



Advice from the Experts

PR, Branding and Reputation Management to Build Image, Positioning and Competitive Advantage

The art and science of public relations is gaining increasing recognition for its ability to launch new brands, position companies and build reputation and competitive advantage. The recognition comes in many forms, from increased budgets by happy clients to validation in research studies, articles, books and documented results.

Quite simply, PR works. More complex, it goes beyond cranking out news releases and giving parties. Winning PR requires sound research, good strategic thinking and aggressive implementation to change perceptions and behavior. The team at Gable PR is always on the hunt for new ideas to keep our client programs on the forefront of good planning and creativity. Some recent books have been particularly stimulating and we thought we would share a few excerpts:

Reputation – Realizing Value from the Corporate Image – Charles Fombrun

To achieve prestige requires a long-term outlook toward building competitive advantage. Companies develop winning reputations by both creating and projecting a set of skills that their constituents recognize as unique.

A reputation develops from a company's uniqueness and from identity-shaping practices – maintained over time – that lead constituents to perceive the company as credible, reliable, trustworthy, and responsible. In turn, a company's established reputation helps to protect it from rivals trying hard to imitate its practices.

Reputation builds strategic value for a company by granting it a competitive advantage that rivals have trouble overcoming. To achieve that advantage, however, a company must develop appropriate practices, or character traits, as it were, that rivals find difficult to imitate.

Marketers, advertisers and public relations specialists help to create attractive images of a company. Indeed, many companies rely quite heavily on PR professionals to shape the perceptions of those looking in from the outside – principally the

customers. But unless those images are anchored in core characteristics of the company and its products or services, they will decay.

The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding – Al Ries and Laura Ries

Today brands are born, not made. A new brand must be capable of generating favorable publicity in the media or it won't have a chance in the marketplace.

What others say about your brand is so much more powerful than what you can say about it yourself. That's why publicity in general is more powerful than advertising. And why over the past two decades, public relations has eclipsed advertising as the most powerful force in branding.

Credentials are the collateral you put up to guarantee the performance of your brand. When you have the right credentials, your prospect is likely to believe almost anything you say about your brand.

Credentials are particularly important in the publicity process. Reporters and editors are quick to dismiss advertising claims as puffery.

The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing -- Al Ries and Jack Trout

20. The law of hype -- When things are going well, a company doesn't need the hype. When you need the hype, it usually means you are in trouble.

The New Positioning, McGraw Hill -- Jack Trout, with Steve Rivkin

In spite of its overwhelming acceptance by the advertising community, it's possible that positioning will come to play an even greater role in public relations.

The general rule is: PR first, advertising second. (PR plants the seed. Advertising harvests the crop.)

The truth is, advertising can't start a fire. It can only fan a fire after its been started. To get something out of nothing, you need the validity that third-party endorsements bring.

If you don't have a simple, differentiating idea to drive your company or brand, you'd better have a great price.

The Fall of Advertising (& the Rise of PR) – Al Ries and Laura Ries

The first stage of any new campaign ought to be public relations.

If you want to launch a new brand today, you need a message that gets media attention. Without publicity your new brand will fail no matter how good the product

or how good the service. It's not enough to have a better product or service. You need a better PR idea.

Every brand that gets to the top got there by favorable publicity. It may have been a better product, but without publicity it's not going to go anywhere. (Note: the book has abundant case histories on how major brands were built through PR and before advertising hit, including VW, Microsoft and Starbucks. He also cites many popular advertising campaigns where the advertising won awards and the brand lost market share [Got Milk, Budweiser Wassupp, Joe Izuzu, among others]).

When you want to establish a leadership claim, it's especially important to use the media to give your brand the credentials it needs. It's not enough to get stories in newspapers, articles in magazines, or interviews on radio or television, although these can help. What is absolutely necessary is to get your leadership claim authenticated by the media.

You have to give your PR efforts enough time to produce results. Impatience kills more good PR ideas than poor execution. The better the idea, the longer it is going to take to implant that idea into someone's mind. It's new, it's different, and it's instantly under suspicion. Media people are sometimes just as skeptical as consumers.

Strategy is more important for a PR program than it is for an advertising program. You can always run an ad even if your strategy is atrocious. But PR is different. If the strategy is bad, the publicity is non-existent. With PR you give up the luxury of reaching everybody in favor of reaching somebody who counts. Somebody will carry your message to friends, relatives, neighbors. (Most brands are first purchased because of personal recommendations, not because of advertising or even publicity mentions.)

The emphasis in PR is not on reach and certainly not on frequency. The emphasis in PR is on the credentials of the medium and the quality of the plug. You need both. (A favorable mention in *The Wall Street Journal* is worth a lot more than a lavish plug in some minor publication.)

Brand building takes place inside the prospect's mind. And only the media have the credibility to plant a new idea in the mind. If you are going to build a brand from scratch, only the media can do the job.

No brand starts from a position of strength. All brands were built from scratch. The essence of brand building is to furnish the materials that allow the media to build the brand. That is the essence of the PR business today.

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