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Blending Advertising and Public Relations

Someone once said the difference between advertising and public relations is "Advertising is paid for, publicity is prayed for." Both are important to the total promotion of a company or organization... its products and services.

Let's face it, every successful organization (profit or non-profit) needs public goodwill, favorable public opinion, to survive in today's economic and social climate. Public opinion can make you. Or break you. And whether it's creating awareness, knowledge, conviction, demand for products and services or an overall favorable image for an organization, advertising and public relations help achieve promotional goals.

So how do they differ? How does each play a distinct and significant role in the communications process?

Scope and importance of advertising

The big advantage of advertising is control. Because you buy advertising time and space, you have total control over its placement. You control reach, frequency and continuity of a schedule for maximum effectiveness. And you have direct control over message content and creativity. In addition, you have a broad range of media available and the potential to reach a broad, mass audience.

On the other hand, viewers know that advertising is a biased message from a sponsor, so credibility is judged accordingly. In addition, running a strong schedule in order to build effective reach and frequency can be costly.

Scope and importance of public relations

Publicity is a highly cost effective way to generate public appreciation for the good performance of an organization. First, there is little or no cost for message time or space. However, public relations does require an investment. There are usually charges for message development, publicity departments/personnel and other items. Since messages are reported by independent media and not typically attributed to the sponsoring organization, they are usually highly credible. What's more, readers, viewers and listeners are likely to pay more attention to news reports than advertising.

The primary limitation of publicity is control. An organization has little or no control over messages, their timing or placement. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee messages will run at all. Publicity items are at the mercy of editorial staffs who decide on their newsworthiness or human interest value.

Obviously, a strategic combination of advertising and public relations is desirable and often necessary to create positive awareness for an organization's products and services, as well as a favorable reputation for the institution itself.

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