

Investing in communications

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[Marketing Mix, April 2001] The promotions, advertising and communications fraternity is under increasing scrutiny by clients to justify costs and quantify performance. The communications industry needs to respond to these heightened demands by focusing corporate efforts on developing long-term brand-building partnerships with clients.

Communications should not be regarded as a monthly expense, but rather as an integral part of the overall corporate strategy. It should, ideally, be included in the company's budget.

A committed and ongoing exchange of information between the two parties is paramount, as the level of input corresponds with the level of return a client can expect.

Clients should differentiate between the 'nice to have' PR luxury and communications specialists who are experts in advising and guiding clients towards the best possible media scenario.

Strategically-motivated exposure heightens employee morale, new business growth, positive affirmations by existing business, top of mind awareness by media and consumers, and the emergence of 'opinion leaders' and stimulates clients to think 'outside the box' and to evaluate and innovate existing business practices.

To properly serve a client's communication requirements, it is essential to have an in-depth understanding of the business and the competitive environment. This does not happen overnight but the benefit will be realised within a given period.

Communication consultancies need to avoid charges on an hourly basis or obsessing over rands and cents and should encourage clients to look at the communications investment in terms of derived value: on the basis of sales, market positioning, staff morale and share price criteria.

Sporadic communication can be counterproductive and fails to create the credibility and consistency. By taking charge of communications, one can negate unfavourable publicity by the media. During a crisis, properly managed communications is a powerful tool indeed: it can bolster a falling share price, alleviate public and investor concerns and even minimise the severity of legislation.

By involving specialists who keep abreast of current affairs and actively seek out news opportunities, companies benefit from the most succinct way of communicating: by targeting the media.

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