

Some good public relations protects firm's reputation

Public Relations—PR for short—is now centre stage at the massive recalls of a number of makes and models of cars made by global automakers Toyota and Honda. At Toyota, it's floor mats and sticky accelerator pedals. It's brakes on Prius hybrids. It's steering on Corollas. At Honda, it's problems with power windows and faulty air bags. All together, about 12 million cars recalled—so far.

Toyota has already ramped up a PR ad campaign in major newspapers, attempting to repair their reputation, only to be dismissed by cries of “too little, too late” by the media. For Mississauga businesses, here's a guide to “Public Relations 101.”

Public Relations is the keeper of your reputation.

Although the field of PR is more than 100 years old, many business people confuse it with marketing, advertising, and publicity stunts.

What I tell my clients is that PR has four goals: to establish, promote, protect, and sometimes salvage the reputations of their companies. Your reputation is your most important business tool and asset. You're not going to sell any products or services if no one trusts you.

The most senior PR person sits at the right-hand of the CEO.

The most senior person has input into all major strategic decisions a business makes, and has the authority to interact (and sometimes over-ride) other business functions like operations, finance, IT, HR, and so on.

It may be legal to do certain things, but is it ethical? Think back to U.S. sub-prime mortgages: high-pressure sales tactics were used to sign up mortgagees who didn't have a clue, just so salespeople would meet their daily quotas, just so they'd get a paycheck.

When you hire a PR person, you're hiring the “eyes and ears” of an organization—your corporate conscience—saving the organization a crisis of public confidence and millions of dollars in potential class-action suits.

PR is the “Bank of Good Will.”

JANA SCHILDER MARKETING



I also tell my clients that they should think of PR as the “Bank of Good Will.”

Companies make “deposits” in the Bank of Good Will by doing the right thing (not PR “stunts” aimed at getting publicity) toward their employees, their customers, their suppliers, their regulators, and even their non-customers.

As with investing, regular deposits are key.

Companies are wise to make regular “deposits” to the Bank of Good Will because some day, they may need a very, very large “withdrawal” a.k.a. a crisis.

Communication in large companies is difficult.

The more employees, the more management layers, the more worldwide locations, the more difficult communication is to coordinate. Even in the age of the BlackBerry and social media, message sent does not equal message delivered (or understood).

Corporate culture is everything.

Is there a culture of protecting your “turf”? Is there a culture of “shooting the messenger”? In the case of Japanese companies, there is even more of a reluctance to spread bad news upward.

The three questions of crisis communication.

Once your company enters crisis mode, here are the questions that every reporter will want to know: “What did you know? When did you know it? And what did you do about it?” Better be prepared with real answers, not just “Key Messages.”

For example, we are now learning that some of the problems with the Honda airbags date to 2002. And Toyota's problems go back years, and are just surfacing now.

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United Way makes it over the top

A lousy economy is no time to be going out to the public and asking for almost \$13 million.

But the fact the economy had soured was even more reason why the United Way of Peel Region had to reach its goal of \$12.75 million this year.

More people were in crisis. More needed assistance.

Last month, the UW gathered about 700 donors and volunteers to the International Centre to celebrate raising \$12,835,582 in 2009.

The total exceeds the campaign target by more than \$85,000.

“We believe people recognized that many of our friends, neighbours, colleagues and family members need our help right now,” said United Way CEO Shelley White. “This year more than ever, we had a license to ask. We are so grateful for the fantastic response.”

White was joined by Campaign Chair Bob Johnson, who retired as president of Purolator in December, to celebrate the total.

“It was a very challenging year as many individuals and businesses struggled with

the impact of the recession and the uncertainty of economic recovery,” said Johnson. “At one point we thought we might fall short of our goal by as much as \$500,000. But our end-of-year plea to the community reminded people of the need and helped put the campaign over the top.”

The money raised in the 2009 campaign will support a wide variety of services, programs and initiatives in Peel. This includes a network of more than 100 programs in more than 50 local social service agencies, community partnerships such as Success By 6 Peel, and grants to support neighbourhood development and social purpose enterprise.

“We know that 2010 will continue to be challenging as recovery makes its way slowly through our export-oriented local economy,” said United Way Board Chair Michelle Cole. “That is why it's so important that United Way continues to focus on supporting programs that foster resilience. This includes meeting basic needs, providing economic opportunities, building coping skills and abilities, and aiding active participation in society.”

Featured in the April issue...

2010 Golf Guide

Canada has the highest participation level of golfers in the entire world. Mississauga Business Times will feature this unique business sector in our 2010 Golf Guide, supplying our readers with an up-to-the-minute information package featuring a complete directory and editorial about innovative courses and new programs. In addition, a special report on out-of-town golf courses and resorts, our 2010 Golf Guide '10 promises to be a handy reference tool, and a must-read for all those in the golf industry.

Ad Space Closing: Tuesday, March 16th
Contact: Ingrid Doherty (905) 273-8285
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Special "Earth Month" April Feature Edition



Mississauga Business Times goes "GREEN" – exploring how business and local government are responding to environmental concerns. Our "GREEN" issue will examine how environmental practices are changing the way we do business, design buildings, and deal with transit. Are you a business that makes others “GREEN” with envy? Celebrate Earth Month and Earth Day with your advertisement in this special issue focused on your environmental victories!

By placing an advertisement in this feature you can:

- Establish a top-of-mind awareness of your business
- Reach business executives & decision-makers with a press-run of 25,000
- Targeting business subscribers for over 26 years!

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Contact: Ingrid Doherty (905) 273-8285
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