**Public Affairs Preparedness Checklist**

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| Situation | Self-Examination Questions | Actions Necessary | Status |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| We don’t have a public affairs plan. | What risks do we face when high-profile events require a coordinated response? What opportunities are we leaving on the table? | Have stakeholder-centric SWOT analysis and vulnerability audit conducted. Use output to develop public affairs plan immediately. |  |
| We have a public affairs plan. | Is it current, regularly updated and aligned with ***both*** business goals and external stakeholder interests/circumstances, as well as by periodic sessions to assess and update vulnerabilities / opportunities? | If not, update immediately:   * Contact lists should be updated at least twice annually, rest of plan at least annually. * If the organization has a broad-scale public relations plan, public affairs can and should be integrated into that effort. * Internally created plans should be reviewed by outside experts specializing in public affairs. |  |
|  | Was it prepared by someone who is as qualified in his or her field as experienced specialty group attorneys are in theirs? | Public affairs is not consumer PR or integrated marketing communications and it is often the difference between weathering storms or being held captive to events. Have your plan reviewed (at least) or created (ideally) by specialists in this area. |  |
|  | Was the plan based on a comprehensive audit of potential vulnerabilities, opportunities and desired positioning that included input from all levels of the company, relevant consultants ***and*** key outside contacts? | A plan based solely on management and staff input vs. a formal audit carries risks; have audit conducted and revise plan.  A comprehensive audit is one that reveals not only vulnerabilities, but opportunities as well. It should suggest both where the organization’s current capacity for key-relationship maintenance is at, and what is reasonably possible with a sustained effort.  Although not always the case, a truly thorough audit often makes management a little uncomfortable with the uncovered insights – another reason it is better handled externally than internally. |  |
|  | Do we know the key individuals, groups and/or legislators who could support our actions in a high-profile situation?  Even more importantly: Do we have *relationships* with these individuals, groups and organizations? | Every organization – from the proverbial garage start-up to a *Fortune* 1000 multinational – needs to know who it can count on when publicly challenged.  That can mean creating and nurturing relationships as varied as the local Chamber of Commerce or federal regulators.  As with other aspects of effective public affairs, this is a two-part process: Assessment of who the organization needs to know, and action designed to create and sustain these relationships.  A sustained, institutional public affairs program ensures that these valuable relationships are not only maintained and expanded, but are also tied to the organization rather than any single employee. |  |
|  | Among these key potential supporters, do we reciprocally support their projects and efforts or take other actions, such as ongoing, proactive communication about our organization’s events, to maintain an open channel of communication? | Supporters and key stakeholders have needs of their own, and one of the most cost effective ways of creating and sustaining relationships with them is to support – financially or otherwise – their efforts. |  |
|  | Are our efforts integrated geographically across multiple operating locations, vertically throughout our supply, vendor and end-user chain and/or horizontally with other organizations in our industry? | A proper assessment should reveal threats and opportunities based on geography, on the upstream and downstream elements of your organization’s work, and on other organizations in your industry.  If your public affairs program does not identify key stakeholders and influence opportunities across all three vectors, your organization is likely unprepared to face the full range of situations that may arise. |  |
|  | If our organization scored a big victory next week, do we feel confident that we could expand the reach and power of that victory’s impact in our market? Similarly: If our entire industry faced a high-profile challenge next week, are we confident that third-party validation and testimony could separate our organization from the (possibly tainted) pack? | The public affairs effort should have steady input from marketing and PR (to trumpet successes) and from those elements of the organization, such as legal and HR, that may be involved in crisis work.  As with so many other elements of public affairs, “Plan the work, work the plan,” is the mantra. No organization should ever wonder where it can turn for support in a surprise situation. |  |
|  | Do our in-house or consulting marketing and PR team have clear public affairs / community relations objectives, or are their efforts primarily centered around sales support? | Whether or not public affairs is executed in house comes down to staffing and expertise. In many organizations, marketing, advertising and PR are mixed among a small staff – public affairs generally does not get the attention or specialization it requires in those situations without outside counsel.  In larger organizations, public affairs is often a separate, executive function with direct-report status to the CEO. This reflects the power these organizations recognize in their networks of influencers and stakeholders. Outside counsel is often retained by these firms to help assess and plan, as well as execute in high-intensity situations. |  |
|  | What are our early-warning systems and data-sharing processes? What are staff expected and empowered to do if a potential challenge or opportunity arises on social media? In a legislative setting? Among an organized segment of the community? | In a hyper-connected age, the cost of one unhappy individual or group can be enormous for an organization. Accordingly, effort spent identifying negative issues early (and appropriately publicizing positive issues) can have very high ROI.  In well-prepared organizations, this typically means a formal, ongoing process of monitoring traditional and social media, combined with clear, written procedures for all staff that escalate even nascent issues for further review. |  |
|  | How do we periodically assess the strength of the relationships we have built with influencers, legislators or other stakeholders? | Sales has quotas. Marketing has ROI targets. And public affairs should be just as rigorously assessed to ensure it is advancing the organization’s goals.  Depending on the universe of stakeholders, assessment measures can take forms ranging from of industry surveys to consumer research, complaint/compliment tracking or simply a qualitative measurement how often and how easily challenges that arise are dealt with.  The professionals handling the assessment and plan development are in the best position to suggest objective measurement techniques appropriate to a given situation. |  |