

PR & Comms: Show value or risk being cut

By  Lara Magnus

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I have always advocated that public relations cannot drive the sales of an organisation. Not because I don't believe in the practice, but because any communications strategy should be examined for its long-term benefits and not merely its sales targets. Aspects such as brand and reputation building, supporting customer/employee communication and morale and educating its audience around not only its products - but what the company stands for - all take time and are ideally why you engage your public. An increase in sales is merely a positive outcome of this.



Image source: [Pexels](#).

However, this has changed.

I recently read a comment from Gini Dietrich, founder and author, *Spin Sucks*, where she was quoted as saying;

“ While there are communicators who will argue that it's not our job to sell, I say the opposite. If a recession truly is looming (and I think one is), things will get leaner. And if you can't demonstrate that work you do is driving sales (or whatever metric is important to your organisation), you will be cut from budgets. ”

And to be honest, I couldn't agree more.

You can't read an article today that doesn't talk about the tough economic times the local and global market is going through, and we know that PR is often considered a 'luxury' spend during times like this.

Focus on the value you bring

However, this doesn't mean that PR and communications are not useful, it just means we need to focus on the value we bring to our clients far more. And this value is not hard to demonstrate if we take the advent of big data and analytics – of which increased sales has become a natural extension.

And let's be honest, it is this type of metric that makes it easier for the decision-makers to justify their spend – which is why we are seeing a host of agencies in the communications sector – from all sectors – embrace and use analytics – as they should. Data makes sense, data is seen a hard fact.... but there is a caution to this.

Communications and PR must show value – I will never argue or question that. And yes, I do agree that in leaner times, this value must be linked to supporting and driving the sales function of a company. However, even with market uncertainty, communications professionals must still be storytellers of the brand. This means challenging our clients to communicate clearly (with integrity), gain loyalty with customers and build trust with investors – and this takes time.

Loyalty and understanding

Time to understand how a brand is perceived and what its stakeholders care about most – and adapt. If you want to drive value into your market – real value attached to loyalty and understanding – then your communications strategy is the best place to start – but this means work and commitment.

So, in 2020 I believe that unless a communications agency can present real tangible value, it will not be afforded budget increases or even awarded with clients. However, our challenge will be balancing the quantitative or so-called 'lead-generation' value the market requires with that of our longer-term results of building trust and market reputation for a brand.

ABOUT LARA MAGNUS

Lara Magnus is one of the founding members of Orange Ink. Having understood the need to establish a communications company that can demonstrate how companies engage in meaningful conversations with their public(s), she opened Orange Ink, together with Meggan Liebenberg, in June 2003. With her focus on client services, Lara ensures that the team at Orange Ink remains focused on client retention and satisfaction. Lara also takes responsibility for overall support of the company's key business opportunities.

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