



Bulletin

Public Relations: An Important Marketing Tool For The Mechanical Contractor

INTRODUCTION

One area of most startling change in recent years has been the growing role of creative marketing in achieving recognition and success for the mechanical contractor. Until recently, executives of many companies refused to concede that every contractor, regardless of size, must be persistently promoted.

But in recent years, economic pressures, coupled, with newly uncovered sophistication and the rejuvenation of heightened competitive instincts, have convinced an increasing number of mechanical contractors that they now face a rare moment to tell the public, the government and the industry their impressive story of accomplishment, capabilities and convictions. Like the rest of us, they also have an immediate and serious obligation to contribute to the preservation of our free enterprise system, and they can easily achieve these worthwhile goals within the understandable restraints of time, energy, expertise and resources with the resultant benefits of

new and renewed customer confidence and enthusiasm.

If management is genuinely committed to sound expanded marketing and if it seeks the help of legitimate, creative public relations counsel already experienced in and sensitive to working with such a client, the contractor surely can realize abundant dividends from this investment, not only in terms of additional assets and goodwill, expanded exposure and a more satisfying business climate, but also in the fulfillment of a better standard of living for customers and employees alike. This valuable assistance does not have to be expensive, and it can successfully supplement your internal marketing ability.

SELECTING A PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANT

Your company, regardless of size, must carefully select its public relations consultant . . . ideally an individual or firm that has broad



contacts, imagination, independence, integrity, knowledge, reliability, respect, self-confidence, a variety of services and talents—and perhaps most critically, a special and refreshing brand of finesse and vitality for handling your industry.

In return, your counsel should ask that you and your employees fully cooperate with him; that you first sanction an honest appraisal of your present image; that you solicit and ponder his expertise and judgement; that you take him into your trust; that you candidly concede your own imitations; that you encourage bright ideas; and that you allow his efforts sufficient time to bear fruit. Do not expect him to invent instant miracles to compensate for years of lethargy in developing and retaining customers.

MANAGEMENT'S PR ATTITUDE AND DEDICATION

After many years of working with clients in the construction industry, my associates and I are convinced that while a client's budget in some cases may be prerequisite to the impact of a marketing program, the real key is attitude—your attitude. Lavish finances simply cannot assure success unless the thrust receives highest priority.

Responsible public relations historically has always been utilized by the industry. Its justification is to challenge, to educate, to motivate, to serve . . . and in the process, to gain valuable visibility for your company, large or small, as an attractive instrument to help the public satisfy critical mechanical contracting requirements. Subtly tell your story—and customers readily stream forth. In countless cases, working as a team, public relations and advertising have substantially contributed to the growth—if not the survival—of the busi-

ness community. A huge budget is not required . . . just determination, innovation, consistency and vision.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A CRAFT

As a well polished and highly influential discipline, public relations has a mandate to show the client those tested techniques that can most effectively work for him. Our craft is alert, responsive, versatile. We must play to your strength; no need to respect marketing weaknesses. Let public relations express itself to you in many viable ways:

1. **General Publicity.** You and your executives can be interviewed on radio and television, and in newspapers, trade publications and magazines. They can author articles which should be reprinted and distributed. Do not overlook airline, alumni, city, corporate, consumer, foreign, fraternal and special interest magazines; "letters to the editor" sections; syndicated columns; graphics; brochures; seasonal letters; and mailing inserts.

2. **Government Involvement.** Where legally permitted, your reputation, assets and talents should be selectively channeled into support of political candidates, causes and parties. Get to know local, state and national elected and appointive public officials. Where appropriate consider a government appointment for important contacts, experience and exposure. Testify on behalf of your company or industry before administrative and regulatory commissions, government panels, and legislative committees. Make yourself available to government agencies and lawmaking bodies as expert counsel.

3. **Public Speaking.** The platform can help you attain precious credibility, visibility, personal development, and new business. Be



encouraged and trained to address prestigious groups, conventions, and conferences, forums, civic and philanthropic and youth clubs. Initiate, confirm and help plan engagements. Participate in news conferences. Tape speeches for radio and television. Reprint and distribute manuscripts. Invite community leaders to hear messages. Edit speeches into newspaper and magazine interviews and articles. Nominate best texts for awards and other recognition. Make certain that following every speech, each contact is followed up. The true value of an engagement is not simply the 30-minute speech but also all of the marketing activities which you can then schedule around it.

Public speaking, by the way, does not have to be a miserable ordeal. On the contrary, a growing number of contractors are not only enthusiastically acknowledging lecture requests but are actually seeking them out, and having fun fulfilling them. Influencing others, on behalf of your company and the industry, is rewarding.

If you need to improve your speech content and delivery, consider speech training. Learn how to organize cohesively and then communicate your thoughts before unfamiliar audiences, how to respond to unexpected questions from the floor, how to express your personality in a one-to-one relationship before and after an appearance, how to be courteous, prompt and resourceful in writing to the curious and concerned in an audience. Learn how to deal with the unpleasant.

The modern executive learns that a speech must be conceived, developed and rehearsed repeatedly to be polished. He learns to detect accurately the frequency and depth of the audience's laughs, tears and applause. He learns to make sure each listener hears, understands and reacts to the message.

His material must reflect contemporary rhetoric, convincing logic, concise organization, honest and substantial investigation of fact, sincerity of purpose, a spirit of optimism, and a genuine appeal to the listener to react. He must resolutely ignore the temptation to be crude, insensitive, offensive, pornographic or vulgar. The speaker must remember that his appearance, credentials, personality, temperament and overall conduct before an audience are just as critical to success as what he says and how he says it.

Improvement comes to the man who diligently and readily reviews each of his speeches. He should go over his notes, encourage listeners and lecturers to critique him, and analyze closed circuit television broadcasts, motion pictures and tape recordings of presentations. He should grab every opportunity to speak. Experience perfects skills of composition, delivery and timing. And with these skills, you can contribute immeasurably to your own personal and professional effectiveness as well as to a sounder understanding of our economic tenets and, more specifically, of your industry.

4. Civil Participation. Perhaps today more than any period in our history the mechanical contractor is becoming increasingly aware of economic, political and social frustrations, and is equally determined to share in civic activities, which at best may only indirectly relate to revenue and profits.

Because of mounting vicious attacks on business, and because our way of life is always susceptible to collapse from within, every mechanical contractor has an absolute charge to pitch in and help preserve our heritage; cleanse and guarantee the climate of opportunity; safeguard our liberties; revitalize our drive and determination; and strengthen



our national purpose. This is a burden, but commitment to the future is a burden that simply cannot be ignored. As in the past, why do we today not stand tall, proud, unafraid, unashamed and rekindle that positive attitude that earned America its envy, admiration and plenty?

For example, you and your management should seriously consider joining suitable Chambers of Commerce; charitable, cultural and youth organizations; industry and professional associations; and service clubs, and then work to assume leadership roles. You should also carefully weigh becoming a trustee of churches, colleges, foundations, hospitals and school boards. You can learn how, when, where and why to apply prudently your strengths in service to others while, at the same time, becoming acquainted with those who may enhance your company's growth.

5. **Philanthropics.** Assign a reasonable schedule of annual contributions. In some cases, tasteful publicity and recognition can be arranged at the time of gift presentation. A meaningful relationship can often be comfortably cultivated between you and the recipient. Corporate donations should be augmented by branch allocations. How about local fellowships and scholarships, a gift to the community, volunteers for United Way, sponsoring a Boy or Girl Scout troop, management guest lectures at the university, supervising a teenage Junior Achievement corporation, dialogue with the inner city, or counseling with senior citizens?

6. **Special Events.** Such significant events as anniversaries, dedications, employee additions and promotions, ground breakings, holiday observances, customer and company milestones, and office expan-

sion or relocation should be planned and promoted. It is all too easy to ignore these activities. To recognize, organize and publicize them, however, is in each instance to afford you one more excuse to create momentum and to suggest progress and prosperity.

7. **Public Recognition.** An executive, or other employee, having accomplished or contributed generously to the betterment and stability of community or industry, can rightfully be recommended for special tribute, such as a commemorative or congratulatory resolution, Congressional Record insert, Freedoms Foundations or other patriotic award, government recognition, honorary degree, or "Man or Woman of the Year" designation. Your public relations consultant or staff can instigate and supervise arrangements, presentation and publicity in the expectation that well-deserved acclaim will motivate the recipient toward greater heights of achievement; give authority and prestige to your endeavors; and challenge others to emulate your example. The company itself can similarly be honored.

8. **Business Image.** You and your employees can also achieve critical visibility and impact your customers and prospects by mastering such fundamentals as how and where to mix well socially; the art of meaningful conversation; proper dress; attractive office decor; gracious entertaining; knowledge on current topics; as well as the impact of a handshake, kind and prompt letter, warm word, smile, pleasant telephone call, friendly staff, thorough follow-up, and the proper handling of consumer complaints and concerns.

Imaginative, functional, forthright and discerning public relations is today within the easy grasp of every mechanical contractor who is seriously interested in marketing its important services to assure a prosperous and



satisfying tomorrow. It is never a question of whether you have an image—only whether that image is good or bad. It is also correct to point out that most of us prefer doing business with the competent—better yet the competent and successful, or at least the association perceived to be a winner.

This exciting new trend toward more creative and intensified public relations for

mechanical contractors offers you, your management and other personnel a precious chance for challenge, gratification and profitability. Indeed, a chance well worth grabbing.

NOTE: Additional public relations concepts are contained in MCAA "Mechanics of Marketing Manual."