

## CHAPTER 22

# Business-to-business public relations



## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define and describe business-to-business public relations
- recognise the key role of the trade media in shaping perceptions
- identify the key principles of business-to-business public relations
- apply this understanding to simple, relevant scenarios
- recognise business-to-business activity through case examples
- apply the principles to real-life scenarios.

## Structure

- Core principles of business-to-business (B2B) public relations
- Trade journals and journalists
- Coordinating the communications disciplines
- Building corporate reputation

## Introduction

The concept of business-to-business (B2B) public relations is based on the recognition that most organisations sell to other businesses rather than directly to the consumer. The scope of such business transactions is enormous and incorporates products and services as diverse as aircraft and microchips. Each sector of the marketplace has its own operating environment but the fundamental need for public relations underpins all transactions.

The traditional focus of B2B public relations has been the use of *editorial* in trade magazines as a direct method of prompting sales enquiries. This pragmatic perspective of the role of B2B public relations has demonstrated the power of public relations in creating the sales environment in the economically massive US, European and international marketplaces.

However, contemporary B2B public relations uses the full scope of public relations as the business-to-business marketplace becomes increasingly sophisticated. An examination of entries into B2B categories in the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations Excellence Awards and the PRCA Frontline Awards shows how public relations is being successfully used to manage corporate reputations and build relationships as well as providing vital support for sales and marketing programmes.

**Definition:** *Editorial* refers to written text in a journal, magazine or newspaper that has been written either by a journalist/reporter or submitted by a public relations practitioner and then reviewed/edited before printing by the editor or sub-editor of the publication. Editorial is the opposite of advertising, which is bought (paid-for) space in a publication. Editorial is perceived as having greater impact because it has editorial endorsement by the publication and has support for its 'objectivity'.

## Core principles of business-to-business (B2B) public relations

The starting point for B2B public relations is a detailed understanding of the specific marketplace, the application of the products or services in question and an appreciation of the dynamics of the buying process. This reflects the traditional emphasis on supporting sales and the very real need for public relations activity to present the benefits of particular products and services.

Advocates of B2B public relations as a specialism say that the depth of marketplace understanding is a point of differentiation with consumer public relations (see Chapter 21), where practitioner knowledge of consumer behaviour outweighs the need for product and marketplace familiarity. (See Activity 22.1.)

**Definition:** Business-to-business (B2B) is defined as 'relating to the sale of a product for any use other than personal consumption. The buyer may be a manufacturer, a reseller, a government body, a non-profit-making institution or any organisation other than an ultimate consumer' (Cornelissen 2004: 184).

The characteristics of a business-to-business marketplace include:

- relatively small number of 'buying' publics – it may even be that potential customers can be named as individuals (e.g. manufacturers in the building trade will know of the specific builders' merchants who could stock their products: there may only be three or four)
- a specific application/end uses for products and services (e.g. a producer of thermal insulation boards for house building)
- defined product and service terms of technical specifications and any legal/trading restrictions (such as controls on building products like insulation requirements of windows or insulation boards, as in the previous example)

### activity 22.1

#### Finding B2B examples

Go into a large newsagent or magazine shop and see how many magazine/journal titles you can see which are non-consumer and are targeting the trade/specialist business-to-business marketplace.

#### Feedback

Examples might include *PR Week* in the UK or a regional business magazine. Other examples could be *Accountancy Age*, *Architecture Today*, *The Stage*, etc. (see Table 22.1).

- purchasing decision often negotiated individually and subject to finite contract periods.

This list indicates the depth of company and marketplace knowledge required by successful practitioners of B2B public relations. The traditional use of media relations techniques in trade and specialist magazines also requires a detailed understanding of the workings and requirements of these journals.

## Trade journals and journalists

The trade press is an important and integral part of the B2B marketplace. The UK is unusually well served by specialist publications covering all sectors from aerospace to waste management (see Table 22.1). The pan-European marketplace is not dissimilar, with prominent titles addressing all market sectors (see also Romeike website at [www.romeike.com](http://www.romeike.com) or PR Newswire at [www.prnewswire.co.uk](http://www.prnewswire.co.uk)).

Managers and professionals tend to read the titles particular to their trade or industry as part of their working lives. And it is this special linkage that attributes particular influence to trade and specialist magazines.

*Circulation* and *readership* relate to the size of the sector and the existence or otherwise of competitive titles. Thus a key trade publication such as *The Grocer* in the UK, which serves the food and drink industries, has a circulation of 54,000 and a readership of over 200,000. This dwarfs the *Architects' Journal*, one of the 64 titles covering the building sector in the UK. But both publications have the unique advantage of the trade press. They are read by decision makers in their sector. The loyalty of trade press readerships creates a strong role for their titles in the B2B cycle of influence and persuasion.

This accounts for the traditional B2B public relations focus on gaining editorial coverage in trade magazines. This role remains important and editorial staff on trade magazines are worthy of special attention.

**Definition:** *Circulation* refers to how many copies of the magazine are distributed.

**Definition:** *Readership* refers to the actual numbers predicted to read each circulated copy based on research. Note that more people read trade journals because they are based in an office with one subscription, which is shared, e.g. the *Architects' Journal* in an architects' practice is circulated around the team, often with comments on relevant or interesting features/articles. (See Mini case study 22.1, overleaf.)

TABLE 22.1 Examples of specialist business-to-business titles to be found under 'C'. The listing reflects the breadth and diversity of sectors

Cabinet Maker	Chocolate & Confectionery International	Computer Buyer
Cable & Satellite Europe	CHP Packer International	Computer Consultant
Cable & Satellite International	CHT Cleaning & Hygiene Today	Computer Finance
CABLEtalk	CiB News	Computer Fraud & Security
Cabling World	CIR Continuity Insurance & Risk	Computer Headline Scotland
CAD User	Circle Update	Computer Music
Cafe Culture	Circuits Assembly	Computer News Middle East
Call Centre Europe	City Confidential	Computer Reseller News
Call Centre Focus	City Planning	Computer Shopper
Campaign	Civic & Public Building Specifier	Computer Trade Shopper
Capacity	Civil Engineering	Computer Video
Caravan Industry and Park Operator	Civil Engineering Surveyor	Computer Weekly
Card Technology Today	Claims Professional	Computeractive
Card World	CLASS Magazine	Computergram International
Cards International	Clay Technology	Computers + Telecommunications in Africa
Care and Nursing Essentials	Cleaning & Maintenance	Computing
Care On The Road	Cleaning Matters	Computing Which?
Careers Adviser	Clearview (Midlands)	Concrete
Cargo Systems	Clearview (North)	Confectionery Production
Caring	Clearview (South)	Conference & Exhibition Fact Finder
Caring Times incorporating Homecare Professional	CLI Clinical Laboratory International	Conference & Incentive Travel
Caring UK	Client Server News	Connect
Carmarthenshire Business – Busnes Sir Gaerfyrddin	Clinica World Medical Device & Diagnostic News	CONNECTINGINDUSTRY.COM/electronics
Cash & Carry Management Inc.	Clinical Medicine	Conservatory Industries
Cash & Carry Wholesaler	Close-Up	Conservatory Magazine
Casino International	Club Journal	Conspectus
Castings Buyer	Club Mirror	Constabulary Magazine
CAT (Car & Accessory Trader)	Coach Monthly	Construction Europe
Catalogue and e-business	Coach Tours UK	Construction Magazine
Caterer & Hotelkeeper	Coal International	Construction Manager
Catering & Licensing Review	Coin Slot International	Construction National
Catering Manager	Cold Chain News	Construction News
Catering Post	Commerce & Industry	Contact Centre Management
Catering South West	Commercial Insurance	Container Management
Catering Update	Commercial Lawyer	Containerisation International
CBW Coach and Bus Week	Commercial Motor	Contraceptive Education Bulletin
CCTV Today	Commercial Property Monthly	Contract Journal
CFJ Contract Flooring Journal	Commercial Risk	Contrax Weekly
CFO Europe	Comms Business	Control Engineering Europe
CFR	Comms Dealer	Convenience Store
Chamberlink	Comms MEA	Converter
Channel Business	Communicate	Converting Today
Channel Middle East	Communications Africa	Co-operative News
Channel Moves	Communications News	Corporate Affairs
channelinfo	Communicators in Business	Corporate Citizenship Briefing
Charities Management	Community Care	Corporate Entertainer
Charity Finance	Community Pharmacy	Corporate Finance
Charity Times	Community Practitioner	Corporate IT Update
Chartered Secretary	Community Retailer	Corporate Location
Checkout	Company Car	Corporate Times
Chemical and Engineering News	Company Clothing	Corrosion Prevention & Control
Chemical Engineering	Company Van	
Chemical Week	Components in Electronics	
Chemist & Druggist	Computer Arts	
Chemistry & Industry	Computer Arts Projects	
Chemistry World	Computer Business Review	

TABLE 22.1 (Continued)

Cosmetics International	Create Online	CTE Cable Telecommunication
Cosmetics Products Report	Creation	Engineering
Cost Sector Catering	Creative Head	CTO Computer Trade Only
Counsel	Creative Review	Custom Installer
Countryside Focus	Credit & Car Finance	Customer Management
Coventry and Warwickshire Enterprise	Credit Management	Customer Relationship
Cover	Credit Today	Management
Cranes & Access	Crops	Customer Service News
Cranes Today	CSN Copy Shop News	CWB Childrenswear Buyer

## Trade journalists

As a public relations practitioner, you will routinely find that trade press journalists have a thorough understanding of their subject area. This fact creates both an opportunity and a challenge for the practitioner. You will have an informed and potentially responsive audience. But you will need to be knowledgeable and show your competence when dealing with trade journalists. However, also remember that we all have to start our careers somewhere. So you may be dealing with a ‘*cub*’ reporter or a journalist who has moved recently to a particular title. The big media groups have a raft of trade titles and journalists move frequently between titles and specialist areas. They may still be learning about their new subject area, maybe at the same time as you.

**Definition:** A *cub* reporter is a junior or trainee reporter/journalist.

When dealing with trade press journalists, as a rule of thumb, assume expertise. This is usually the case and it is common for editors of relatively small circulation magazines to be frequent commentators on television news programmes and in the national dailies. This is simply because such individuals do become genuine experts through their professional concentration on a subject area. For example, the editor of *The Grocer* is often used on national business broadcasts on radio and television as an expert commentator on supermarket trends and prices. Also *Jane’s Defence Weekly* editors are frequently called on to supply expert knowledge during armed conflicts around the world. See Activity 22.2.

## Story ideas

The news values of trade publications obviously have a sector-specific focus and regular reading of key magazines will readily identify the news angles adopted. Practitioners working in a B2B marketplace should be avid readers of the sector’s periodicals. Box 22.1 pro-

### activity 22.2

#### Trade magazines in your country

Do you know just how many trade magazines are published in your country? Use the internet or media databases such as PIMS or Romeike ([www.romeike.com](http://www.romeike.com)) to search the number of titles.

#### Feedback

You may be surprised by the number. In the UK there are titles relevant to a wide variety of sectors, from the railway industries to animal health, chemical processing and embalming.

vides some examples of typical B2B news angles for gaining editorial coverage.

News will usually be presented to the media through a press release but other techniques of regular use to B2B public relations practitioners include:

- one-to-one briefings
- photocalls
- feature articles
- case studies
- press conferences
- facility visits.

### box 22.1

#### Typical news angles for B2B editorial

Typical news angles for B2B editorial would include:

- new senior, technical and managerial appointments
- new products and services
- new technology and new processes
- new contracts
- unusual or problem-solving contracts and applications
- new premises
- market diversification or convergence
- partnerships, associations, mergers, takeovers.

## mini case study 22.1

## How trade publications are used



PICTURE 22.1 The *Architects' Journal* is one of 64 titles in the UK covering the building trade. This particular cover features an Adjaye/Associates scheme.

Source: Photograph Timothy Soar

The following case study shows how a practising architect uses B2B titles such as the *Architects' Journal* in his everyday working life. The architect is Nigel Jacques, director of one of the UK's largest commercial architecture firms, Carey Jones Architects:

'As an architectural practice we use the *Architects' Journal* and other similar trade magazines at varying levels and for different reasons. The *Architects' Journal* is used in our practice as an important technical and visual resource. It keeps us up to date with new design concepts, regulations and innovative materials and also with the legal and professional aspects of architecture.

'The more senior you are within the practice the more in depth you tend to read the *Architects' Journal*. At director level it is used as a resource for keeping up to date on a weekly basis with the market as it evolves and with new materials and design concepts. To a young design architect, the *Architects' Journal* is used more as a visual resource. When you read through an architectural trade magazine it is a media experience in which you are constantly absorbing knowledge and picking up ideas and inspiration on an often subliminal level. Architecture is an art, which

## CAREYJONESARCHITECTS

means that we are constantly looking at visual stimuli first and foremost and then looking in more detail and noticing aspects of design such as products or innovative use of materials.

'The *Architects' Journal* can influence buying and design decisions in as much that an architect might notice a particular material and/or form used in a building on an image and start thinking how it may influence a Carey Jones' scheme. Technical articles within the *Architects' Journal*, for instance, indicate in detail how the material was used effectively in the design and who the supplier is.

'The journal also contributes to sector understanding as it provides an up-to-date and informative source of current trends, regulations and changes in legislation which could impact on the practice. As well as an architectural resource, it is therefore also a useful trend predictor. In growing and developing your business you are constantly monitoring the performance of other practices (the *Architects' Journal* top 100 architects, for instance), watching the political environment and organisations with whom you may wish to collaborate or who may directly impact upon your business. The *Architects' Journal* can be used as a tool for all these things.

'In terms of alternative thinking and inspiring creativity, the *Architects' Journal* contributes in as much that it features the commercial conformists, the individuals and the mavericks of the trade. The visual illustrations can inspire architects with ideas for their own work and often promote healthy debate.

'Our PR consultants also target the *Architects' Journal* as a means of raising our profile as a national practice and we are frequently approached by journalists for comment on national and project-specific issues. However, publications of this nature can also be responsible for negative comment and it can be somewhat frustrating when publications are predictable and frequently one sided. A good relationship with journalists though can help to offset this and allow you the opportunity to respond to potential negative coverage. Regular positive editorial coverage within national trade publications adds equity to the Carey Jones brand, acts as an efficient business development tool when read by key decision makers, contributes to the 'feel good' factor within the practice as an excellent motivator and attracts high calibre staff to our practice.

'The *Architects' Journal* is a key resource for Carey Jones, without which we would be working within a vacuum with regard to current trends. Every design practice needs to monitor the macro environment within which it operates and without national trade publications like the *Architects' Journal* this would prove extremely difficult.'

Source: Carey Jones Architects

These techniques are covered in Chapter 16, but here are some other techniques that are available to the public relations practitioner.

## Advertorials

The advertorial is also used frequently in B2B promotional campaigns. Advertorials are paid-for advertisements designed to look like editorial. However, journals will always indicate clearly the sponsoring company in order to differentiate from editorial. So although advertorials may look like editorial, they do not have the credibility of news or features material written and/or edited by journalists.

From the practitioner's perspective, advertorial is often regarded as promotional material and treated much like a newsletter or a company publication.

## Websites

Particular note must also be taken of the specialist websites gaining common currency in most industry sectors. Many specialist and trade publications maintain their own websites to complement their printed publications. Equally, the trade associations operating in each sector often have websites. Major industry events such as conferences, seminars and exhibitions are also frequently supported by websites. Such websites are both a vital source of information for practitioners and offer an additional source of target outlets for placing product and corporate news and information. In the UK, a good starting point for seeking industry-sector websites is via the Chartered Institute of Public Relations website – [www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk).

Beyond the specific product or company-related news items, trade magazines offer a particularly good opportunity to place commentary on marketplace, technology and product developments. In-depth material available through your client company may be highly valued by the editor of trade magazines. In practice, this creates the opportunity for a client or

company to be seen as a source of authoritative industry information. (See Think about 22.1, Case study 22.1 and Think about 22.2, overleaf)

## Coordinating the communications disciplines

The use of public relations techniques to support the sales environment is well understood and is often the motivation for appointing a public relations manager or using a public relations consultancy. Practitioners can demonstrate that insightful and creative public relations can both indirectly and directly generate sales.

In B2B public relations, an understanding of the role of other communication disciplines is essential, as is the timing and coordinated application of the right techniques. Public relations practitioners working in B2B often display an in-depth understanding of advertising, direct mail and sales promotion and of how public relations can act as a unifying mechanism. This is particularly true where editorial placement techniques are being used as an element in the promotional part of the marketing mix. The marketing mix, originally defined by Borden (1964), is the combination of the major tools of marketing otherwise known as the 4Ps – product, price, promotion and place (see Table 22.2, overleaf).

Figure 22.1 (overleaf) shows some of the promotional disciplines typically employed in B2B marketing. All are aimed at supporting the sales effort and their application reflects views on the best way to reach decision makers. It is often not enough to rely on one channel, hence most promotional campaigns use a combination of techniques to make up the promotion aspect of the 4Ps in the marketing mix.

## Role of advertising

Advertising has the very particular job of placing a proposition in front of the target audience. The

### think about 22.1

### Becoming an expert

How would you as a public relations practitioner become an expert on your company, its products and services and their application?

**Feedback** To build understanding, we often need to spend a lot of time researching the company and its products and services. For public relations practitioners, this can mean taking time to work with the company, spending time in different departments and perhaps learning to use the products.

## case study 22.1

**Charles Yorke**

PICTURE 22.2 The public relations campaign emphasised the craftwork and quality in the product range.

### Using the trade media to create the sales environment

This case study shows how a specific business need can be fulfilled by a well-planned and tightly executed trade media campaign.

Charles Yorke is a division of the Symphony Group plc: one of the UK's largest independent providers of fitted furniture. Responding to the growing demand for craftsman-built bespoke kitchens, the company needed to establish a retailer base in order to take its product offer effectively to the trade marketplace and ultimately to the consumer. MCG Public Relations proposed very clear public relations campaign objectives:

- to recruit retailers by creating a desire for the Charles Yorke brand in the industry
- to enhance Symphony's reputation as a supplier of premium, as well as volume, kitchen furniture
- to communicate the originality of Charles Yorke's designs and products.

### Planning and research

MCG Public Relations carried out one-to-one interviews with all key trade journalists in the sector and also spoke to existing Symphony retailers to assess knowledge and perceptions of the Charles Yorke brand and the Symphony Group. It was clear that, although Symphony was seen as a well-established major manufacturer, there was little knowledge of its bespoke provision.

The results were used to create key messages for all communications associated with the campaign and also to help select tailored and targeted tactics to reach the designated audiences.

### Implementation

Preview visits to Charles Yorke's manufacturing facility were organised with selected trade journalists to see craftsmen in action and the showroom of latest kitchen designs.

Exclusive features were devised to give selected journalists unique news material, from trade magazine *Cabinet Maker's* profile of Charles Yorke's Manufacturing Director, to *Kitchen Designer's* preview of the new kitchen design concepts.

'Kitchen Showcase' – a premium-end industry exhibition – was chosen to launch Charles Yorke's latest kitchen designs, placing the brand firmly in the bespoke/craftsman-built sector.

AGA – a household name in kitchen appliances – was chosen as a partner at the showcase exhibition to demonstrate the synergy between the brands, both in terms of heritage and innovation.

Maytag – the premium US manufacturer of fridge/freezers – was also chosen to partner at the Charles Yorke stand, ensuring that the brand's contemporary, as well as traditional, design executions were depicted.

Tailored press packs were created for all trade journalists and freelancers, with an extensive CD library of quality photography and exclusive, carved cheeseboards to show Charles Yorke craftsmanship.

Choosing to stock a new kitchen brand is a major decision for a retailer, often entailing the replacement of existing displays and complete studio refurbishment. MCG ensured that interested retailers were shown the added value of becoming a Symphony brand stockist, by providing public relations support in terms of trade and local publicity. Early consumer media coverage was also secured, in order to strengthen the marketing support messages for retailers.

### Outcome and evaluation

First, 30 retailers signed up to become Charles Yorke stockists, 19 of which were attributed directly to the



### case study 22.1 (continued)

public relations campaign. The support mechanism created for retailers resulted in ongoing relationships, with 'customer home' features compiled for the follow-up consumer campaign.

A post-campaign trade media audit showed a clear shift in perceptions regarding the strength and depth of Symphony's product offer. More than 20 items of positive trade media coverage were achieved, each containing the agreed key messages about the Charles Yorke brand and Symphony Group proposition.

Mutually beneficial publicity relationships continued with AGA and Maytag, further strengthening Charles Yorke's brand image. Also, Symphony's reputation with key trade journalists was substantially enhanced, ensuring a platform for the full spectrum of its product portfolio.

#### Observations

This campaign by MCG Public Relations provides a model of how to use the trade media to develop tangi-

ble business benefits. Prior to the campaign, time was taken to understand the requirements and knowledge levels of trade journalists. This resulted in a campaign planned around their needs. As required, sales leads were generated and both product and corporate reputation are enhanced substantially.

Alison Andrews of Symphony said:

*This campaign led to many high-quality enquiries from potential retailers of which 19 were converted into actual sign-ups. The tailored and targeted nature of their programme ensured that only premium-market design studios approached us and each had a clear perception of the Charles Yorke brand and values. Rather than being perceived as just another new product range for Symphony, the launch of Charles Yorke shifted industry perceptions about the strength and depth of the whole company.*

Source: Charles Yorke

strength of advertising is in the control of message delivery. Your message is placed in front of a known audience at an agreed point in time. This precise control of the message, audience and timing can make advertising very effective. And in the B2B arena, results can usually be measured and analysed.

The very best advertisements offer a single proposition in a highly creative way. In the B2B marketplace, there should always be a 'call to action', making it clear what we are asking interested readers to do – phone this number, send in this coupon, access this website.

Advertising spend should not be used to attempt to influence editorial decisions. Some sales and marketing managers may believe that the importance of advertising revenue to trade magazines means that big advertisers can expect an editorial *quid pro quo* (obtain editorial coverage if they have paid for advertising space). This is not the case. Editorial staff cherish their independence and this should be re-

spected. Editorial decisions should be based on the news value of 'copy' submitted in the form of press releases and news features – see also Chapter 16.

**Definition:** *Copy* refers to a term used generically by the communications industries to describe written text for news releases, adverts, advertorials, editorials, articles and in-house newsletter articles, etc.

Advertising has a defined role in placing repetitive messages in front of buying audiences. Hence its value in B2B marketing. Public relations can be used in a complementary way to expand on a necessarily simple advertising message and to broaden audience reach. It is also worth noting that news value is usually enhanced if editorial is offered before an advertising campaign. Something that is already being advertised can not really be regarded as 'news'.

## think about 22.2

### Business to business as a public relations specialism

Public relations practitioners regard B2B as a specialism unlike others. This is primarily because of the special emphasis placed on supporting the sales effort and understanding the marketplace. Think again about how B2B public relations has been defined and how this differs from consumer public relations (see also Chapter 21).

TABLE 22.2 The marketing mix

Price	Product
Cost	Product management
Profitability	New development
Value for money	Product features and benefits
Competitiveness	Branding
Incentives	Packaging
	After-sales service
Place	Promotion
Access to target market	Promotional mix
Channels to market	Public relations
Retailers and distributors	Advertising
Logistics	Sales promotion
	Sales management
	Direct marketing

or compile themselves. Responses are tracked and measured with precision.

Direct marketing is becoming increasingly sophisticated as a promotional technique as communication channels, message content and response rates can be tracked and refined. Public relations supports direct marketing by building the credibility and reputation of the organisation. It is able to do this by placing key messages in front of target audiences.

**Role of sales promotion**

Sales promotion techniques such as special offers, 'bogofs' (buy one, get one free), vouchers, redeemable gifts, competitions, etc. are well established in consumer marketing and are being used increasingly in B2B. This is simply because a well-thought-through sales promotion can work and has a single objective – to increase sales. Sales promotions can also be popular with sales teams as it gives them something specific to offer their customers.

**Role of direct marketing**

Direct marketing is appropriately named as a promotional technique. The proposition is put directly to the prospective buyer, for example in a leaflet, flyer or brochure, without an intermediary such as a distributor, agent or salesperson. This creates its major advantage in many B2B marketplaces where there is an identifiable and discrete number of buyers and/or influencers. Direct marketers work from target lists (databases) that they either buy from a list brokerage

**Definition:** *Bogof* is an abbreviated term used in sales promotion for selling two products for the price of one, 'buy one, get one free'.

Sales promotion is very distinct from public relations but the disciplines do have much in common. When they run in tandem their effectiveness in creating sales opportunities can be enhanced. The linkage between sales promotion and public relations is strong because sales promotions can offer benefits that supplement the basic product, price, place and offer.

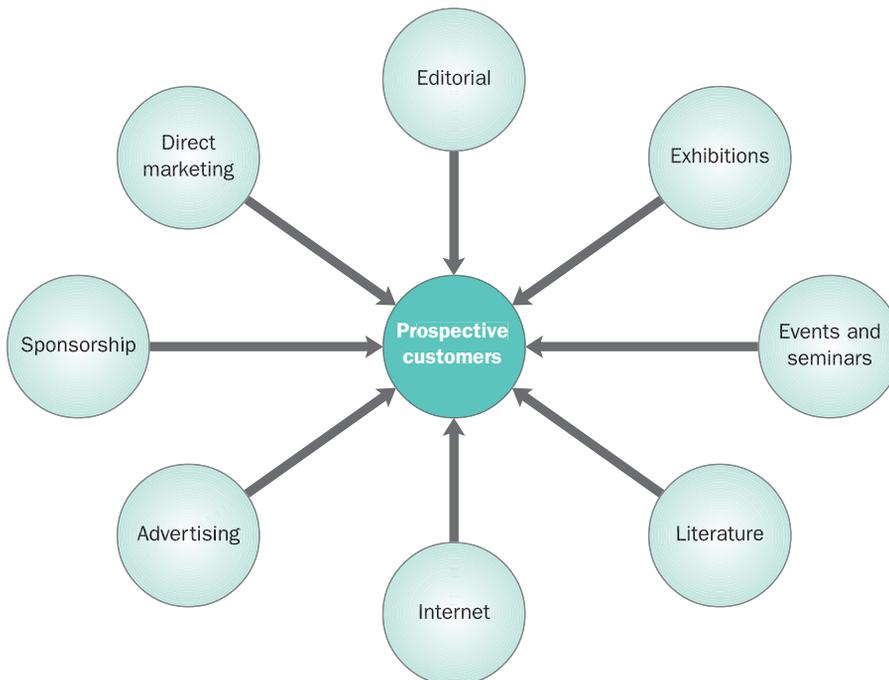


FIGURE 22.1 Promotional disciplines used in business-to-business marketing

## Role of public relations

Public relations can support the other promotional disciplines and be a promotional technique in its own right. Undoubtedly, the most effective use of the promotional disciplines is shown when there is clear coordination in the planning stage. Common themes can be developed that 'work' in all channels, albeit with content and messages presented in different ways to different audiences at different times.

Creative routes can be developed jointly through 'brainstorming' and practitioners in all the disciplines can work to a shared timetable. Cost savings will be demonstrated through minimising the time input of contributing professionals and through shared creative work (artwork, photography, etc.).

**Definition:** *Brainstorming* means getting a group of colleagues to discuss an issue and come up with different ideas collectively.

The special role of public relations is in taking the proposition to a broader range of influencers through the use of media relations and other public relations techniques. Of course, public relations as defined in marketing terms, as one element of the marketing mix (see Table 22.2), is a more limited concept than you will find elsewhere in this book. For a fuller discussion of public relations and marketing, see Chapter 26. Public relations in its larger sense is also of value to B2B communications, as discussed in the later section, 'Building corporate reputation'. (See Box 22.2.)

The best B2B campaigns invariably use the appropriate promotional techniques in a parallel and supportive way. (See Think about 22.3 and Case study 22.2.)

## Building corporate reputation

The use of editorial to support the sales environment is an essential element of most B2B public relations

### box 22.2

#### Activities used in B2B public relations campaigns

Most frequently, editorial will be the lead public relations tool. Other activities used in B2B public relations campaigns include:

- newsletters
- literature
- internet
- seminars
- briefings
- conferences
- roadshows
- awards and competitions
- presentations
- sponsorship and endorsements.

campaigns. However, there is a fundamental difference between media relations as a promotional technique and the comprehensive application of public relations methodology to analyse trends, counsel organisational leaders and to plan and deliver reputation-building communications programmes. Media relations can be used as part of the marketing mix alongside the other promotional disciplines such as advertising and direct mail to great effect. But the real power of public relations is seen when applied as a strategic planning tool in support of top-line corporate objectives.

An examination of award-winning B2B public relations campaigns shows a clear trend. The support for sales and marketing efforts, usually through a thoroughly planned approach to trade media relations, is undiminished. But senior practitioners are imposing their professionalism on client organisations to use public relations methodology to plan strategically, to integrate and unify communications and to build reputation with key stakeholders before the sales process is engaged. Good examples can be found on the websites of national public relations organisations such as the UK's CIPR and PRCA.

### think about 22.3

### B2B in action

Can you think of an exhibition/sponsorship campaign in your country or internationally that is targeted at B2B audiences?

**Feedback** Think about big trade shows, for example motor shows, where cars are launched to the 'trade', i.e. the people who then go on to sell them to us, the consumers. There are many other big specialist shows/exhibitions, such as for the print industry (do a search for 'printing exhibitions' in Germany on the internet), building and even the conference/exhibition industry! To see the range of international trade exhibitions held at one site, look at the Barcelona 'Fira' Exhibition and Trade Fair venue at [www.firabcn.es](http://www.firabcn.es)

## case study 22.2

## smartLite

### Coordinating the communications disciplines

This case study of B2B public relations demonstrates how a pan-European trade show was used to great effect to create media interest in a new technology with the ultimate aim of preparing the ground for sales-force activity. It also illustrates the successful incorporation and coordination of other communication techniques, such as an exhibition, website, advertising, literature and direct mail, in order to deliver the desired results.

Ash Communications was tasked with creating and organising the European launch of a new footwear-soleing technology, smartLite, to technology, footwear, lifestyle and creative design media at a prestigious trade show in Bologna, Italy. Its client was the industrial conglomerate Huntsman.

The public relations objectives of the campaign were specific and geared to ensuring a successful launch of the new product by:

- attracting 10 journalists (minimum target) to the launch
- ensuring perception of smartLite as a premium, highperformance, lightweight, aesthetically creative and innovative product
- recording the number of media impressions (number of times the product was mentioned/featured in all media) including key messages (coverage achieved in trade publications).

### The launch Launch programme

Ash Communications prepared a campaign strategy focusing on an insight into consumers' footwear purchasing habits. Importantly, the public relations activity used the themes that would be taken up in supporting promotional activity, such as advertising, direct mail, website and sales literature.

### Launch presentation

Ash consultants liaised with the product technicians to provide presentations at the launch that would endorse the technology and provide real-life experience of handling and creatively working with the material. They also wrote the copy for sales literature and edited website copy, in order to ensure consistency of product messages.

### Media relations

The consultancy acted as the creative agency to create and copywrite a 'teaser' media invitation, targeting Europe-wide footwear, lifestyle, technology, creative design, national, regional, broadcast and online media. It agreed communications messages based on the consumer insight and prepared a full press pack, including design concept images.

The daily show magazine was targeted to attract attending journalists and to communicate subsequently the new technology to a wider audience.

The Italian office of Ash organised the media launch, liaising with the local organisers, caterers and audiovisual technicians to ensure the smooth running of the presentation.

### Evaluation

- Total media in attendance at launch: 18
- Total editorial pieces: 25
- Total media impressions: 1,500,000

### What the media said

'Soft, light and strong smartLite soles', ARS Sutoria, Italy  
 'Perfect footwear technology', Ayaks, Turkey  
 'A fusion of technology, creativity and innovation', La Pelle, Italy

### Observations

This case study demonstrates the mainstream use of B2B public relations applied on a pan-European basis. The consultancy used the vehicle of the trade show to manage the media and present with great success the new product's key messages. Significantly, the work forms part of a wider marketing campaign using other communication techniques and helped the Huntsman salesforce to gain meetings with business customers and to sell the new technology. The role of Ash Communications was not just to manage the media opportunities created by the exhibition but to help unify and coordinate the other promotional disciplines. For this to happen with this level of success requires the consultancy to combine the essential tenets of B2B public relations: detailed product and marketplace understanding; thorough public relations planning and implementation; and an understanding of how the promotional disciplines work together to achieve results.

Source: used with kind permission of  
Ash Communications

The most effective use of public relations from an organisational perspective is to build a favourable reputation with key stakeholders. And this process is critical to B2B communications where 'reputation' is the essential element in the buying process. No one wants to do business with an organisation without a reputation, and certainly not with an organisation with a poor reputation. Thus the public relations function in a B2B organisation has the same remit as that applied in a consumer or public sector organisation – to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics.

This reputation-building role will become increasingly important as external stakeholders, including customers and activist groups, start to look at the organisation behind the brand and make purchasing decisions based on wider judgements including social responsibility considerations and corporate ethics (see also Chapters 6, 11 and 15).

Organisational leaders with an understanding of public relations are using public relations in two interconnected ways, regardless of the size of the operation. Public relations works as a promotional tool with the other marketing disciplines such as advertising and sales promotion. But public relations is also being used to manage the organisational reputation with audiences beyond the marketing remit, such as shareholders, the local community, staff, suppliers and government at all levels. (See Activity 22.3 and Case study 22.3.)

### activity 22.3

#### Managing reputation

Use the internet to find an example of a B2B company that actively uses a wide range of communications techniques to manage its reputation.

### case study 22.3

## CPP Group

### Building corporate reputation

This campaign by public relations consultancy Financial Dynamics on behalf of its client, the CPP Group, provides an example of creative public relations that aims to build corporate reputation. The methodology is more typical of consumer public relations but is here applied with outstanding results in a B2B environment. (This campaign was a finalist in the UK CIPR Excellence Awards, see website [www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk))

The CPP Group is an international provider of everyday consumer assistance products, with 11.3 million customers worldwide. It offers a number of services including:

- credit card protection
- retrieval service for lost or stolen keys
- emergency service for everyday domestic problems
- mobile phone insurance
- insurance, advice and support for people with debt worries.

CPP works with many partners, including high street banks, which re-brand CPP products as their own, leading to virtual anonymity for CPP among end consumers.

### Public relations objectives

The public relations objectives of this 12-month communication programme were to build greater awareness of the company among corporate audiences, to profile new and existing products in trade and special-

ist publications and to increase the 'share of voice' for CPP and its products.

### Implementation

Rather than simply promote CPP's range and products, the campaign focused on product-related issues of concern to the customer, both to raise CPP's profile and position it as a consumer champion. Robust, topical research formed the backbone of the campaign, with each topic carefully considered for impact in terms of delivering optimum news value and boosting CPP's sales figures. Research was undertaken on a quarterly basis, enabling CPP to examine trends and become more central to industry debate – achieving results such as the lead story on the front page of UK national newspaper *The Daily Express* (circulation 945,000).

Announcements linked to other products, such as home emergency and mobile phone insurance, worked in synergy with CPP's product marketing activity so that different issues were prioritised at different points in the year. Finance Dynamics carried out an aggressive media programme, based on regular consumer omnibus research, to provide contemporary news angles.

Proactive news releases generated for CPP included:

- 15 February – 'Fear of debt soars by 44% in three months'
- 28 February – 'Mobile phones top the league of most useful modern inventions'
- 12 March – 'Consumers display lax attitude toward plastic card fraud'

### case study 22.3 (continued)

- 3 May – ‘Young Britons crippled by financial commitments’
- 13 June – ‘It may be good to talk . . . but it’s clearly better to text’
- 20 August – ‘Obsession with home improvement TV puts Britons at risk of injury and expense’
- 17 September – ‘1 in 10 only alarmed by debt when they lose their home or partner’
- 2 October – ‘Britons ill-prepared for rollout of chip and pin’
- 12 November – ‘Brits’ patriotic tendencies revealed in mobile phone tune hate list’
- 5 December – ‘CPP Group plc promotes improved financial awareness with new product launch’
- 10 December – ‘Credit card spending cut back this Christmas’

Financial Dynamics also undertook a number of additional public relations initiatives throughout the year. These included the launch of CPP’s new financial advice and support service, Financial Health, which capitalised on the strong relationships with journalists from the debt index stories. A programme of media briefings was organised between target business writers and the new CPP Group Chief Executive, Andrew Fisher, to help build the company’s corporate profile. A weekly ‘Box of Tricks’ was created to allow opportunistic CPP comment ‘piggybacking’ (working alongside or aligned to) the news agenda, to help maintain CPP’s position at the cutting edge of industry issues.

#### Evaluation and measurement of the campaign

The campaign generated 373 pieces of news coverage – 19% of which appeared in the national media. CPP’s average share of voice in the market against competitors – including Barclaycard, RBS, Egg, National Debtline and Citizens Advice Bureau – was 18%.

Seventy per cent of all coverage included at least one of CPP’s key messages: ‘Fear of debt soars by 44% in three months’ generated the greatest media interest, with 51 positive news hits, including national

dailies and trade publications, and the ‘Elderly set for a winter of debt and discontent as tax hikes hit hard’ press release led to the lead, front-page story in UK national paper *The Daily Express*.

Presence in home news, rather than just the money pages, suggests that the campaign succeeded in positioning CPP with consumers as well as with trade audiences.

Coverage for CPP achieved a potential audience reach of more than 146 million people. Based on flat-rate card figures, coverage was valued at over £583,000 – five times greater than public relations fees and expenses.

The campaign was vigorously evaluated every quarter, enabling Financial Dynamics to present the value of public relations as a discipline to CPP’s internal audiences and offer quarterly recommendations for continuous improvement to the programme. The positive results shown through evaluation correlate with coverage volumes rising by an average of 20% per quarter.

Rob Miatt, Marketing Manager for CPP, commented: ‘The targeted media relations approach via regular, thought-provoking and hard-hitting research led by the news agenda gave us a strong media following, raised our profile amongst an important consumer audience, forged our position as an industry leader, and even made us front-page news.’

#### Observations

This case study offers an example of contemporary public relations activity that is able to encompass the traditional B2B role with the substantial ‘added value’ of developing a simultaneous consumer-facing campaign. The regular use of research provides both the trade and consumer media with the relevant material while positioning CPP as the major industry commentator. The annual public relations programme is acting as a major platform for building the corporate reputation of CPP that can be supported subsequently by other activities.

Source: [www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk)

## Summary

B2B public relations will always concentrate on supporting the commercial performance of an organisation. The mainstay of this support will be well-placed editorial, especially in the trade media read by influencers and decision makers in the buying process. This ‘works’ and there are good examples showing just how the craft skills of public relations can be applied with outstanding results. This core activity is fundamental to B2B public re-

lations and B2B practitioners are able to demonstrate a masterful knowledge of their client organisations, of products, services and applications, and of the mechanisms of the marketplace.

The understanding that buying decisions are not solely based on promotion, price, place and product (the marketing mix: Brassington and Pettitt 2003) but also on *reputation* offers scope for public relations practitioners

to adopt a holistic approach to B2B communications. The concept of the influence of the 'brand' is established in consumer public relations. We are now recognising that the brand – and all it stands for – is also relevant to B2B.

It is also the case that buying decisions are no longer left to individuals in an organisation. Their decisions may have to withstand the scrutiny of a range of internal and

external stakeholders. Thus an integrated communications strategy is essential, with consistent messages being communicated to diverse audiences.

B2B campaigns will always focus on the bottom line to support sales and marketing targets. The very best work is planned strategically to help enhance corporate reputation and show clear and consistent linkage through to all internal and external communications.

## Bibliography

Black, C. (2001). *The PR Practitioner's Desktop Guide*. London: Hawksmere.

Brassington, F. and S. Pettitt (2003). *Principles of Marketing*. London: Pearson.

Borden, N. (1964). 'The concept of the marketing mix'. *Journal of Advertising Research*, June: 2–7.

Cornelissen, J. (2004). *Corporate Communications: Theory and practice*. London: Sage.

Davis, A. (2004). *Mastering Public Relations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gregory, A. (ed.) (2004). *Public Relations in Practice*. London: Kogan Page.

Hart, N. (1998). *Business to Business Marketing*. London: Kogan Page.

Haywood, R. (1998). *Public Relations for Marketing Professionals*. Basingstoke: Macmillan .

Howard, W. (ed.) (1988). *The Practice of Public Relations*. London: Heinemann.

## Websites

Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR): [www.cipr.co.uk](http://www.cipr.co.uk)

Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA): [www.prca.org.uk](http://www.prca.org.uk)

PR Newswire: [www.prnewswire.co.uk](http://www.prnewswire.co.uk)

Romeike: [www.romeike.com](http://www.romeike.com)