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DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE CORPORATE IMAGE



In today's fast-paced and increasingly competitive business world, accurately and effectively communicating one's corporate philosophies, goals and capabilities can be vital to the success of your company.

Corporate image is critical to your company's market positioning strategy. The image projected conveys the philosophies, goals and competitive posture of your company and is the basis for growth, both internal and external.

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The image projected must -

- Clearly define who your company is
- Define what your business is
- Reflect management's vision of the future

Following the 10 guidelines outlined on the next few pages will assist you in maximizing your corporate image strategies and communications.

1. DEFINE PHILOSOPHY, GOALS AND VISION FOR FUTURE

Take time to carefully and thoroughly consider your company's overall philosophies and objectives for the future! This process **must** involve top management and end results must have the support of all concerned. Whatever time and effort is required to complete this process is well worth the effort as decisions made at this stage tremendously impact all that follows.

2. DEVELOP MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

Once your top management has agreed on corporate philosophies and objectives, develop a written "mission and vision statement" which reflects these and which will be the basis for communicating management's perceptions and key objectives.

3. REVIEW, EVALUATE CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES, MATERIALS

Now take time to carefully review and evaluate how current strategies and communications materials reflect this mission statement and your company's goals. Evaluate how any changes may impact existing sources of communications. Get feedback and input from your various target audiences. Do their perceptions and interpretations reflect the image you had intended?

Depending on how extensive changes in philosophies are and how accurately the desired image is perceived, you may require some outside assistance in your evaluation in order to get an accurate and objective reading on other's perceptions and what might be required to reposition the company, if necessary.

4. DEVELOP A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Good planning will be critical to the success of your corporate image program. Make sure you know who all of your audiences are and how to appeal to each one.

Prioritize your audiences in order of "need to know." Select the most appropriate means of communicating with each audience, keeping in mind key differences. Formulate your strategy and your tactics and develop timelines.

5.**SELECTION OF SPOKESPERSON**

Personal participation from the top is vital to the credibility of any corporate image strategy. Generally, the chief executive officer is the most authoritative and credible spokesperson.

Make clear who may speak on behalf of your company and what, if any, restrictions may be placed on him / her.

While a formal spokesperson role is a fundamental requirement, it should not be considered a barrier to inducing certain other employees to speak on behalf of the company. For example, it is often desirable to encourage key sales staff to participate in public speaking programs within their territories.

However, it is critical that each appointed speaker is couched and trained on the handling of objectives, criticisms and antagonistic questions be provided. Your company's story must be uniform and the people telling it must have the proper credentials and preparation to know the key messages about the company.

6.**COMMUNICATE INTERNALLY AND INVOLVE THE TEAM**

Communicating your company's corporate identity as envisioned by top management must begin within the organization and should involve employees in a team effort.

Philosophies and goals must be communicated coherently and cohesively, and communications must be couched in a manner understandable to the intended audience.

7.**EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Our control over our communications is limited and only half the undertaking. The other half is the perception of the audience.

Language utilized must be clear, simple and to the point. It should follow in a logical sequence of ideas and represent a clean, evident organization of written materials. Consideration should always be given to the individual characteristics of each specific audience and to speak and write in terms that they can understand.

8. ONGOING PROCESS

It is important to recognize that the corporate image you wish to project will not materialize overnight. Establishing an identity is an ongoing process, both internally and externally. Periodically reevaluate your strategy and tactics in conjunction with the results you have achieved. Are the results in line with expectations, or are adjustments to your strategy and tactics called for?

9. PROTECTING THE IMAGE - CRISIS MANAGEMENT

No company is exempt from crisis and controversy! Protect your corporate image by planning for possible crisis situations before they happen. This type of planning in advance can save valuable time, and frequently many dollars, over the longer term, while at the same time helping to protect that image and your reputation which you have so carefully cultivated.

Management's attitude in this process is very important. Corporate communications are not an end unto them, but are simply a means toward achieving a goal.

The ultimate success of any communications program is measured by how effective it is. Each communications vehicle is different; each has its own strengths and limitations. Select the individual mediums online and offline that are best for your message. Appropriateness and effectiveness are the keys.

10. ONGOING AND DAILY TASK

Remember that establishing your corporate image is a never-ending task and a daily challenge. It means keeping the right people informed in the right ways at right times.

It means monitoring and knowing what is being said about your company on the Internet – in blogs, on social networking sites.

Effectively communicating your company's image is a difficult and complicated charge, best handled by your professionals with experience and may require outside assistance for maximum effectiveness.

By following these 10 guidelines, you will be well on your way to effectively communicating the image of your company.