

PR for B2B and IT

**A Key Tool for Building Brand
Awareness and Reputation**

Introduction

Taking a more deliberate, planned and long-term approach to building brand awareness and reputation, rather than splashing out simply on activities to promote an image, is the key to marketing for industrial, B2B and IT companies.

For this reason, PR is emerging as the key communication tool available to business marketers.

Characteristics

Some of the key characteristics of industrial, business to business and technology marketing are:

Positioning and brand challenge is more rigorous than for consumer brands where the decision is relatively trivial and the delivery of the product is often the end point of the relationship.

Purchase decisions have more implications, the decision-making process is more rigorous and the delivery of the product often begins a long-term relationship.

Customers often care more about the company they're doing business with than about the product itself. Product is often only the entry point. It's not always who offers the best product, it's who you feel most comfortable doing business with.

Reputation

Building a reputation is more important in marketing in these environments than creating an image.

Whereas image can be created through sheer advertising dollars, reputation has to be earned over a period of time. It is built by what organisations do, and how, and with whom, they forge relationships.

Studies indicate that approximately 70 percent of brand equity for industrial, business to business and technology marketers is directly related to tangibles - price, specs/quality and distribution.

However, the other 30 percent is related to intangibles - perceptions of the technologies, industry leadership, and corporate issues such as CEO visibility, corporate governance and how an organisation conducts itself. It is this 30 percent where PR has a significant contribution to make.

Reputation

Traditionally the purchase decision was typically made on technical or engineering grounds by an individual, usually at the shop or factory floor level.

However, intangible factors have gradually become more important as companies choose suppliers on a wider range of criteria than ever before, with the decision now often elevated to the C level.

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PR Tools

The type of marketing communication varies according to the value of the product

The lower the value of product, the more emphasis needs to be placed on image. It means that advertising is the prime tool to reach the large mass consumer audience.

The higher the value of products, the more emphasis needs to be placed on reputation as a key driver. With the audience being smaller PR is the main driver.

The PR tools available to industrial, B2B and technology marketers include:

- media profiling - familiarity helps build credibility
- media engagement
- product releases
- appointment releases
- partner announcements
- customer wins

Leadership

Thought leadership- recognising that customers are attracted to companies they perceive to be leaders:

- opinion pieces
- speaking opportunities
- cause champions
- involvement with associations
- media/industry roundtables

Leadership

Technical credibility - recognising that customers want more than sales literature - they want evidence of substance:

- customers case studies
- technical articles
- house publications
- white papers
- web site materials

Leadership

Stakeholder relationships - recognising that building relationships with key stakeholders is the key to establishing a reputation:

- initiatives and events that are informative and educational
- a CEO stakeholder relationship program
- partner events
- CSR and corporate citizenship activities

Conclusion

Public relations is not being used as effectively as it should by industrial, business and hi tech marketers because too many seem to focus on the short-term nature of projects rather than appreciating the need for continuity in communications.

Too many within such companies see PR as simply press releases - and there are too many implementing so-called PR programs with no strategic vision beyond press releases.