

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CREATING THE IMAGE OF ONE'S BUSINESS - A CASE STUDY

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Purpose: The purpose of the following paper is to analyze the actions taken by the entrepreneur to build the image of their own business.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used the method of analysis and criticism of the literature, the heuristic method and the case study. The authors also cited the results of a survey that was conducted during classes in a subject related to public relations.

Findings: The relationship between such concepts as public relations and the image of an organization is discussed, and relationship marketing is defined. Also, students' responses regarding the essence of public relations activities are presented. In addition, the actions taken by the entrepreneur - the insurance agent in building the image of their company and the results of these actions were characterized.

Practical implications: Conclusions from the analysis of the case study can help other owners in creating the image of their companies, especially those micro, small businesses that may not always have the funds, for example, to use a public relations agency.

Originality/value: The case study analysis shows how to build the image of an organization, in this case, your own company. The content of the article also presents what the essence of public relations is for students - young people who are themselves customers of many companies. For most of them it is contacting and communicating with people.

Keywords: public relations, organization image, relationship marketing.

Category of the paper: case study.

1. Introduction

More and more companies, institutions take care of their image. These are more thoughtful activities - supported by a prior analysis of the environment, defining their target group. As a result, undertaking PR activities is becoming more popular. A way for an organization to communicate with its environment - one of the definitions of PR, takes various forms,

and the most common tool used is the Internet, or more precisely, social media. The purpose of the following paper is to analyze the actions taken by the entrepreneur to build the image of their own business. The research problem formulated in the form of a question is as follows: *What actions are taken by the selected entrepreneur to build the image of their business?* and *How is the image of the analyzed organization perceived?*

2. Public relations and the organization's image

Public relations is increasingly used by organizations to create the image of organizations, individuals, brands.

There are also many PR agencies dedicated to shaping the image of organizations or people. These include: OneMulti, NBS Communications, FIRST Public Relations, Partner of Promotion - these agencies have been on the market for 30 years and are located in Warsaw (Masłowska). Of course, there are more organizations involved in shaping public relations, according to the ranking (Masłowska) – more than 40.

At one university in Wrocław, in 2023 and 2024, during one of the first classes in a subject where public relations content is discussed, management students were asked to indicate one answer from among those resulting from a survey conducted by GfK Polonia (Olędzki, Tworzydło, 2006, p. 40) in 2005. During the aforementioned survey, in 2005, out of 268 respondents surveyed (people said they were familiar with the term PR), almost 40% of people associated PR activities with promoting a positive image of a company and/or person. Contacting and communicating with people came next. 11% of those asked matched the term PR most closely with providing information about the company's and/or person's activities. In fourth place was representing the company to journalists, customers and other interested parties. Only 8% favored advertising products, companies and/or people. Third from last was persuading journalists to publish information about the company and/or person. 2% referred to seeking acquaintances and good contacts with journalists (media). 1% of the respondents surveyed had completely different associations with PR, while 11% found it difficult to comment on it at all, or simply knew nothing about it. It is worth mentioning that a similar survey took place in 2014. Back then it was conducted among 385 people who had heard of public relations (Olędzki, 2014). Figure 1 shows the responses from 2005 and 2014.

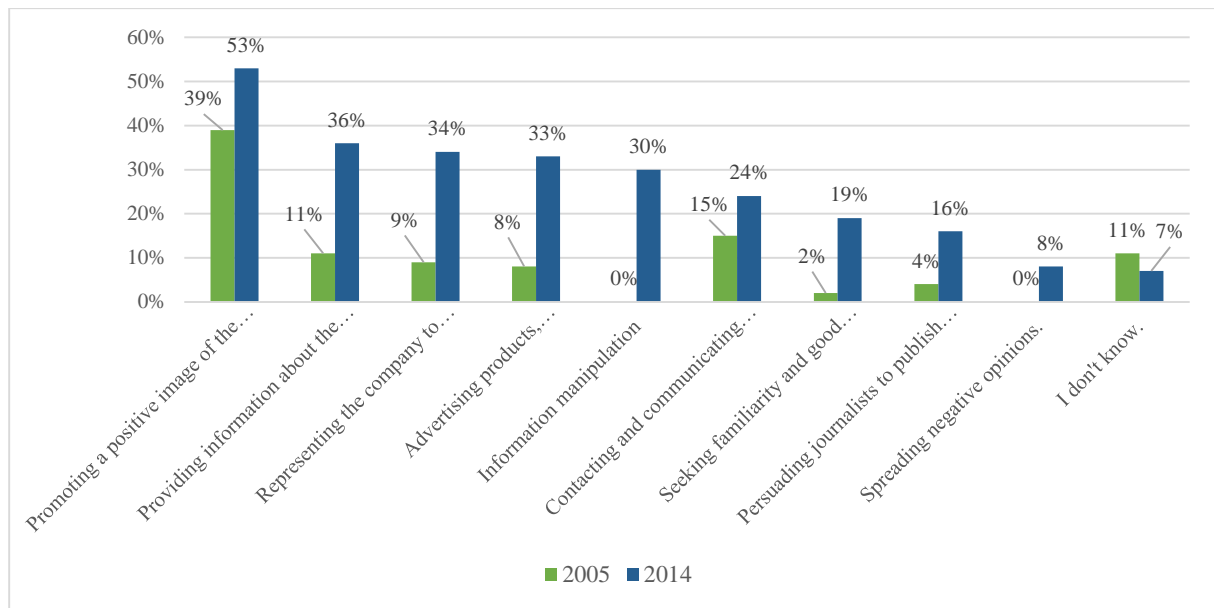


Figure 1. Respondents' answers regarding the essence of public relations activities.

Source: compiled on the basis of: Olędzki, J. *PR nie zawsze znaczy public relations. Wyniki badań ogólnopolskich*, 23.09.2014, Available online: <https://www.proto.pl/artykuly/pr-nie-zawsze-znaczy-public-relations-wyniki-badan-ogolnopolskich>, 3.07.2024.

The graph below (figure 2) shows the distribution of the indicated responses by 132 students. These were:

- A. Promoting a positive image of the company and/or person.
- B. Contacting and communicating with people.
- C. Providing information about the company's and/or person's activities.
- D. Representing the company to journalists, customers and other interested parties.
- E. Advertising products, companies and/or people.
- F. Persuading journalists to publish information about the company and/or person.
- G. Seeking acquaintances and good contacts with journalists (media).
- H. Other.
- I. Don't know/Difficult to say.

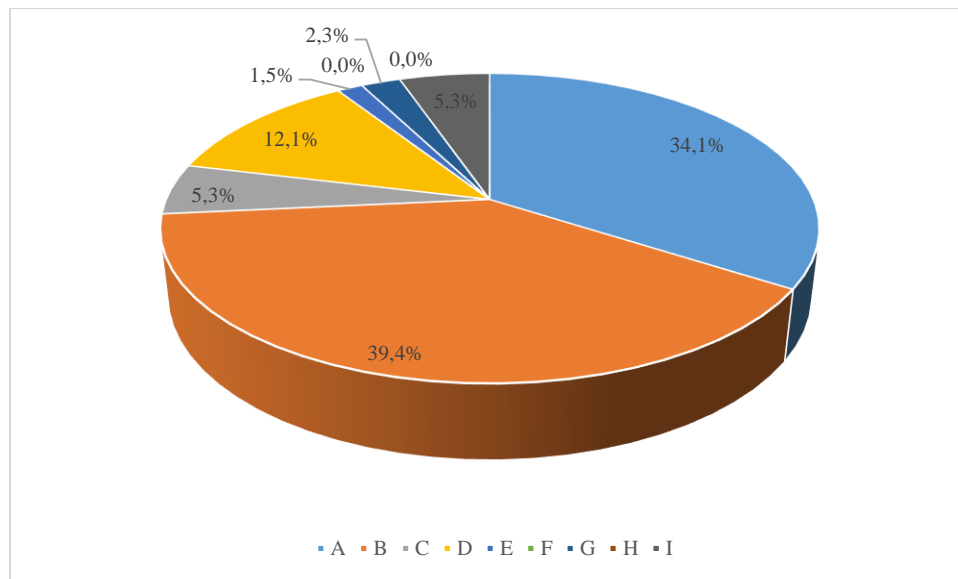


Figure 2. Students' responses regarding the essence of public relations activities.

Source: *own study based on own research.*

It can be noted that the largest number of people (almost 40%) indicated the answer *Contacting and communicating with people*, followed by (about 34%) *Promoting a positive image of the company and/or person*. In contrast, no one chose the answer *Persuading journalists to publish information about the company and/or person*, and *others*.

Discussing public relations has to start with marketing. You will often hear that marketing or advertising is the same as public relations. In this regard, it is worth referring to the 4Ps principle of marketing. The elements of this principle are:

- product,
- price,
- place,
- promotion.

Over time, other elements extending this principle have also appeared, namely (Filar, 2012, p. 322):

- people, and more specifically: service, employees,
- process,
- physical evidence,
- pleasure.

It should be pointed out that public relations finds its place in promotion, as its tool. In promotional activities, communication with the environment is becoming increasingly important. One of the goals of PR is to inform about the activities of the organization, but most importantly to build positive relationships with current and potential customers, suppliers, or other stakeholders.

In Professor Z. Knecht's book *Racjonalne public relations. Budowa działu, instrumenty, studia przypadków*, the reader learns that "PR activity is determined by and takes place in the marketing space, by which should be understood the specificity of the entire management processes, now especially conditioned by market problems and satisfaction of customer needs" (Knecht, 2005, p. 42). Professor Z. Knecht stresses that PR, although literally translated, means social relations, but "this is not a full and adequate reflection of the essence of the problem" (Knecht, 2005, p. 42). One of several definitions of PR given by Professor Knecht is "planned, persuasive communication that intends to influence large social groups" (Knecht, 2005, p. 42).

According to Ł. Piasta "PR is the process of such communication between an organization and its environment, which is to lead to the achievement of planned goals, using appropriately selected means and methods" (Żbikowska, p. 131). A. Szyran-Resiak in her publication also refers to the words of the above-mentioned author. We read that "communication is the heart of the Public Relations process. Without effective communication, the Public Relations process will not be able to exist at all" (Szyran-Resiak, 2017, p. 331). Other definitions that characterize PR are (Smektała, 2001, p. 17): "a way for an organization to communicate with its environment", as well as "a planned, well-thought-out activity carried out over a long time horizon".

In this regard, it is important to remember that PR activities must be systematic and continuous. It is important to have constant contact and dialogue with the environment so that the following functions of PR can be carried out. These are: informational, persuasive, educational, integrative, consultative, negotiating, crisis management.

Public relations methods and techniques include (Szymańska, 2005, p. 125): press form (e.g., press interviews, press releases), exhibition and postal form, as well as gift form. It is necessary to mention the form of meetings: meeting customers, maintaining contacts with business people, experts, organizing/participating in conferences, trainings, maintaining relations with communities and local authorities (lobbying), organizing special events. It is also a good idea to organize tours, so-called "company open days". Public relations activities include sponsorship and lobbying, as well as organizing/participating in charity events. Also, preparing procedures for image protection in a crisis situation is a public relations role. Summarizing the above methods/tools are mainly (Budzyński, 2018): media relations, conducting activities on the Internet, especially social media, publications, press releases, lobbying and sponsorship, organizing events, managing crisis situations.

Professor Knecht points out that the purpose of PR is "to build and then maintain the most favorable image of the company contributing to the growth of interest in its offers, and, in addition, to create the possibility for the company to communicate with the market in such a way that it becomes possible to anticipate and counteract crisis situations" (Knecht, 2005, p. 43).

The overall goal of PR is to shape the desired image (Wójcik, 2015, p. 37). Image is a set of beliefs of a person or group about a particular person, organization or product. There is no single fixed image - there are several types of image (Pilch, 2018, p. 94). An organization's image can be: ordinary, mirror, desired, optimal. Ordinary image - means how the organization is perceived by its environment, mirror image refers to how the organization perceives itself, while desirable image means how the organization would like to be perceived by its environment, and the last type of image - optimal - is the pursuit of compromise (Rozwadowska, 2002, p. 57). One can distinguish between internal image and external image. The internal image consists of the following factors: efficient communication, internal relations: atmosphere, integration, as well as employee motivation, employee development opportunities and working conditions. On the other hand, the external image consists of: relations with customers and other stakeholders (communication), brand, offered goods, services and their quality, media, credibility and integrity, and social commitment (Dziwulski, 2017, pp. 185-186).

It is important to properly formulate an image strategy. First, it is necessary to study the organization's image in its environment, determine the goals for the desired corporate image. Then choose the target audience and select the right image creation instruments. The next step is to determine the people, or units, who are responsible for carrying out the task. The penultimate step is implementation and execution, and after a certain period of time the achieved effects are controlled by comparing the current situation to the planned one (Mendryk, p. 265).

Quoting the concept of marketing and, above all, public relations, it is worth mentioning the definition of relationship marketing, i.e. the retention of a customer “who has purchased a product (used a service), by building lasting, direct ties [...] - by channeling the consumer's loyalty to the organization” (Flieger, 2020, p. 29). It is important to realize that the process of providing a service becomes only one of several elements that serve to create a permanent bond with the customer. In the process of purchasing a good, the customer is taken care of at every stage. As early as the design phase of the product or service, interaction occurs. Then - in the sales phase of the product, as well as during its use. It is good for the customer to be aware that in case of questions, doubts, they can always get in touch with the organization. The process should be continuous and contribute to the development of new products/services, not forgetting their quality. According to the co-author of the publication *Kształtowanie pozytywnego wizerunku administracji samorządowej – wybrane determinanty* M. Flieger, activities related to relationship marketing “are closer to the idea of public relations activities than to the classical concept of marketing activities, including mainly promotional ones” (Flieger, 2020, p. 35). This is due to the fact that the concept of public relations “emphasizes the need for conscious, purposeful and systematic activities aimed at creating permanent and mutually beneficial relationships” (Flieger, 2020, p. 35). It is important that this relationship is based on truth and sincerity, which affects the creation of an atmosphere of trust – “the customer becomes loyal to the organization” (Flieger, 2020, p. 35).

3. Case study

The authors decided to analyze the activities undertaken by an insurance agent from the town of Końskie in Świętokrzyskie voivodeship, Konecki county. The company was established in 2018. However, before the activities undertaken by the entrepreneur are discussed, it is worth characterizing the essence of entrepreneurship and the advantages and disadvantages of running one's own business.

In the book written by Professor Z. Knecht, one can read several definitions related to the concept of entrepreneurship. However, it is worth noting that the concept of entrepreneurship is ambiguous, which is due to the fact that it is a dynamic concept that changes “with the development of socio-economic relations, the level of technology, is subject to changing legal regulations” (Knecht, 2016, p. 11). Entrepreneurship, due to the fact that it is “defined by a set of characteristics of a person and as a process of taking entrepreneurial action” (Knecht, 2016, p. 12), can be divided into: related to the personality traits of the entrepreneur, such as creativity, willingness to take risks (one can also refer to social or family conditions, among others), and into: entrepreneurial actions – “based on an economic assessment of the chances of the action taken” (Knecht, 2016, p. 12). When deciding to run your own business, it is important to analyze the needs of customers. Professor Z. Knecht distinguishes such degrees of orientation of the enterprise to the needs of customers as: “recognition and satisfaction of existing needs, creation of new needs, cooperation with customers in solving their problems in an atmosphere of partnership and mutual trust” (Knecht, 2008, p. 17). It is important to remember that it is important to accurately “penetrate and identify the needs of the market” in which marketing activities are to be undertaken. It is important to “study potential buyers, their needs, motivations, the behavior of competitors and the market environment” (Knecht, 2008, p. 17). Running your own business has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include: independence, self-realization, satisfaction, job security, improved financial situation, among others. On the other hand, disadvantages may include: irregular working hours, additional legal and administrative duties, responsibility, irregularity of income, or constant risk (Knecht, 2016, pp. 73-74). It is important to remember that, especially in the age of the Internet, what matters is the ability to build the image of one's organization, which for some may be a disadvantage when running their own business, and for some an asset.

One of the main reasons for discussing this case study was curiosity about the activity conducted by Ms. Beata Gut on social media regarding her company "Beata Gut Ubezpieczalnia". Ms. Beata runs an insurance company - she is an insurance advisor (insurance agent) in Końskie, Świętokrzyskie province. Browsing the Internet, one can find a professional photo of the Owner, which already shows a professional approach to building the image of her company. The photo inspires credibility in customers, especially potential ones, making the first impression positive. The search engine doesn't provide an official website, but this doesn't

prevent us from finding the most important information about the insurance company - the company's address, opening hours and phone number are provided. From the information found on Google, we learn that it is possible to make an appointment either in the office or online, which may be a convenience for some customers. One can also note the high ratings given on the aforementioned search engine - out of 188 reviews, the rating is 5 out of 5¹ - one reads about Ms. Beata's professionalism, serving to help even in difficult cases, as well as commitment, but most importantly, choosing the right product for the customer's needs, with the customer's best interests in mind.

It should be noted that Ms. Beata actively maintains her company's Facebook profile - Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie. She posts systematically so-called posts, in which she addresses various insurance issues referring to everyday life, through fires, explosions, surges, or flooding. You can also read posts on topics related to investing in the future, or the consequences resulting from a collision between a car and a deer. And in this way, you can see that there is an informational function in PR activities, but also an educational one. The author is able to skillfully present that a product can be used as a gift - it is a non-intrusive form of promotion, and shows that insurance is not just a product. The owner of the Insurance Company also informs about participation in training courses relevant to the development of her competencies. Ms. Beata participated in the RBG Academy (Insurance Consulting Academy)², and also attended the Insurance Summit. This is a conference for insurance experts in Poland, where specialists and practitioners share their knowledge. Ms. Beata shares her experience of building an agent's personal brand through social media (<https://szczytubezpieczeniowy.pl/>). Ms. Beata also participated in a podcast entitled. "How to start building an insurance agent's personal brand in social media. Interview - Beata Gut" (MarcinKowalik.online, Jak zacząć budowę marki osobistej..., 2019). Ms. Beata talked about the beginnings of her business, having previously worked for another company. She also shared her experience of gaining knowledge about running her own business as an agent - how to reach customers, what to do to make them regular customers. Ms. Beata benefited from the experience of other people, who also shared their tips. Ms. Beata revealed that she targeted people she knows, but made no secret of the fact that on occasion other social media users may learn about her. She also talked about the preparation of the materials she posts on social media - it is important that these materials have value, can expand the knowledge of her customers/viewers. What Ms. Beata writes about, posting on social media, as she said, she takes from her life (MarcinKowalik.online, Jak zacząć budowę marki osobistej..., 2019). Ms. Beata stresses that she translates the experiences from meetings with the clients in question - explaining certain policy issues - into her videos, through which she wants to share important issues with other clients/viewer (MarcinKowalik.online, Jak zacząć budowę marki osobistej..., 2019).

¹ Updated as of 22.07.2024.

² Facebook profile Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie, 21.04.2024.

Ms. Beata is also the co-author of the book *Jak sprzedawać ubezpieczenia. 100 historii agentów ubezpieczeniowych*³, in which you can learn, among other things, how to attract customers in a practical way. Ms. Beata has a profile on LinkedIn⁴. In one of the posts on this profile you can read that "Working in insurance is not only a job it is above all a passion and a desire to help"⁵. RBG Group Gala - the event, which took place on the 7th of June 2024, brought together insurance agents from all over Poland (Wysocka, 2024). During the Gala, the best agents were awarded. On the profile of Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie, Ms. Beata Gut reported that she attended the event and that she is thankful for the award she received⁶. Ms. Beata also wrote an article entitled *Dbam o opinię* for the *Miesięcznik Ubezpieczeniowy*⁷.

One of Ms. Beata's advice to people who want to work in insurance is that "they should start with training to know how to contact customers, how social media works and how to use it"(Gut, 2024, p. 17). From Ms. Beata Gut's company profile, we learn that she also engages in charity events, such as collecting bottle caps for a sick girl⁸. In 2018, a sponsored article (Góral, 2018) on life insurance was published - Ms. Beata Gut answered the asked questions. In 2023, Ms. Beata Gut gave an interview. She talked about the preparation of the videos that she sends to customers with the offer and referred to running her YouTube channel⁹, and also referred to sharing videos on social media, through which she explains in detail the role of insurance (By Bartosz, 2023).

At the end of discussing the case study, it is worth noting that Ms. Beata Gut's insurance company participates in the Eagles of Insurance poll. "The plebiscites are organized periodically, in annual editions with a division by industry"¹⁰. As you can read on the page of the plebiscite related to the insurance industry, "Eagles is a unique award, which can boast only the best companies, which are characterized by professionalism and provide the highest quality of services" (Czym jest plebiscyt orły...). The figure below shows which awards Ms. Beata Gut's company received in each year during the 2018-2023 period.

³ <https://marcinkowalik.online/produkt/jak-sprzedawac-ubezpieczenia>

⁴ https://pl.linkedin.com/posts/beata-gut-ubezpieczenia_sukces-ja-w%C5%9Br%C3%B3d-najlepszych-oficjalnie-activity-7091126680554995712-mYB3?trk=public_profile

⁵ https://pl.linkedin.com/posts/beata-gut-ubezpieczenia_sukces-ja-w%C5%9Br%C3%B3d-najlepszych-oficjalnie-activity-7091126680554995712-mYB3?trk=public_profile

⁶ Facebook profile Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie, 9.06.2024.

⁷ Facebook profile Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie, 8.03.2024;
https://miesiecznikubezpieczeniowy.pl/mu/MU_kalejdoskop2024.pdf

⁸ Facebook profile Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie, 20.12.2020.

⁹ Ubezpieczalnia Beata Gut, YouTube.

¹⁰ <https://www.orlyubezpieczen.pl/regulations>.

Najtańsza Ubezpieczalnia Końskie



Figure 3. Eagles of Insurance in the town of Końskie and Konecki County.

Source: <https://www.orlyubezpieczen.pl/profile-134609-najtansza-ubezpieczalnia-konskie>, 5.26.2024.

It is worth noting that as of 2019, Ms. Beata Gut's business is ranked first in the town of Końskie and the Konecki county. This is the annual culmination of Ms. Beata's efforts in running her business.

4. Conclusion

Young people's awareness of the essence of public relations shows that for them it is primarily about contacting and communicating with people, promoting a positive image of the company and/or person. Therefore, it is important for entrepreneurs to take measures to maintain customer-company relations.

As outlined in the article, it is of great importance to build lasting, direct ties, so that the customer will be loyal to the organization in question. Public relations activities are designed to help with this, and in the long run - to create a positive image of the organization. The activities undertaken by the owner of the insurance agency show that it is important for the company to be in touch with its customers, engage with the media, such as through posting valuable posts on the company's profile, giving interviews, or co-authoring a book on the topic of the industry in which one operates. Ms. Beata Gut is also acquiring new competencies - she is constantly educating herself by taking part in training courses. It is worth emphasizing that public relations activities must be systematic and continuous.

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