

## 16. Public Relations and Customer Services

### *Objectives*

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to explain what public relations is, its meaning and functions as a management function or, indeed, as an instrument of management.

### 16.1 Public Relations

#### 16.1.1 Introduction

Public Relations is the deliberate and sustained effort to create good and favourable image for an organization or a person. In the case of a business organization, public relations is aimed at establishing cordial relationship between the organization and its publics. This sustained effort can translate into proper understanding of the organization and interest in its product(s), a situation which will increase sales and profit for the organization, and this is the ultimate objective of public relations effort.

#### 16.1.2 Definition or Meaning

There have been many attempts at defining public relations. Here is a selection:

According to the British Institute of Public Relations, Public relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. Recently, the same institute sought to make the words clearer, and arrived at the following definition: *Public relations practice is the planned effort to establish and improve the degree of mutual understanding between an organization or individual, and any groups of persons or organizations, with the primary objective of assisting that organization or individual to deserve, acquire and retain a good reputation.*

### 16.2 The Various Media of Public Relations

Generally, "media" has become an aggregate term for the press, broadcasting and film. For the public relations officer, the word should mean any and all the methods that can be used to communicate. It is proof of the professional skill of the public relations officer (PRO) to choose the appropriate medium for his purpose and "publics". It is important for the PRO to understand the types, cost and characteristics of the media available to him for effective action.

#### The Types of Media

##### (a) Basic media

Individual speech, personal, public speaking; T.V., radio techniques; Print -editorial, advertising, annual reports, employer reports, house journals; Two Dimensional Visual displays – graphics, photographs, slides, films, charts, Three dimensional displays – models, displays, signs.

## **(b) Composite media**

Press conferences, facility visits, exhibition, export promotion, sponsorship – sports, arts, books, films, sales presentation, education, conference and other activities.

- (i) **Individual speech or person-to-person:** This is one of the most powerful media. The opportunity to meet some important personalities, inside and outside an organization to talk about issues relating to their organization could be exciting. The success tip for such personal talks is that such addresses should be planned, say for every financial year, in the spirit or the practice and art of public relations. For instance, a panel of speakers and the list of relevant and interesting topics could be drawn up for the year on the basis of their relevant experience to the topics for discussion. This is known as Speaker's Bureau. Such speakers from within and outside the organization would be informed in advance.

Alternatively conferences could be organized for the purpose of giving addresses or lectures on the objectives, aspirations and achievements of the organization.

Another point of person-to-person communication is at end-of-year parties for the staff with some local dignitaries invited. Different departments of the organization are appreciated for their contributions to the growth of the organization; prizes could even be distributed. However, the list of person-to-person talks is unending, but a good public relations officer would ensure the success of such talks through planning appropriate of topics, timing, period of talk, as well as a good consideration of the speakers.

- (ii) **Radio and television technique:** This too has become very handy for the public relations officers and also crucial because of the immediacy and impact of the coverage of such techniques on its audience. Again, the message must be well-planned to suit the tastes of the organization's public. Firms could sponsor programmes, e.g. national programmes such as plays and shows. They could also arrange for question and answer interviews on the national station. Documentary films or photographs of a firm's activities could be shown on the television.
- (iii) **Advertising:** Firms could adopt advertising as an effective public relations technique. Organizations have ordained the most interesting parts of their activities for advertising purposes to their public. Such advertisements could come on T.V., in magazines and in the local and national press. Internet Websites could also be used to advertise at the international level.
- (iv) **National and local press:** In Nigeria today, there is a proliferation of national and local press – *The Punch, the Daily Times, the Sketch, the Guardian and the National Concord* are a few of the national newspapers. Such media could be put to an effective use by the PRO through feature writings and special coverage of his client's activities.
- (v) **Films:** Special films of the company's activities could be documented for show on local cinemas, T.V. for private showing to shareholders, employees, especially new employees at the stage of induction, and even to other organizations such as consumer and women organizations having interests in the firm. Such films could also be in form

of movie, magazine and newsreels – the latter is very powerful in educating the illiterate masses having interests in the organization's activities, goals and objectives.

- (vi) **Trade, technical and professional journals:** These are lumped together because they are especially prepared for selected readers under what is known as "controlled circulation". They normally command a very wide audience of immense technical and professional expertise. Such journals cover a wide spectrum of trades and professions such as electrical, mechanical, electronics, engineering, accountancy, medicine, law, chemistry and pharmaceuticals.
- (vii) **House journal:** This is to publicize such information that are of interest to the employees of the firm. The importance of house journals become clearer when one considers that the employees constitute the major force in a firm's resources. The total effect of a successful house journal is to remove rumours and possible unhealthy gossip in the organization by presenting facts.
- (viii) **Press conferences:** A good public relations practitioner will find important occasions where a press conference can be used to his client's advantage. Such occasions, among others, are when there are unfortunate incidents (e.g. the collapse of a bridge, or a building); announcement of new product discoveries, a new management team or even a new managing director, etc.
- (ix) **Facility visits:** These could be undertaken to draw the attention of a firm's "publics" to some of the products, machines, and other activities of the organization. Facility visits are ideal for finalist students in higher institutions who are potential employees and also for wholesalers and retailers.
- (x) **Exhibitions:** These are a common weapon of public relations. Exhibitions have been found very useful among artists, architects, fashion designers, farmers and manufacturing organizations among others. Exhibitions should be very well planned, such as giving it a wide publicity, they should be special invitation to its special "publics"; the appropriate location and hours of the event should be specified. A successful exhibition does not only give a good image of its promoter to the public but could also lead to on-the-spot purchase.
- (xi) **Trade fairs:** These have become the trade-in-stock of many state governments in Nigeria with the active co-operation of the various chambers of commerce. Trade fairs can be international as well. They command a wider spectrum than mere exhibitions. They are a forum for giving publicity to the real and potential industrial capacity of states and, in fact, the nation. They afford a meeting place for local, national and international business groups, among whom real and future contacts could be arranged. Orders could be placed for some of the goods on display. It is also an export promotion device, because it serves as an incentive to local producers. Like other public relations undertakings, it can be expensive in terms of energy and money.
- (xii) **Sponsorship:** Most firms adopt sponsorship as a form of public relations. Examples abound in sports as individual companies enjoy raising and financing sports clubs, e.g. football clubs such as Stationery Stores, ACB, Abiola Babes, Leventis and IICC were

sponsored by private organisations. Other football clubs include Iwuanyanwu Nationale and Julius Berger.

Some companies, such as Coca Cola, have sponsored national league matches and other sports at one time or the other by way of public relations and social responsibility. Scholarship also takes the form of education foundations. Scholarships are awarded to deserving scholars in special fields listed by the donors, scholarships are also awarded to Nigerian students who are in higher institutions studying course related to oil production other fields of study.

### 16.3 Consumer or Customer Services

Customer Services take different forms and some of these are described below:

- (i) **Expert or Professional Pre-survey Activities:** A good example is when borehole experts first come in to identify where water is available before they bring the borehole machine for drilling. Similarly, in farming activities, the soil could initially be examined in order to determine which types of crops would suit it. Another example is the pre-inspection of some types of sand that would be suitable for a brick-making industry. Similarly, there is usually a soil test before new highway roads and high rise buildings are constructed.
- (ii) **After-Sales Service:** This is service rendered to a customer after he has purchased goods – it can take the form of delivery of the goods to the customer's address; or the installation of a machine at the buyer's factory or residence.
- (iii) **Offer of a Guarantee:** This covers a period during which maintenance service would be offered to buyers of certain goods, at a minimum charge or free of charge, or a replacement of the product or goods.
- (iv) **Pre-emptive Breakdown Maintenance:** In the case of some goods, like motor vehicles or factory machinery or even motor battery, a schedule of regular services is offered the customer who would bring in the goods for regular services called maintenance.
- (v) **The Use of a Retention Fee:** In the case of building contractors, part of their fees is retained for a specific period after the completion of the contract job so that in case of any damage due to bad performance, the contractor could be recalled to make good the damage before he is finally paid.
- (vi) **Talks Organized for Consumers:** This can take the form of "how to use and maintain certain goods".

#### Summary

There are special "media" through which public relations practice is carried out, such as basic media and composite media.

#### Revision Questions

#### Essay Questions

1. Distinguish between exhibitions and trade fairs as public relations exercises or methods.

2. Compare and contrast the potency of sponsorship for sports and educational facilities in the practice of public relations.
3. If you were to choose between the use of radio and T.V. and films, which would be your choice? Indicate the different fora in which each of them can be used as a PRO.
4. Give a broad classification of the "media" of public relations.
5. State with brief explanations FIVE types of consumer services.

### ***Objective Questions***

Use the information below to answer questions 1 & 2

Companies I, II, III & IV produce and sell electronic videos. Company I sells its videos for ₦14,000 each and offers advice on how to fix and operate them. Company II sells at ₦14,000 and its representatives go to install at no additional cost. Company III sells at ₦15,000 and offers credit sales at ₦15,500 per video while Company IV sells at ₦15,000 each.

*(JAMB 2001)*

1. Which of these companies are more engaged in public relations activities?
  - A. III&II
  - B. I & II
  - C. I & III
  - D. II&IV
2. Which of these companies offers after-sales services?
  - A. III
  - C. IV
  - B. I
  - D. II
3. The strategy a seller adopts in order to endear himself to the customers, win acceptance and acquire goodwill is called
  - A. personal selling
  - B. persuasive advertising
  - C. promotion
  - D. publicity
  - D. public relations

*(NECO 2002)*

4. Which of these is a correct feature of public relations
  - A. it stimulates the good image of an organization
  - B. it means that some new products of a firm needs no advertisement
  - C. it brings instant success to a firm
  - D. it can take the place of marketing in a firm
5. One of these officers cannot take up the function of a public relations officer in a company

- A. the chief accountant
  - B. the assistant to the managing director on media
  - C. the corporate affairs officer
  - D. the press officer in the organization
6. Public Relations can be defined as
- A. the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain a mutual understanding between a firm and its publics.
  - B. the medium of advertising of a firm's product
  - C. propaganda
  - D. a sales promotion
7. A firm's new "shampoo" product has shaven off some ladies' hair when applied as a hair washing liquid. Which of the following would the firm find useful in the circumstance to redress its image?
- A. product segmentation
  - B. advertising
  - C. public relations activities
  - D. marketing
8. When an organization makes the attempt by information persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution, the organization is said to engage in
- A. marketing
  - B. promotion of its corporate image
  - C. public relations
  - D. advertising
9. One of these is not a media of public relations
- A. exhibition
  - B. trade fairs
  - C. films
  - D. sport festivals
10. In this group, one body has no business with consumer protection
- A. The government
  - B. Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON)
  - C. The Association of Media Practitioners
  - D. The Sanitary Inspectors

### **Project**

Mention 5 public relations practitioners in your state or country.