
UNIT 25 PUBLIC RELATIONS

Structure

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25.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading **this Unit** you will be able to understand:

- the role and functions of Public Relations (PR) in big as well as small **organisations**,
- the interaction of PR with other disciplines,
- the role of modern information technology in the job of PR, and
- the various forms of challenges faced by the PR department.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

What do you think a Unit titled PR in tourism might involve? It obviously should have something to **talk** about public relations as well as its relevance in the context of tourism industry. This Unit discusses the importance of public relations and how it helps you as a tourism professional.

You are already aware of the different segments of the tourism industry. These components and the delivery systems, including the sub-systems, have their own varying degree of specialisations and interdependence. There is the need to create mutual understanding between the different organisations and the **publics/consumers**, in recognition of the fact that without the active support of the key personnel and the goodwill of the public the industry cannot **sustain/develop** in harmony. It must be noted here that by public we mean any group that has any interest (actual or potential) in or impact on an organisation's ability to achieve its objectives. Here lies the crucial role of PR to develop effective coordination among all components of the system and the publics.

25.2 ROLE OF PR

The need for PR in a service industry, such as, tourism is greater because the industry depends on the effective **coordination** among its various components and the goodwill of the public. It is an established fact that public relations people are engaged in various forms of activities starting from research, action, communication, evaluation and **handling** crisis, etc. Today you need a PR Officer for:

- resource mobilisation,
- interacting with the community,
- dealing with government departments,
- marketing, and so on.

In fact the nature of PR varies as per the component of the tourism industry. For example, a PR manager working with a National Tourist Organisation would attempt to remove the apprehensions about a destination from the minds of the prospective tourists. This he or she would do by reinforcing in the tourism brochures:

- promises that carry marks of quality assurance,
- product endorsements and testimonials of travel experts, reputed tour-operators, well known travel writers and journalists. (These are the people whose opinion adds weight and credibility to advertising claims in so far as the potential tourists are concerned.)

In an other organisation or company the Public Relations professional has to play the role not only of a communicator and softening agent but also of an adviser. This is done to:

- **minimise** the pulls, stresses and conflicts,
- reduce friction, and
- diffuse tensions that arise from time to time between the "internal" **and/or** "external" **publics**.

This involves a great deal of social engineering, conflict resolution through research and a two-way communication process. Dialogue and appropriate package of solutions are needed to **harmonise** the conflicting needs of groups and/or individuals.

In fact the responsibility of a public relations personnel lies in developing a corporate culture in the industry and in promoting better network among various bodies. Generally, the activities performed by the PR department include:

- Media relations i.e.** to interact with media (print as well as electronic) and place such information that attracts attention to the product, service, organisation or event, etc.
- Product Publicity i.e.** initiating efforts to **publicise** a particular product or service.
- Lobbying i.e.** dealing with officials etc. for softening their attitude towards the organisation.
- Counselling i.e. advising** the management about public concerns, company's image and steps to be initiated in this regard.
- Corporate Communication i.e.** promoting understanding about the organisation through external and internal communications.

According to Philip **Kotler** today more and more companies are setting up Marketing Public Relations group (MPR) whose tasks go beyond simple publicity and include:

- Assistance in the launch of new products,
- assistance in repositioning a mature product,
- influencing specific target groups or market segments,
- **defending** products that have encountered public problems,
- creating awareness about the **organisation's** product or services,
- establishing credibility of the company's product, service and image, and
- developing publicity campaigns.

In small **organisations** the single manager or the entrepreneur has to handle these PR tasks as well. However, it is always better that a proper planning must be done by:

- setting the PR objectives,
- **organising** and choosing the appropriate PR methods, and
- evaluating the outcome of PR efforts.

Check Your Progress-1

1) Why should an organisation adopt a policy of public relations?

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2) Discuss the role of a PR manager.

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253 FUNCTIONS OF PR

There is no **model communication** organisation. It depends upon circumstances which vary from organisation to organisation. In some organisations the PR function arises out of a "fire-fighting" role and in other **organisations**, a PR department is created as a deliberate effort with set objectives. PR department works by the principle of "Management by objectives". PR professional is to act as a **catalyst for change** within a company and in order to fulfill this objective it needs "information". In a rigid or closed organisation it is difficult to get information which severely obstructs the two way flow of communication. In contrast in an open organisation, PR manager can even be privy to board-room secrets.

The functions of PR department are thus:

- To periodically evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the economic and business environment.
- To scan the environment and gather organisational intelligence and perform corporate surveillance.
- Before a **product/service** is launched in the market place, it is essential to know the market forces, the perceptions of the target consumers, the competitor's strengths and weaknesses, the potential for real and stimulated demand, the mood of the opinion makers, decision makers and the media vis-a-vis the organisation.
- Information thus gathered through primary and secondary data is analysed, sifted, processed and brought within the organisation for decision making at appropriate levels.
- Identify the intra-departmental and inter departmental communication and informational needs of various departments, assist the concerned departments by making films, writing backgrounders, publishing brochures, newsletters, specialised house-journals and manuals or other audio-visual communications.
- The PR department has to identify and establish contacts with a cross-section of important external publics encompassing decision-makers, opinion makers, the media, consumer groups, wholesalers, travel retailers and special interest groups or selected publics.

- PR needs to **organise** image **surveys** within and outside the **organisation** to gauge the people's perception about the organisation and its **product/service mix**. The findings will facilitate decision making and remedial measures.
- Another important job is to establish a PR environment within the company whereby people feel free to give vent to their feelings at appropriate forums and not fall victim to the grapevine. If these communication gaps are not **bridged** by official sources, they will be filled by gossip and **unauthorised** sources.
- PR **has** an advisory role towards the top management regarding internal and external developments that **will** effect the business of the **organisation/destination**. In tourism industry the issues are automation, revolution in the information technology, **eco-tourism**, unconventional forms of holidays, newer and **ecologically** softer forms of tourism, lack of market research and trained manpower, ineffective coordination between tourism **organisations** and government departments, ministries, health hazards, safety, hygiene, economic changes, technological innovations and changes in consumer behaviour etc. foreign exchange earnings, new destinations and new tourism **products/developments**, sociological and demographic changes in tourism generating countries, world tourism trends in the future and emergence of "niche" or "boutique" tour operators (eg. those operating musical tours, gourmet tours, **helisking**, etc.), policies on aviation, transport, hotels, entertainment, telecommunications, shopping and travel related laws, customs and immigration rules, export regulation, etc.
- It is the role of PR to dispel **disinformation** and create an informed public opinion for better decision making.
- Last, but not the least, it is necessary for PR to create an **emergency communication plan**, which should form part of the "disaster management plan" of the **organisation**.

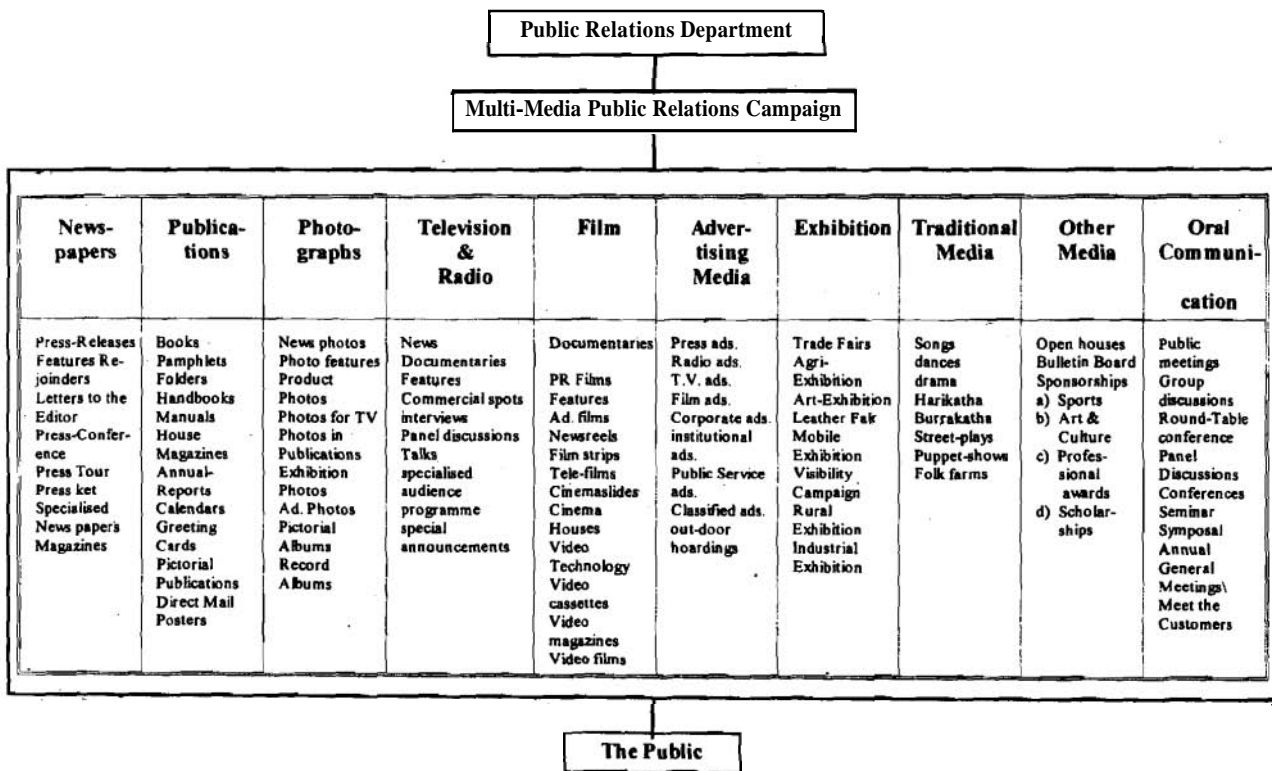
25.4 PR IN TOURISM MARKETING/PUBLICITY

The role of PR services in marketing a tourism **product/destination** is in the following areas:

- **Organising Familiarisation/Educational or Study tours consisting** of travel writers, radio journalists, photographers, TV or Film teams, journalists, opinion makers and travel-trade from the source markets. Articles or programmes **with** by-lines of writers and travel experts, trusted in their countries, carry a conviction with potential tourists which is perhaps unmatched by paid advertising messages.
- **Organising Training workshops/Sales Seminars** on a destination, wherein lectures are supplemented by audio-visual presentations and printed matters. Releasing Special supplements on the destination in the travel-trade media.
- **Direct Mail campaign** targeted at specific groups of consumers, decision makers, special interest segments such as golfers, wildlife enthusiasts, adventure sports clubs, trade associations, guilds and professional associations.
- **Newsletters** to the travel trade press, **airlines/air-charter** and **cruise/Cos.**, tour-operators/travel agents, aimed at **moulding public** opinion in favour of a destination or a tourism product.
- **Servicing of enquiries from the public:** Generally all enquiries written or oral can be serviced by mailing printed matter. In some cases a **customised** reply in the **form of** letters may be called for.
- **Film Distribution:** Distribution of tourism and destination promotion films for screening in clubs, schools, colleges, etc.
- **Promotional evenings and weeks:** Joint promotions with leading departmental stores clubs, cultural **organisations**, air-lines, tour-operators to **organise** handicrafts, food and **cuisine** festivals.
- **Trade Marts/Exhibitions:** Opportune time for Press Releases, Press Conferences, photo features, etc. on the tourism **product/destination**.
- **Celebration** of a country's Handicraft and cultural festivals in major source markets.
- **Liaison** with universities, colleges, professional and social clubs for image building.
- **Organisation** of contests, essay competitions, photo **and painting** exhibitions in the source markets.

- Participating in Radio and Television talk shows, interviews in the print media, specialised magazines, etc.
- **Organising** publicity and manufacturing 'news' to promote the destination directly or indirectly for Meetings, Incentive-tours, Conferences and Exhibitions.

The range of multi-media possibilities can be exploited through a judicious mix of two or more of the following tools:



A successful PR executive will grab any opportunity to project the country as a "year round" destination and create an image that is firmly rooted in the source of its competitive advantage. The idea is to project a "unique" and "distinctive" image of the destination by spotlighting those features which other destinations cannot offer.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Discuss the functions of PR department.

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2) Discuss the role of PR in tourism publicity.

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25.5 INTERFACE WITH OTHER DISCIPLINES

PR professional needs the support and cooperation of other divisions which really involves interface with major "line and staff" departments such as Marketing, Law, Personnel and HRD, Finance, **Production/Operations**, Consultancy, etc.

Marketing

Marketing is all about **products/services** and people. As they reach out to the consumer, marketers feel they are also in the business of PR. The major area of conflict is in advertising and publicity, especially in product advertising and institutional **advertising**. While the former is designed to increase product sales, the latter promotes the corporate image. The cause of friction lies in the allocation of funds to PR or Marketing.

As a via media, in **many** large Corporations, the product advertising is assigned to 'Marketing' and 'Institutional' advertising to PR. There is of course a dire need for integration in the communication strategy or it will send wrong and mixed signals to the target consumer. The integration is paramount because the aim of **advertising** and PR is acceptance of the organisation and its products in the market place.

According to 'Pioneer' newspaper, today 80% of the companies still spend **95%** on advertising and only 5% on PR and media relations. This meagre allocation **will** grow @ **75%** in the next couple of years. PR and publicity not only supplement the advertising but tap the media to convey the message in a credible and inexpensive way. The advantage of PR is that it creates publicity in the media which has high credibility and involves low costs. PR thus acts as an ideal foil for advertising.

Law

In times of crisis, in cases of alleged defamation, libel or slander, **top** management seeks legal aid. PR must work closely with the legal department to create an informed public opinion rather than leave the press and the **internal/external** publics to speculate.

PR's interface with the legal department relates to matters such as safety environment, health hazards and implementation of consumer protection legislation pertaining to the travel industry. The dissemination, scope and interpretation of travels laws, to safeguard the legitimate interest of the tourists and ensure the efficient running of **tour/travel** arrangements, the quality, the performance and availability of the diverse components and segments of the tourism infrastructure.

PR has to play the role of "Communication" and catalyst so **as** to build external "quality assurance standards" into the manufacturing or service process, as the case may be. Globalisation of the Indian economy will require observance of **ISO** standards and zero defect philosophy in provision of **products/services**.

Production/operations

The tourism product is largely intangible the end product being an "experience", quite unlike traditional goods and products which can be stored, the **product/service mix** of the tourism industry has to be produced fresh each time. The consumer interacts with all phases of this 'Process' of production and consumption. The 'process' of rendering the services is referred to **as** 'operations in the airline, hotel, resorts, entertainment and travel related **activities**.' These operations are the equivalent of the term 'production.'

- PR can play a complementary role to the **production/operations** manager in the field of employee motivation. This can be done by **organising** publicity for the employees as an "incentive" by giving wide "recognition" to those who excel, via 'news releases' etc. An ongoing dialogue with the chief of **production/operations** is necessary for making the internal media interesting and employee oriented.

Conflict Resolution

In order to achieve the objective of **centralised** communications, an **organisation** should have a PR committee comprising departmental heads of all "**staff**" and "line" functions with the PR person as the member secretary to play:

- (a) the advisory role
- (b) the role of a softening agent in resolving conflicts
- (c) the role of Communicator.

In these periodic meetings, the organisation can review its corporate identity, develop a programme to communicate this identity for creating an image that fits in with the overall corporate strategy. In a world of openness, greater transparency and fast communications, the performance itself depends on the "image" since it is linked to the confidence of investors, share holders, **financial** institution, etc.

Finance

With an ever increasing number of **shareholders**, the financial community, stock exchanges and **business/financial** press form important "publics" for the PR **department**. The requirements of all these publics are specific, hence the communication packages designed for them should have the expertise of the finance department combined with the language and skills of the PR professionals,

The Finance department must also be made aware of the value and objectives of PR activities. Expenditure on PR, advertising and publicity is till considered by many **finance** experts as dispensable and is generally slashed in times of **crisis**. It is wise for the PR department to build in certain escalations and margins for any unexpected financial cuts, thereby maintaining in **all** circumstances, the requisite level of financial resources.

25.6 INFORMATIONAL NEED

Performance of the tourism industry is to a great extent dependent on modern **information** networks, and technology **i.e.** computer, fax, telex, E-Mail and all **forms** of data processing.

According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) the induction of **computerised** global information and reservation systems will be the second revolution in tourism. This perhaps, **will** be more extensive in its effects than the **first** revolution created by the jet engine.

To quote an example, AMADEUS a global reservation system offers an innovative way to make instant reservations with more than 300 international airlines, 19,500 hotels and **7,500** car rental locations around globe. Today more than 100 Indian travel agencies are using the world's largest travel agency reservations system with **200** more agencies to be connected soon. The information and data in the system is constantly updated to suit the particular needs of a **region** or country.

In another significant development which has a great implication for the tourism business, the PC (Personal Computer) sales have zoomed to over 50 million a year worldwide. As recently as five years ago, says the Economic Times, Computers were used as glorified typewriters or word processors and connected to no more than a power source and an office printer. However by the middle of 1994, INTERNET connected over 2.2 million computers **globally** and served more than 25 million people.

At Hewlett Packard, a multinational company, every month **HP's 97,000** employees exchange 20 million E-Mail messages and execute more than a quarter million transactions with customers and suppliers by sharing three trillion characters of data. The electronic messages cut-out interminable hierarchies which take weeks and months and processes information at subliminal speed without any managers being involved.

The revolution in the information technology will certainly make the world easily accessible to travellers and make organisations increasingly customer and user friendly.

In the light of **this** development in information technology PR profession has to be very much **upto** date about the effective use of these information networks for public relations.

25.7 CHALLENGES FOR PR IN INDIAN TOURISM

The challenges for PR professionals in India exist at two levels:

- (a) International level
- (b) National level.

At the international level PR has to correct and change the "**cultural** and historical" image of India. The country continues to be perceived overseas as a land of poverty, heat, dust, disease and snake-charmers. Besides, PR professionals have to build awareness of the great diversity of India's tourist attractions and its infrastructure. The diversity of its landscape, culture, people, cuisine, arts, music, shopping, entertainment, languages, leisure and recreational possibilities including adventure sports mountaineering and trekking, etc. conferences, golf, wildlife and flora and fauna.

The Indian tourism product is heterogeneous as compared to the smaller city-state destinations in Asia. India is ideal for long stay tourists and repeat visits. This diversity and heterogeneity need to be high-lighted through the mass media.

At the 'National level' tourism as an industry **still** does not enjoy total Government or **community** support. India's political managers and representatives **find** it worth-while to promote those 'tangible' industries which are easily noticeable such as dams, canals, power projects and roads. Tourism being largely 'intangible' does not catch the eye of the politicians and the electorate, notwithstanding its great **socio-economic** benefits. PR has in this case to play the role of catalyst of change and create awareness amongst individuals and communities.'

Although our people are by far the most friendly and hospitable, the attitudes of those involved in providing the civic amenities and running the delivery systems are often negative. Poor hygiene, lack of cleanliness and inadequate public facilities, unethical shopkeepers, untrained guides, unskilled manpower in the **facilitation**, hospitality services and ill maintained monuments are adverse factors which add up to deter potential tourists from visiting India. PR has to create ways to **minimise** these weaknesses and threats to the travel industry.

Last, but not the least, unplanned tourism is placing a great strain on the natural resources of our country. It is the duty of PR professionals to promote environmental causes and protection, preservation of fragile eco-systems as well as the **bio-diversity**, reduction of noise and scenic pollution, **minimising** and recycling of wastes, incorporation environmental content in design planning etc. to create eco-friendly tourism products for a safe, clean and well managed destination. In fact these aspects introduce the concept of social responsibility and social benefits in the domain of public relations.

In order to achieve these aims, the PR **professionals will** have to evolve communication programmes to persuade the Governments and tourism industry to form **Eco-Courts**, Eco-Brigades in the rural and urban communities and Eco-Clubs in **colleges** and schools. The future of tourism depends on a high quality environment.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) What is the necessity of interaction between the PR professionals and other departmental heads in an organisation?

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2) List out some responsibilities of PR professionals to promote tourism in India.

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25.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we explained to you the importance of public relations in tourism and how in different ways public relation professionals act. The volume of work done by public relation professional may vary depending on the size of a company. Successful promotion of tourism definitely requires the public relation people to:

- encourage an enduring interest among all employees,
- develop proper coordination among various bodies,
- make the top management aware of the market needs and problem, and
- project a positive picture about the tourism products to the prospective tourists.
- maintain cordial relations with different publics.

In case you are an entrepreneur or self manager you have to ensure that your organisation has a sound public relations policy.

25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Need of public relations in any organisation lies primarily in promoting harmony and goodwill among various segments of employees and also between the organisation and the clientele. See Sec. 25.2.
- 2) See Sec. 25.2.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sec. 25.3.
- 2) See Sec. 25.4.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) Interaction helps in sharing information, responsibility and resolving conflicts. See Sec. 25.5.
- 2) Proper projection of cultural heritage of India, natural beauty, removal of various bottlenecks and development of goodwill among various agencies, development of public awareness, etc. See Sec. 25.7.

SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Susan Webster	Group Travel Operating Procedures, Newyork, 1993.
Donald Lundberg	Tourist Business, Newyork, 1990.
James M Poynter	Travel Agency Accounting Procedures, Newyork, 1991.
J Christopher Holloway	The Business of Tourism, London, 1989.
Rob Davidson	Tourism, London, 1993.
South Asia Tourism Secretariat	Publications on Travel Operations and Tour Operations.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS BLOCK

Activity 1

Make an inclusive tour package for a group of 15 tourists who intend to visit a Wildlife Sanctuary nearest to your town.

Activity 2

Write a **letter** to a Travel Agency offering the package you have made in Activity 1.

Activity 3

Make an assessment of your own communication skills in dealing with public. List the limitations and what efforts you are making to improve upon these limitations.

Activity 4

Learn how to make the following reservations:

- 1) Railway reservations,
- 2) Airline reservations,
- 3) Deluxe Bus service reservations.

Activity 5

Visit a hotel of any category in your town. Observe their front office operations. Make a list of improvements that **can** be done in these operations.

Check-in Times :

Certain formalities are required to be completed by the passengers at the airport before and after being accepted by the airline for travel. To complete these formalities and the check-in process, passengers are required to arrive at the airport sufficiently before the departure time of the flight. The check-in time for individual flights can be enquired in advance from the airline's booking and airport offices.

The time(s) shown on the flight coupons(s) is the departure time of the aircraft. The flights cannot be delayed for passengers arriving late for check-in and no responsibility can be accepted in such cases by Air-India.

चेक-इन समय :

एअरलाइन द्वारा यात्रा के लिए स्वीकार किए जाने से पहले और बाद में यात्रियों को एअरपोर्ट पर कुछ औपचारिकताएं पूरी करनी होती हैं। इन औपचारिकताओं और चेक-इन प्रक्रिया को पूरा करने के लिए यात्रियों का उड़ान के प्रस्थान से पर्याप्त समय पहले एअरपोर्ट पर पहुंचना और एअरलाइन के चेक-इन काउंटरों पर रिपोर्ट करना जरूरी है। हर उड़ान के प्रस्थान समय के संबंध में एअरलाइन के बुकिंग तथा एअरपोर्ट कार्यालय से पहले ही जानकारी प्राप्त की जा सकती है। टिकट के

उड़ान कूपन(ए) गति(ए) समय विमान के प्रस्थान का (के) समय है (है)। चेक-इन के लिए देर से आने वाले यात्रियों के लिए उड़ानों को विलंबित नहीं किया जा सकता और ऐसे मामलों में एअर-इंडिया द्वारा किसी प्रकार के दायित्व को स्वीकार नहीं किया जा सकता।



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