

PUBLIC RELATIONS – THE CURRENT PRACTICE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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***Abstract:** Public relations are now an indispensable part of every communication mix and every market-oriented company. This profession, which arrived from the West in the 1990s, is undergoing a period of transition in our region. Organizations need to understand that not only do they manage their image on the market through public relations, but also solve their business problems, which directly affects business success. In the last few years, there has been an improvement and it has been noticed in practice that a lot of effort has been put into change. Knowledge is the driving force of all processes, which is also important in positioning public relations in companies as an important element of integrated communications.*

***Keywords:** public relations, publicity, integrated marketing communications*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, in competitive and dispersed markets, the importance of long-term budgeted communications, so-called PR – public relations, is increasing.

Public relations have become a very important organizational and communication element, which determines whether a business and company image will be positive or negative. Business results and image will be positive if the company's public relations are perceived as one of the most important factors in the company's management. That is why the public relations management process must be seen as an integral part of company management. Public relations include a variety of programs designed to promote or protect the image of an organization or its products and services (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

The development of public relations can be seen in the context of the development of communication between people, which has always been aimed at influencing people's behavior.

Contemporary theorists argue that the success or failure of a company, both in the regional and global markets, today greatly depends on its public relations.

There are several different definitions of public relations, and the essence of that diversity stems from a different approach to public relations. Some authors viewed public relations in the context of company management, others in the context of communication management, the third in the context of communication methods, the fourth in the context of public relations goals, etc. According to Cutlip et al. (2006) "Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends."

Public relations should be seen as a part of integrated communications. Every market-oriented company has public relations within the communication mix.

The goal of integrated communication is to achieve a consistent image across different groups, then build image and reputation. In the 1980s, business success depended on product and sales, and in the 1990s business success depended on brand and marketing, while today business success depends on image, reputation and public relations. PR activities give the impression of trust. Communication is conceived as information marketed by an objective third party, which results in greater trust in the promotional message (Đervida, 2012).

The main goal of every PR campaign is to create a positive perception of us or our product in our environment, whether it is among colleagues at work, friends, relatives or even strangers. Our status in the environment we are in will greatly depend on the perception of our environment about us. Unlike a classic advertisement, that aims to convey what the advertiser wants to highlight, PR provides evidence, facts, and opinions that help people come to certain conclusions on their own. The main goal of the PR campaign is to spread the message, to create publicity, to be heard.

However, there is also a negative PR, which means that the news, the client's name in the media or in the target group has caused a negative, adverse reaction. PR has an extremely powerful effect on positioning and it is important to make sure that this effect is favorable, not the other way around.

Effective public relations require strategic thinking, problem-solving skills, and other management skills. PR encompasses all forms of business relationships with the entire environment.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The term public relations first appeared in the United States in a political speech by Thomas Jefferson in 1897 and referred to international relations. After that, the term has been increasingly used and has had different meanings, while the greatest boom happened after the Second World War. It is also important to emphasize the role of public relations in politics and religion of different historical periods (Black Sem, 1997).

The first professional public relations training courses were held in the United States in 1940. Ideas about establishing a professional institution, which would deal with these issues, soon emerged (PR - Institute of Public Relations in London in 1948, PRSA - Public Relations Society of America in 1955, CERP - Confederation Europeenne des Relations Publique in 1959). Today, it is estimated that approximately 400,000 people undertake a variety of public relations activities at work in the United States, and in New York alone there are more than 700 specialized public relations agencies, in addition to many independent services in almost all major companies.

In the former Yugoslavia, the situation was somewhat different. Prior to 1990, public relations in companies in this country did not have a special name and operated within the marketing department. The first PR department was established within the Tourism Organization of Yugoslavia in 1952. The Public Relations Society of Yugoslavia was established in Belgrade in 1993. When it comes to public relations in the territory of the Republic of Srpska - Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), their appearance is related to the arrival of international organizations in these areas. The profession is still developing, which is confirmed by the lack of a public relations association.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN BIH

Public relations in BiH are of recent date. Unfortunately, they have not started to completely function in accordance with the profession, i.e. not all public relations activities are represented yet. If we are talking about the history of public relations in BiH, then we should also mention

that the key moment for public relations, for corporate and marketing communications in BiH, was the XIV Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo in 1984. The international community was determined to establish public relations in accordance with its standards, and experts (mainly from the US and Canada) came to Sarajevo to set up a press service.

As in many countries in transition, PR has become just one of many organizational functions that struggle to access the resources of an organization – institution (Kent, 2006).

Having in mind that BiH is in the transition phase and it is adopting European propositions on the freedom of communication and open civil society norms, public relations are gaining importance. Public relations in the differentiated competition of ideas and structural, business and other interests impose the need for even more intensely targeted communication. This type of public treatment is best accomplished through the various methods used in public relations (Đervida, 2012).

Globalization and the development of information and communication technologies have made consumers make their purchasing decisions in a way that drives them away from the business (Dašić & Stojanović, 2017). The significance of public relations is, among other things, reflected in the ability to keep and tie consumers to the enterprise.

Compared to developed countries, the situation in BiH is slightly different in terms of public relations. Today, this profession is based on two-way communication, with the aim of building mutual trust between businesses and the public. Public relations are more present in institutions than in business entities (almost all institutions at state, entity, cantonal, and municipal level have an established institution of spokespersons, that is, established public relations service).

Statisticians in BiH estimate that as many as 60% of institutions and companies in BiH do not have a public relations officer, a spokesperson, or a public relations service. Research results show that almost all large companies in the Republic of Srpska have established, at least, a spokesperson institution, if not a public relations service. Based on this, it can be concluded that large companies have realized the importance and role of the public relations service.

PROBLEMS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN BIH

For the last fifteen years, the public relations practice known in developed market economies did not exist in BiH. Following the

implementation of economic and political reforms in BiH, public relations emerge on the surface of the business life of companies and organizations. Every organization must understand that public relations are not a wonder, but the basic premise for the functioning of an organization in democratic societies.

Modern living and working conditions have imposed the need to set up public relations departments and services in companies, for the purpose of informing the public, preparing crisis response plans, and establishing contacts with various target groups. The success of businesses in the market is increasingly dependent on public affection, hence the need for being as informed as possible.

There are significant differences between the theoretical understanding of public relations and its practical application on the territory of BiH and in the developed countries. In principle, this difference is small in theory and more pronounced in practice. In the field of theory in most higher education institutions, as well as in businesses, solid professional literature is represented, providing a good foundation for theoretical development and practical application of public relations. In the last 10 to 15 years, many small companies, which are trying to compete for their place in the domestic and foreign markets, have been established in BiH. On the other hand, the process of privatization of socially owned enterprises has been ongoing. The processes of business transformation were "deaf" to the public relations service. Management in most businesses did not recognize the role and importance of public relations in the true sense of the word.

The main problem in measuring the results of public relations was the lack of research, both among the internal and external public. The messages that the company directs to employees should encourage employees to think, or behave as the company wants them to. Opinion polls are not given enough attention by the government sector in BiH. Many theorists dispute public relations as the discipline of management and justify their opinion by the fact that it is very difficult to measure the results of public relations.

Being guided by the thought what will you get in return if you give money for something, is a serious obstacle when it comes to the insufficient functioning of public relations. It has been argued that public relations will never be appreciated unless its values are measured. One of the main problems with the insufficient functioning of public relations in the territory of BiH is the lack of education of management when it comes to knowledge in the field of public relations. "The role of management is

to evaluate public opinion, determine the policies and procedures of an individual or public interest organization, to plan and implement a particular program, and gain public understanding and approval” (Vračar, 1999).

In most cases, public relations are not properly understood, due to a lack of public relations knowledge.

The insufficient functioning of public relations in BiH is influenced by: the war period, decades of heritage, previous social order and outdated thought, as social phenomena that have exerted their influence on this discipline of management (Đervida, 2012).

The main reason for the public relations situation in our region is the fact that public relations are reactive rather than proactive.

Public relations are said to be proactive when planning to seize an opportunity to achieve a defined company goal, and reactive when responding to a problem or crisis, with the aim to prevent the spread and minimize rumors. In practice, public relations need to be proactive. Today, most public relations services in BiH have a reactive role. This practice is not favorable to enterprises (institutions) and must be changed in the future.

CONCLUSION

Public relations should be professional and function in both directions and equally, that is, through the application of a symmetrical two-way model of public relations management, with the continuous exchange of information. The role of experts is not only to present the company’s thoughts to the public but also to present what others think of the company and how they treat it. Good and smart business relationships with the environment, citizens, customers and users of services, various state governments and services at different levels, businessmen, the non-governmental sector and the media will always pay off.

There are several key issues which are related to the future of public relations. The profile of newcomers in the public relations field and the quality of the training they undergo must be improved. This means greater investment in the field, as well as the willingness to adopt new knowledge and new professional practices.

Public relations is a young profession in our country, which explains the wandering in practice, but one thing is for sure: with the development of markets, the emergence of multinational companies in BiH, investment in education and adapting good professional practice of

the countries which have a long public relations tradition, the application of this integrated marketing communications tool would gain its due importance and significance.

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