

Module 7: Public Relations

Lesson 1 - Publicity

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will learn about public relations and its role in the process of generating and managing publicity.

OBJECTIVES

1. Define publicity.
2. Describe how publicity is managed and controlled by a business or brand.
3. Explain the concept of public relations.
4. Describe the concept of crisis management.
5. Understand why a crisis management plan is important to a business.
6. Recognize why businesses and brands engage in publicity stunts.

KEY TERMS

Crisis Management

Press Conference

Press Kit

Press Release

Public Relations

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Publicity

Publicity Stunt

This Lesson Bundle Includes:

- Publicity - Lesson Outline
- Publicity - Presentation Slides
- Industry Application - Related Links
- Student Activity - Creating a Press Release
- Discussion Deck - Publicity Stunts (April Fools!)

WHAT IS PUBLICITY?

Publicity is public information about a company, brand, good, or service appearing in the mass media as a news item, and appears at no cost to the organization. Publicity can be positive or negative, potentially benefiting a business or brand or creating storylines that can be damaging. Both positive and negative publicity are managed and controlled by an organization using a public relations strategy. No matter the size of the organization or the industry, all businesses and brands need public relations. Why? Because an effective publicity management strategy has a significant impact on how consumers view the business or brand. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), only 27% of U.S. adults trust the information viewed on social media. More than half, 56%, trust national news media, and 75% trust local news outlets.

How is publicity generated, managed, and controlled?

The biggest disadvantage of publicity is that it cannot be controlled by the business or brand. More importantly, public opinion is typically perceived by consumers as more credible than advertising. However, even when a business or brand perfectly executes its plan for managing publicity, there is no guarantee that the business can achieve their desired result. For example, the business may distribute a press release with details about a donation to a cause the organization supports, but a social media influencer or local reporter might not accurately communicate the details of the initiative or share a different perspective than what the organization had hoped, ultimately resulting in a less favorable outcome.

Public Relations

Public relations (PR) refers to a business or brand's efforts to build and maintain a favorable image with consumers through mass communication. Unlike advertising, which can also influence consumer perceptions, public relations is not a paid form of media, and does not always have a direct impact on sales. Instead, a brand or business will lean on a public relations strategy to build its image and communicate key information to consumers without spending money through any advertising channels.

Businesses and brands can benefit from successful public relations activities in the following ways:

- **Creating effective product or brand positioning**
- **Building and maintaining a positive business or brand image**
- **Communicating key information about the brand, products, services or the business/organization**
- **Generating goodwill among consumers, media, and influencers**
- **Managing potential crises if and when they arise**

Publicity can be generated, managed, and controlled with a variety of public relations communication tools:

- **Press conferences**
- **Press releases**
- **Press kits**
- **Public Service Announcements (PSA)**
- **Media blitzes**
- **Crisis management strategies**
- **Publicity stunts**

Press Conference

Press conferences take place when a business or brand's spokesperson addresses the media to answer questions or make announcements. When an organization calls a press conference, it is generally implied that the organization has a newsworthy announcement featuring information of significant importance.



Press Release

A **press release** is a prewritten story about an organization or brand that is distributed to various media. These releases are often referred to as press, news, or media releases.

An effective press releases will:

- Be clear and to the point
- Address specific pieces of information
 - Date
 - Release statement
 - Typically states FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or TO BE RELEASED ON
 - Headline
 - Contact information
 - The Lead
 - Lead paragraph must grab reader's attention
 - Text (body of release)
 - Should answer the questions who, what, where, when, why and how
 - Pitch
 - The release ends with identifying information, including a phone number and email address. This is where the business or brand makes its "pitch" to the audience
 - End
 - Press releases typically end with "end" or "#####"
- Be creative and informative or the organization runs the risk of the media not reporting the information
- Feature a catchy title
- According to a study from SEO Agency suggests a properly crafted headline can increase web traffic by 500%
- Kept to one page if possible



ACTIVITY

Press releases have been an important tool for communications professionals for a very long time. However, as the landscape continues to shift from traditional media to digital throughout the industry, the role of the press release has evolved. Much of the information that would be shared with consumers by press releases in prior years is now often communicated via social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

However, that does not mean that the press release is no longer relevant as organizations work to maximize exposure through as many communications channels as possible. For a quick activity, divide into groups or pairs. As a team, create a press release for communicating information about your favorite brand relating to the launch of a new product or an initiative tied to a cause they may be supporting. Then, create a strategy describing how the information will be disseminated to the media AND shared with consumers through broader, digital platforms.

Press Kit

Business press kits (also known as media kits) are important as they provide much information regarding an organization or event to the media in a variety of ways. A **press kit** is a package of information distributed to the media or information shared on a business or brand's website to assist media outlets in reporting.



Press kits generally include:

- Company/organization details
- Contact information for the point person within the organization
- Promotional materials
- Biography/photos of anyone within the organization who the business or brand would like to see featured in interviews or speaking engagements
- Business or brand awards or special recognition
- Press releases
- Samples of any other prior media coverage
- Testimonials
- Downloadable or printable features like logos, infographics, product or service demonstration videos, etc.

PSAs (Public Service Announcements)

A **PSA**, or **Public Service Announcement**, is a message communicated by the media to raise public awareness surrounding a specific issue. PSAs are a common public relations tool for non-profit organizations and typically feature a brief message positioned as intended to be in the best interest of the general public.

Crisis Management

Crisis management refers to a coordinated effort to handle the effects of unfavorable publicity or of an unfavorable event.

Crisis management often includes a strong focus on public relations to recover any damage to their public image due and assure consumers that recovery is underway. Successful crisis management requires a plan in advance for how to respond if and when a scenario develops where the organization must respond to negative publicity.

Crisis management examples:

- In 2022, Walmart faced widespread [criticism](#) after attempting to commemorate Juneteenth with the introduction of a “Celebration Edition” ice cream flavor. After the backlash, the company quickly issued an apology and removed the products from its stores.
- In 2023, widespread winter storms in the U.S. at the peak of the holiday season caused an operational meltdown for Southwest Airlines. The company was forced to cancel 70% of its flights, leaving an estimated 2 million travelers stranded. Despite the brand’s strong track record for its customer service, the fallout resulted in severe damage to the company’s brand and reputation as they mismanaged the response to the public relations crisis.
 - According to communications and [PR experts](#), Southwest’s crisis response failed in several ways:
 - They failed to explain the cause of the cancellations, leaving customers confused as competing airlines resumed flights
 - They did not explain how the root cause was impacting the current situation
 - They did not offer details on how they planned to resolve the issue
 - The aftermath cost the airline a [reported \\$800 million](#), contributing to a 21% decline in Southwest’s stock for the year, and damage to its sterling reputation for providing some of the best customer service in the industry.





DISCUSSION TOPIC

Crisis management presents one of the biggest challenges for businesses and brands from a PR perspective. Carefully crafted messages can, and often do, come across as too scripted. Knee-jerk reactions can be perceived as tone deaf, or unsympathetic. An effective crisis management plan will strike an effective balance that resonates with a fan base in a positive way.

Over the years, many brands have found themselves in precarious positions that have necessitated a crisis management strategy. Select one of the stories below and discuss the organization's response, and explain how you think the brand should have responded.

Pepsi – A marketing campaign in 2017 featured Kendall Jenner in which the brand aired a “short film” [commercial](#) that quickly amassed over 1.5 million YouTube views. However, the ad was not well received, creating a firestorm of criticism surrounding both Pepsi and Kendall Jenner. Jenner tearfully quickly apologized for her involvement in the ad, while Pepsi issued an apology and quickly pulled the spot.

Chick-fil-A – Chick-fil-A, one of the most popular fast food chains in America, had long been criticized for its [history](#) of donating to charities with anti-LGBTQ positions. In 2020, the company [announced](#) a shift in its approach to charitable giving, suggesting it would instead take a “more focused giving approach” in the future.

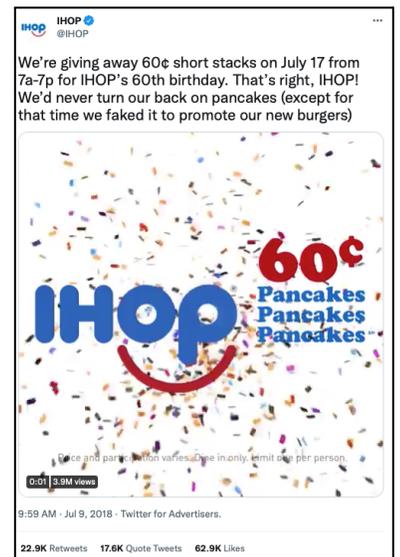
Chipotle – An E. Coli outbreak in 2015 destroyed the popular chain, with the negative publicity resulting in a staggering [82% decrease](#) in profits over the next year while seeing its stock price tumble by 15%. The company issued a statement addressing food safety concerns, but it wasn't until the company's CEO stepped down years later that the brand finally made its comeback.

Publicity Stunts

Publicity stunts are a marketing tactic where specific events or activities are planned with the sole purpose of achieving a high level of media coverage and public awareness. Publicity stunts (also referred to as PR stunts or marketing stunts) can serve as an effective vehicle in generating public “buzz” surrounding a brand, often promoting the release of a new product or around a major event.

Publicity stunt examples:

- For one day only in 2022, Duke's Mayo partnered with Yellow Bird Tattoo (located near the company's Richmond, Virginia headquarters) to [offer](#) free Duke's Mayo-themed tattoos (including options for 47 different designs, ranging from images with the brand's name or logo to a gravestone marked “HELLMAN'S”, one of the condiment makers' chief rivals).
 - The stunt resulted in over 1,000 people being placed on a waitlist, and more than 70 people getting Duke's-themed tattoos, generating thousands of dollars in free publicity and media exposure
- Initially dubbed a catastrophic marketing fail because of widespread criticism online, IHOP announced a fake rebrand to “IHOB” as a marketing gimmick. Consumers were confused by the rebrand, and very critical of the publicity stunt on social media. However, the company wound up selling [quadruple](#) the number of burgers, and the stunt ended up as a massive success.



KEY TAKEAWAY

No matter the size of the organization or the industry, all businesses and brands need public relations. Why? Because an effective strategy for managing publicity has a significant impact on how consumers view the business or brand.



INDUSTRY APPLICATION

Connect your classroom with industry examples by reviewing the following news stories relating to concepts covered in this lesson:

- Crisis Management** - [Rivian CEO walks back price hike for any customers who pre-ordered before March 1](#)
- Crisis Management** - [How Pepsi's Kendall Jenner ad taught brands to respond](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Skittles is Releasing a Candy Dispensing Bed for \\$1.50](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [KFC Gives Money Away on Social Media](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Taco Bell takes ownership of taco emoji in global Taco Day stunt](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Amazon's latest stunt is beaming a new Prime Video sci-fi show into outer space](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Panera Launches a Purse to Carry a Better Sandwich](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Shake Shack Introduces "The Truffle Table Fine Dining Experience"](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [VELVEETA and Compartés Launch TruffVels, an Over-the-Top, Indulgent Treat Combining Two of Life's Greatest Pleasures](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Burger King fans stunned by 'flame grilled' billboard that goes up in flames](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Taco Bell Is Now Marrying A Couple In The Metaverse](#)
- Publicity Stunt** - [Wingstop's Ranch is So Good. Fans Want to Take a Bath in it \(And Now They Can\)](#)
- Publicity Stunt ("PSA")** - [Bazooka® Bubble Gum Celebrates Dad Jokes and Its 75th Anniversary with Celebrity PSA Campaign on Father's Day](#)

KEY TERMS DEFINED:

Crisis management: A coordinated effort to handle the effects of unfavorable publicity or of an unfavorable event.

Press Conference: when a business or brand's spokesperson addresses the media to answer questions or make announcements.

Press Kit: a package of information distributed to the media or information shared on a business or brand's website to assist media outlets in reporting.

Press Release: a prewritten story about an organization or brand that is distributed to various media. These releases are often referred to as press, news, or media releases.

Public relations: A business or brand's efforts to build and maintain a favorable image with consumers through mass communication.

Public Service Announcement (PSA): a message communicated by the media to raise public awareness surrounding a specific issue.

Publicity stunt: A marketing tactic where specific events or activities are activated with the sole purpose of achieving a high level of media coverage and public awareness.

Publicity: Public information about a company, brand, good, or service appearing in the mass media as a news item at no cost to the organization.

