**

**Carmen Voinescu (Clapan) Ph. D Student**  
**University of Craiova**  
**Faculty of Economics and Business Administration**  
**Craiova, Romania**  
**Assoc. Prof. Apostolos Apostolou**  
**Technical University of Crete**  
**Department of Production Engineering and**  
**Management**  
**Chania, Greece**

**Abstract:** Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics. It involves the management of problems or issues, helps management to keep informed on public opinion, defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest and uses research and ethical communication as its principal tools.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Public relation is a way of communicating with the publics or keeping up relations with them. It is an interactive form of communication from which the organization collects information from the targeted group through research methods that take place.

A better way to define public relations is through practicing it in real life. Public relations can be put into practice by following these research methods, thus producing new forms of strategies that can give better reputation to the organization.

The intercontinental hotel group marked an example of public relation's success by working with local school children. A competition was created whereby the children were asked to depict the importance of the environment in a drawing and the winning entries were displayed at the different hotels in the group. Many organizations nowadays form "green strategic alliances" with other organizations. It should be noticed here that by using the correct public relation and marketing strategies Grecotel became the first hotel group in the Mediterranean to establish an environmental and culture department.

Public relation is a form of promotional technique that is needed by an organization to enhance its image. This is very important especially for service-based organizations such as hotels or tourist offices that need a positive image in order to be successful.

This promotional technique is less costly and more credible than advertising. Therefore when it is difficult to raise advertising budgets, public relations is a low cost alternative, but it is difficult to control the timing and consistency of public relations coverage.

It is of critical importance for public relations practitioners to have a sense of public relations history so they can fully understand its place and purpose in the society. The history described below involves the development of public relations during Ancient Genesis, the middle years and the modern concepts.

Communicating to influence viewpoints or actions can be traced from the earliest civilizations. Greek theorists wrote about the importance of the public will, even though they did not specifically use the term "public opinion". Certain phrases and ideas in the political vocabulary of the Romans and in the writing of the medieval period relate to modern concepts of public opinion. Public relations was used many centuries ago in England.

Many of the generating forces had their origins in the nineteenth century, although the modern concept of public relations was little known in young America. There were few influences for its full-scale development and the population was smaller, thus no means of mass communication on a national basis existed. Group relationships were relatively simple; people were relatively self-sufficient and independent, the majority of them living at farms. Public relations have developed from press agency, although a gross oversimplification contains a focus of truth. Systematic efforts to attract or divert public attention are as old as efforts to persuade and propagandise. Elements of press agency are found in many public relations' programs today, but not as strong as critics assert.

The activities of public relations have also been and still remain a significant influence in political campaigns. Public relations are playing dominant roles in politics and political parties.

America's post civil war era set the stage for public relations in the twentieth century. The war period produced mass production and mass media resulting in the emergence of the advertising agent and increased use of press agents to promote business interests.

#### **PUBLIC RELATIONS - MODERN CONCEPTS**

The publicity bureau was the nation's first publicity firm and forerunner of today's public relations that was founded in Boston in 1900. Two Americans organized the publicity bureau to do a general press agent for as many clients as possible.

The other big industries and enterprises turned to the specialist who could tell business's story in the public form: the news reporter. Thus began the large scale recruitment of journalists to serve as interpreters for corporations and other public institutions.

Since the mid-1960s public relations has increased in importance and complexity. Far reaching trends early in this period made government affairs a main public relation's task and brought issues management by objectives to the functions' lexicon. In 1950, only 17% of workers held informational jobs, by the early 1980s more than 60% were similarly employed. In 1960 the United States of America had about 25% of the world market share in manufacturing but by the 1980s, this has slipped to less than 17%.

The implications for public relation communication seem to be less revolutionary. Now we talk about the world as a global community, where nations and people can share one economy, one environment, one technology and at least, in commerce, one language thus improving the concept and use of public relations in real life.

Public relations and marketing have always been misinterpreted by small and big organizations. Every organization needs both marketing and public relations functions. Both functions build and maintain the necessary relationships for the organisation's survival but the problem arises as they share a similar theoretical base and common techniques in carrying them out. The two disciplines differentiate in the end result. Public relations exist to maintain positive behavior and good communication among social groupings and the publics who are likely to affect an organisation's mission. Marketing is used to attract and satisfy customers; or clients for the long term to achieve the organisation's economic objectives.

The organisation's target is to analyse their objectives. Evaluating that target public relations helps in maintaining and building good communicational skills and mutual beneficial relationships with the publics. Marketing establishes though long term research methods what the customer really wants and the greater demand for the products they are offered in the market.

Public relations analyses and evaluates through different methods the opinion of the public on the different products offered, in order to create a better image of the organisation. This helps the marketing department to ensure a better pricing policy and meet the demand for the mostly desired products

Marketing operates as a line management function whereas public relations operate as a staff management function. Public relations one of several staff functions advises and supports line managers, who have the responsibility and authority to run the organisation. Line functions include the product and profit producing functions whereas staff functions include finance, human resource management, legal and public relations.

Effective public relations contribute to the marketing effort by maintaining a hospitable social and political environment. For example, a hotel that maintains good relationships with employers, then local government will enjoy success in the marketing effort to attract and satisfy clients on their services. Public relations should be used by tourist enterprises for the implementation of a good tourist marketing and not as a subsidiary.

In general, public relations is a management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the interest, plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

This program should include mainly four stages in order to be successfully planned, and provide maximal results. Program's goals, planning, and programming, communicating and evaluating are the four stages through which these targets of public relations can be achieved in tourism and in any other organisation.

a. The first stage involves identifying and learning about a client or an organisation and the problem to be solved, referring to its audiences or publics.

Public relations serve a wide variety of organisations/ institutions such as businesses, tourist enterprises (hotels, tourist offices, tour operators), and hospitals. The audiences or publics that are concerned with the programs' goal refer to the problem and effective relationships should be developed between them are employees, member

customers and the society in general. That phase includes collecting the necessary information, opinions of the publics, behaviors and the changing knowledge by diagnosing, defining and clarifying the problem.

b. The second stage deals with the aim of the program to solve the problem by planning and programming. The information gathered in the first step allows us to make decisions about program publics, objectives, action and communication strategies, tactics and goals. This involves the co- ordination of relationships or activities to keep the organisation's publics and other stake holders aware of the organizational policies and actions.

c. The third stage. Taking action and communicating, involves the implementation of information by using means of communication that help to achieve the required objectives and accomplish the program's goals.

d. Finally, the fourth stage, involves the evaluation of the program by assessing and implementing the results of the process. Adjustments are made while the program is being implemented, based on evaluation feedback on how it is or is not working.

The above process applies in tourist enterprises and in any other organisation, needs to be practiced. This process is used as part of the plan to achieve the goals after assuming that the organisation has clearly defined its goals. All enterprises and especially tourist enterprises, which are based on a good service, use public relations as their major tool to communicate with the society and reach their targets in order to be successful.

The most important factor for the successful realization of this process is communicating with the publics and using the appropriate means of communication. The main aim of using public relations in tourism as in any other industry is the transmission of messages, aspects of a particular tourist enterprise to the public and then to transfer these opinions of the publics back to the enterprise for further evaluation.

The transmission of views and messages from and to the tourist enterprise can be obtained effectively by using different communication media. The selection of the appropriate communication media is necessary and is worth using it, only if the end result provides the enterprise with a solution that satisfies both the public and the enterprise.

It is therefore appropriate to analyse the means of communication used in public relations, in order to achieve better acceptance of the message which should be interpreted either as intended or getting the message stored for later use.

Print media include newspapers, general news magazines, specialty publications and industry trade publications.

Newspapers are the main public information system. They form the foundation for most information programs together with all the other print media. By sending messages through print media, readers can be educated and update their knowledge.

Electronic media carry out communication. Two of the most useful electronic media are television and radio whereas the future is promising for Internet. Two of the greatest discoveries, regarding communication, of the 20th century are the television and the radio. They both serve a very persuasive role in transmitting messages to the publics.

The development of technology made radio very advantageous, as with it can be transmitted to anywhere and listened by everybody. Television, on the other hand, became very popular, during the years. Almost every house has a set. Television

combines audiovisual image and there are separate channels broadcasting particular programs (news channel).

Other electronic media include teleconferencing, and video news release and closed television. Teleconferencing as a medium in public relations helps to reach people the same message at many different locations all at the same time.

The system of closed circuit television makes possible to telecast live or by videotape and film to a large number of employees at the same time.

Lastly, other communication media are direct mail, e- mail, newsletters, fliers, pamphlets and brochures.

Communication as the main tool of public relations in tourism is defined as the programmed and systematic attempt of a tourist enterprise to influence positively the public's towards their product, which is available to future buyers. This is carried out by using a two- way method communication to bridge the receiver (specific clients) and the sender (tourist enterprise) with a message creating trust with the opposite party.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN TOURIST ENTERPRISES**

The need of development of public relation and the rapid change in technology, on behalf of the tourist enterprises, has a consequence the limitation of personal contracts particularly in the communication sector.

This can be clearly explained by using the following example. Tourist agents use to communicate by phone with the tour operators' reservation personnel. The rapid change in technology, eliminated the reservations by phone as they were replaced with the on line reservation system, minimizing the telephone calls between tour operators, travel agents and the clients of the tourist enterprises.

Tourism and the tourist industries contribute positively to the economical life of a country. Therefore the reputation of a product of a tourist enterprise largely depends on the quality standard of the personnel that are responsible for the production of that product and the right behavior towards their clients.

For example when a tour operator moves every year a great number of tourists to different destinations. It is his/her responsibility to develop a friendly and positive relationship with his/ her clients.

In other words public relations form a persuasive tool whereby, tourist enterprises influence the buying behavior of their clients by presenting them with a more detailed picture of the product in respect to the advantages and disadvantages. If the consumers of the products become more demanding and as a consequence more invulnerable to the messages (advertising), then the role of public relations in tourism will be upgraded.

People's opinion underestimate the contribution of the public relations in promoting a product of the tourist enterprise, believing that marketing is more efficient for the promotion, as public relations deal more its social obligation of the product.

As an example, a tour operator trying to find new destinations for its clients. The tourist enterprise will be more interested in the work of the marketing department. The marketing department will try to attract and satisfy the customers to those destinations guaranteeing that they have the necessary tourist infrastructure and economical benefits.

On the other hand the tour operator will get information from the public relations department which will be more the reason for the program offered, as well as the possibilities of social gathering in order to provide a relaxed atmosphere.

The personnel of public relations of the tourist enterprises in USA plays an important role in taking significant marketing decisions on the pricing of the product, sales promotion e.t.c., while tourist enterprises are becoming more sensitive regarding their social responsibilities.

In large tourist enterprises there are well organised public relation departments while in smaller ones they are using the services offered by companies responsible for consultancy on public relations.

The consultant of public relations researches programs and exercises his activity on issues dealing with human behavior. His success is based on his/ her attempt to persuade the client for a new product or to divert his /her opinion on the product.

A public relations department in a tourist enterprise as in any other organisation should include.

1. Media used

- a. list of media used to publicise
- b. file of exhibitions or actions that the enterprise has carried out
- c. Watching publicity

2. Personnel: The cadres of the department are usually people with experience in communication and in using media for informing. Usually the department consists of ex- journalists with excellent journal connections, good knowledge on the functions of mass media in informing and above all good communication skills.

3. Budget. It involves:

- a. The expenses of the department
- b. The exhibitions organised
- c. The expenditures

#### **PLANNING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN IN TOURIST ENTERPRISES**

The planning of a campaign comes as a result of the program described earlier used to analyse the targets of public relation. A campaign cannot be carried out if this program did not take place.

Starting with the programming of a campaign in public relations the responsible personnel of public relations should know the public they are referring to as well as their attitude towards the tourist enterprise and the product it produces, in order to know- how to act.

On the other hand the research for tourist marketing helps the consultants to have a clear picture of these active and the possible future clients. Therefore there is a need for an additional research so the management of the tourist enterprise can have a more detailed picture on the positive and negative aspects on its relationships with the publics to determine the goals during the planning of a public relations campaign.

Continuing with the procedure of planning the campaign in the tourist enterprise, public relations is to decide the strategies and tactics to be followed, so it can achieve the goals that have been determined by the tourist enterprise. Finally a research on the cost of budget is also necessary.

The major targets of a public relation campaign in a tourist enterprise are:

- a. Publicity news

- b. Relationship with the mass media
- c. Relationship with tour operators and travel agencies
- d. Relationship with other clients.

#### Publicity News

It is very important for a tourist enterprise to publicise its location, in order to be kept live in the memory of the public. The public relations consultants should attract clients and successfully approach them through the mass media.

#### Relationship with the mass media

An important function of the department relations in a tourist enterprise is the development of good relationships with the mass media and particularly with the journalists and authors of tourist guides and books. These people can promote the product more effectively to the interested clients or others who were not aware of it.

Press conference is necessary whenever a tourist enterprise decides to promote a product or to announce a new concept and its activities. At the end a summary press release with the details of the new product is distributed among the visitors.

#### Relationships with tour operators and travel agencies.

Tour operators are of critical importance to the tourist industry. Their contribution is major as they act as intermediate of marketing for most tourist products. The main duty of the public relation department of a tourist enterprise is the development and the maintenance of good and friendly relationships with tour operators and travel agents.

From a historical perspective, the traditional tourism distribution channel has consisted of small, retailers whose objectives were to maximize their own profits. As time passed, these retailers started to specialize and a group of tour operators also emerged. As this specialization developed different groups of intermediaries became prevalent in the tourism market, other processes took place, which change the pattern of tourism channels. Today, they are owned by tour operators.

Tour operators, in general, buy different tourist services and try to promote them to different clients by organizing special tourist packets. They also sell them at wholesale price to travel agents which then in turn sell them to clients at retail price, with a commission charged at 10%.

Tour operators emerged in the market in order to provide services that benefit some social groups. The traveling public uses the expertise of operators in order to save time, effort and money. In return, industry principals and suppliers gain access to a wide spread network of outlets, the business community gains appropriate advice regarding travel and hotel reservation and other ancillary services. The expertise of tour operators and tourist agents comes from the educational trips that are carried out for them to attend and learn details about the services they offer.

Some people support the decision that the organisation of educational trip which are offered to tour operators and tourist agents, are not involved in the public relations functions but probably to the sales promotion. They have an intention to increase the sales of their products of that tourist enterprise which organizes these educational trips as well as improve the knowledge of their buyers around this field, so they can easily sell not only better but also easier to the clients.

Educational trips are organized by tour operators for the cadres and personnel of the tourist agents who sell their tourist packets at retail price. The sponsoring and support of the programs of the educational trips derives from tourist factors such as hotel enterprises, airline companies marine companies who make available their products to tour operators. They can use them afterwards as their main ingredients of

the tourist packets they produce and make them available directly or indirectly to their clients to meet their tourist needs or desires. These trips help, the personnel to gain more knowledge about the details of the services they offer and influence the management of travel agencies to sell these services offered by tour operators who organise these trips.

The people, who are chosen to follow the programs of the educational trips, should be orientated regarding to where they will go and what they will see. They should organise meetings, where information are given to all participators during the trip, the advantages of the tourist destination they are visiting and eventually for some problems they might face. The programs of the educational trips should not be heavy in visiting many tourist organisations.

The main point is that the experience that they can gain from the realization of an educational trip is the considerable increase of fidelity of the salesperson to the tourist product he/ she sells, because he/ she has the assurance that the particular product satisfies a specific need or desire of his buyer.

Relationship with other clients.

The development and maintenance of good and friendly relationships with the possible and active clients of a tourist enterprise except those of the tour operators and travel agents involves a significant function of the public relations department because it is know that the product is supplied to it and also from it, it draws off income and receives profit.

Lastly the framework of effort is completed by informing them continuously about the services they can offer, the new services they produce or intend to produce, for special offerings, price lists e.t.c.

## CONCLUSION

Public relations contribute significantly to the successful promotion of products. Public relation techniques if they are used effectively they can achieve more specific promotion of products by increasing the sales and also the number of clients that are becomes and more interested in their products.

Public relations should be distinguished from anyother complementary activity that contribute to the promotional mix of a tourist enterprise.

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