

Research: the backbone of reputational brand building



By [Annette Jansen van Rensburg](#)

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In an increasingly competitive market, staying ahead of the competition is a challenge all organisations face, and a great reputation is more important than ever.

Managing your company's reputation strategically is vital for every multinational and every small to medium enterprise from Cape Town to Kosi Bay.

What is reputation management and how can organisations get it right?

Reputation management is first and foremost about building relationships with a company's key stakeholders, which includes communicating with employees, engaging with clients, reacting to investor concerns, collaborating with government and partnering with the media and everything in between.

Personal experiences, perceptions and expectations intrinsic in relationship building is what complicates the reputation management process.

It is important for organisations to realise that different stakeholders make different assessments and not all stakeholders share the same view of what your company's reputation is. The values of these groups differ and change over time - what was important yesterday may not necessarily mean as much today and can even be of no significance to some stakeholders.

In an increasingly turbulent economic environment and due to the changing perceptions of key stakeholders, decisions should be based on extensive research. It also necessitates that the organisation is open to the opinions of their internal and external stakeholders.

The only way to secure information about stakeholders' perceptions and expectations is to request it through research and evaluation, which ranges from informal research in the form of regular conversations, to focus groups and questionnaires.

So why is research so important when planning to engage with your stakeholders?

Here are the top five reasons research is invaluable and non-negotiable when planning a communication strategy to increase a brand's reputation amongst its stakeholders:

1. Internal influences - Employees are the most important stakeholder group of any organisation and undoubtedly the most

critical of the organisation's actions. By knowing what is important to the internal stakeholders and by addressing employee concerns and expectations head-on, the organisation's reputational core will be steadfast and strong.

Internal research will also assist in gauging whether or not employees understand the vision and mission of the organisation, which will help align all messages and get all the employees on the same page. This is extremely important as coherency will impact employee performance and ultimately make or break the organisation's reputation and business. With a sturdy foundation and a focussed internal force behind the organisation, there is no crisis it cannot withstand.

2. Benchmark for better - Knowing what an organisation's external stakeholders' relationships are with its competitors, gives it the advantage of knowing what it is up against and what it needs to do to exceed the experiences stakeholders share with its competitors.

3. Perceived importance - The majority of organisations often assume what their stakeholders find valuable and what they want to be informed about, yet each stakeholder group is unique and requires tailored messaging that speaks directly to their needs.

This means that research is vital to ensure that each stakeholder receives messages that are relevant and valuable to them and are not bombarded with messages the organisation thinks are important.

4. Stakeholder expectations - Again, each stakeholder group has different expectations in terms of the way they want to be engaged. Therefore corporate communication often fails due to organisations communicating through the wrong channels, at the wrong time, at the wrong frequency, in the wrong tone or with the wrong message, which ultimately means that the carefully constructed messages never reach the right target audience.

5. Proactive approach - By researching stakeholders' expectations and having an in-depth understanding of their requirements, equips organisations with the knowledge and tools to communicate proactively, rather than reacting to stakeholder criticism or changed expectations.

The Repudometer™ is a research tool that helps analyse all aspects of an organisation that has an impact on its reputation and provides insight into each of the elements listed above, which assists in developing a communication strategy that speaks directly to its target stakeholder group.

The value of research is immense, but the value of regular research is immeasurable. By reassessing your organisation's reputation, you will be able to evaluate what is and what is not working, and whether your stakeholders' expectations have changed. This gives an organisation insight that can be used to tailor communication initiatives to stay current and relevant.

ABOUT ANNETTE JANSEN VAN RENSBURG

Annette has practical experience in copywriting, strategy development, media liaison, advertising planning, event management and campaign implementation. Her dedication to each venture enhances her commitment to the pursuit of excellence and attention to detail. Annette is excited about the changing communication industry, and is proud to be part of an agency that is at the forefront of providing a strategic approach to communication and reputation management.

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