

Writing goals and objectives provides map for public relations

By Susan Bennett, APR, CPRC

A good Marketing and Public Relations Plan provides you with a mechanism to measure the impact of the work you do.

When was the last time you went on a long-distance road trip without a map?

Unless you have GPS in your car, I'd bet it's been awhile.

That's because public relations professionals, by nature, are planners.

We like to plan every detail of public relations projects and even plan for the unexpected, the "please-don't-let-it-happen-today" eventuality that sometimes becomes more than just a possibility.

In our zeal to redesign the newsletter, stage the anniversary party, or plan a major re-branding, we sometimes lose sight of the very reason we're doing these things.

Just like we need a road map to get to our destination, we also need a written plan of action for our public relations

program that we can refer to again and again to make sure we are on the right path.

It's called a Marketing and Public Relations Plan for your company or organization with clearly defined goals, objectives, and strategies. They are sometimes called MBO (Management by Objective) or MOR (Management by Objectives and Results).

Why do we need a plan? Public relations efforts are sometimes criticized because we don't always have quantifiable results to show for our work. A succinct plan will help you measure results and show the value received for spending money on public relations.

A good Marketing and Public Relations Plan will help you:

- Determine which strategies are effective and worthy of repeating, and

which strategies should be discarded. This is important at budget time when you are asked to justify each line item; and

- Position yourself for future advancement. Managers want results and are more likely to promote those individuals who produce results.

A good Marketing and Public Relations Plan provides you with a mechanism to measure the impact of the work you do, which is far more effective than merely accumulating a stack of newspaper clippings to show value.

Writing goals and objectives is about as much fun as recovering from a computer crash, but it doesn't have to be that way if you keep just a few simple rules in mind.

The Difference Between Goals and Objectives

Public relations *goals* support the overall mission of the organization and spell out the overall outcomes of a public relations program.

Objectives specify the desired outcomes, in what sequence, by what dates, to achieve the program goal.

Think of it this way:

- Goals are broad; objectives are narrow.
- Goals are general intentions; objectives are precise.

- Goals are more abstract; objectives are concrete and measurable.

For example, Golden Image entries sometimes say their objective is to “Increase public awareness of XYZ Bank.” But this objective is not definitive. It doesn't say *how* you will increase public awareness. It does not give an outcome that can be *measured* nor does it establish a *timeline* for completion.

A better objective would be to “Increase public awareness of XYZ Bank by implementing a series of strategies that will result in a 10 percent gain in assets by the end of 2007.” This objective meshes public relations with the overall organizational goal of increasing business. It also is measurable and has a completion time.

Writing objectives is a lot like covering the 5 Ws and the H in a news release. Think of it this way:

- *What* is the reason for the objective. In this case, “increase public awareness.”
- *Who* is the name of organization or department (XYZ Bank).
- *How* is how you intend to accomplish the objective (by implementing a series of strategies).
- *When* is the time frame in which you will accomplish the objective (by the end of 2007).
- *Why* is why you are doing this, the outcome you hope to achieve (to obtain a 10 percent gain in assets).
- *Where* – in some cases, you may want to include a geographic area in your objective.

Objectives have several things in common – they are measurable, specific, and have a date for completion. See how easy this is?

What About Strategies and Tactics?

This is the part that most public relations professionals love because it is the most creative. Here's where you can determine *how* you are going to obtain the 10 percent gain in assets by the end of the year.

Strategies describe the methodology or approaches you'll use to meet the objectives. Using our previous objective, here are some potential strategies:

Objective 1.0

Increase public awareness of XYZ Bank by implementing a series of strategies that will result in a 10% gain in assets by the end of 2007.

Strategy 1.1

Conduct three seminars for customers and their friends highlighting the services of XYZ Bank with a goal of 35 attendees at each one.

Strategy 1.2

Distribute at least three news releases per month to area media with a goal of attaining at least 200,000 gross impressions.

Strategy 1.3

Develop six statement stuffers during the year informing customers of special offers and services with a goal of 4% response rate for each one.

Notice how each of the strategies now has a number in front of it that corresponds with the objective number. Subsequent objectives would be numbered 2.0, 3.0, etc. Strategies for Objective 2.0 would be numbered 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, etc.

There is no limit to the number of goals, objectives, and strategies you can have, but remember to keep it manageable – five to six is the norm. More than that tends to become too cumbersome.

Tactics are even more specific than objectives and strategies and refer to the specific kind of workshops you'll host for customers, the specific media which will receive your releases, and the topics /special offers for the statement stuffers. Tactics are the most fluid of all and are subject to change, as needed to meet market conditions.

Keep it SMART

Here's a quick guide to help formulate each objective and strategy:

S – Is it *specific*? Does it focus on the specific behavior you wish to change?

M – Is it *measurable*? This usually means either increasing, reducing or maintaining some behavior, but the objective must be quantifiable.

A – Is it *action-oriented*? Remember to start your objectives and strategies with an action verb, such as develop, distribute, increase, identify, etc.

R – Is the outcome *realistic*? You want your goal to be a bit of a reach, but not so high that your chances of attaining it are minimal.

T – Is there a *timetable*? Every objective and strategy should have a timeline for when it is to be accomplished.

Summary

Establishing goals, objectives and strategies are key parts of public relations planning. A former boss of mine, former *USA TODAY* President Paul B. Flynn,

once told me, “Give me objectives that show how public relations contributes to our mission and goals, including the bottom line. Do those things and you will always have a seat at the management table.”

Creating and meeting solid goals and objectives will not only help you claim your seat, but also provide a map for your journey.

About The Author



Susan Bennett, APR, CPRC, is president and owner of Susan Bennett Marketing & Media, L.C., a full-service marketing and public relations firm in Fort Myers, specializing in commercial, non-profit, health care and governmental agencies.

She opened her company in 1991 with more than 25 years of marketing experience, primarily with Gannett Co., where she was marketing director of *The News-Press* and served on the launch team of *USA TODAY*.

Susan has won more than 180 regional and national awards, including a bronze award from the

International Film and Television Festival of New York, and 142 from FPRA. She also received special recognition from former Presidents Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter for her role in creating a national newspaper campaign credited with helping free the American hostages held in Iran in 1980.

She has been honored as Southwest Florida’s Public Relations Professional of the Year, is certified in government and foundation grant writing and is registered as a professional fund-raising consultant with the State of Florida.

Susan earned a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism and a Master of Arts degree in mass communications from the University of Florida in Gainesville, where she and her husband Phil continue to be involved as members of the President’s Council.

Previous FPRA White Papers can be found in the members’ section at www.fpra.org.

