PERSONAL COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT
HOW TO POSITION PEOPLE EFFECTIVELY

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ABSTRACT

Agencies and consultants are increasingly accompanying politicians, businessmen and women, scientists, artists and sport professionals as well as individuals from showbiz, the fashion and TV worlds as they become public figures/personal brands. This paper describes this booming personality market and different counselling models in theory and practice (marketing, branding, reputation and public relations models) as well as an ideal planning concept for how to position people effectively. The theoretical background of the phenomenon of personalization is discussed within the context of marketing communication and organizational communication management, emphasizing that personal communication management or personality PR is a responsible management task.

DEFINITION

Personal communication management (PCM) is defined by the author as a collective name for all forms of professionally organized communication (i.e. systematically planned, continually carried out and properly evaluated) by and for individuals in all areas of society. The overriding aim is to successfully position individuals and, to a certain extent, the companies they work for, in the public eye. PCM does not only focus on CEOs as role models but also, in a broader sense, on positioning 'major' and 'minor' celebrities in society, such as politicians, artists and sports professionals, but also freelance professionals (lawyers, doctors, life coaches, education counsellors, management and business consultants, therapists, etc.). Many of them are also members of organizations or networked within (trade) associations and subject to the social conditions of competition.1

THE PERSONALITY MARKET

Personal Communication Management is becoming an important economic factor, above all in connection with the marketing of individuals (personality or celebrity marketing) where PR has a special role to play, and has become an independent discipline (just like in corporate communication). In his book, High Visibility. The Making and Marketing of Professionals into Celebrities, Kotler, one of the best known experts on marketing, analysed the US market for celebrities with his team and attributed PR with the most dominant role of all communication disciplines: "the most essential support for most aspirants comes from public relations" (cf. Rein et al., 1997).

The market is also booming in Europe (cf. Nessmann, 2008). Well-known politicians, managers and stars from showbiz often have their own team of experts who advise them in all aspects of public relations: specialist consultants, ghostwriters, photographers, media trainers, colour and style consultants, press officers, etc. People in management positions – particularly CEOs – are becoming more important for corporate communication. In stark contrast with the

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1 The 'Personal Communication Management' (PCM) research project, including a focus on continuing education, was initiated by the author of this paper at the University of Klagenfurt in 2003. The many different ways in which individuals present themselves have since been investigated in a number of seminar papers and diploma dissertations. The university course on PCM was first held in the academic year 2005/2006. So far it is the only university-based continuing education course which deals with the positioning of individuals, providing both a solid theoretical foundation and practice-oriented work.
American market, hardly anybody ever talks about this type of consultancy work in Europe, preferring to see it as an undercover activity which is carried out confidentially and very discretely. Nevertheless, personalization is seen as a key factor for successful PR/organizational communication and is unlikely to disappear from the everyday work of agencies and consultants.

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The phenomenon of personalization and the various ways in which individuals present themselves go back to the very dawn of humanity. People have always used a rich repertoire of techniques, either consciously or unconsciously, so as to leave a lasting (positive) impression on others. In an analysis of the history of PR (cf. Nessmann, 2000/2004), concrete case studies (of kings, emperors, statesmen, businessmen, etc.) revealed that over the last 2000 years, famous and influential historical personalities have used numerous methods which would nowadays go under the heading of PR techniques, such as

- deliberately making use of 'fashionable' clothing, hair styles, make up and accessories
- 'showing off' their personal life styles
- basking in other people's limelight and surrounding themselves with VIPs
- having coins minted with their likeness on them
- creating their family's own coat of arms
- having their portraits painted (naturally by the great masters of the day)
- staging important social events (weddings, birthdays, moments of personal success)
- attending festivities, as well as making public appearances of any sort
- publishing documents, manifestos, books, memoirs, autobiographies, etc., and,
- with the emergence of the mass media, knowing how to work with journalists.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

From a theoretical point of view, the phenomenon of personalization can be located on several levels:

- firstly in a social context, particularly where there are conflicting priorities between the 'individual and society'. Key words here would be individualization, self-realization, globalization, neo-liberal society, modern day capitalism, the labour market, etc. (cf. Bridge, 1994),
- secondly in public communication as conveyed through the media, as in society journalism, celebrity news, the booming gossip press, etc. (cf. Park and Berger, 2004) and
- thirdly in the context of organizational and corporate communications, and particularly CEO communication/positioning, testimonial advertising, etc. (cf. Gaines-Ross, 2003; Fombrun and van Riel, 2004; Deekeling and Arndt, 2006; Zerfaß et.al, 2008).

Over the last few years, very many 'how to' books have been published, providing tips on promoting, marketing or branding yourself and dealing with a wide range of concepts connected with the marketing of individuals. As part of the Personal Communication Management research project at the University of Klagenfurt, all relevant books on this topic were collected and analysed, resulting in the first, comprehensive review of the literature, which is very interesting for other researchers in this field.
The most important authors of books published on this topic in English are listed by year of publication: Dainard, 1990; Leeds, 1992; Franklin, 1996; Ballback and Slater, 1998; Rye, 1998; Bridges, 1998; Peters, 1999; Baker, 2000; Herman, 2000; Spillane, 2000; Trout and Rivkin, 2000; Inches, 2001; Ries and Trout, 2001; Edwards, 2002; Genasi, 2002; Graham, 2002; Roffer, 2002; Montoya et al., 2003; Montoya and Vandehey, 2005; Pringle, 2004; McNally and Speak, 2006; Arruda and Dixson, 2007; Marcum and Smith, 2007; Van Yoder, 2007.

The quality of these works differs: quite a few of them give advice in the 'how-to' format, although some are partially based on solid theoretical foundations. One thing that really sticks out in these 'how-to' books, whether scientifically grounded or not, is the way that the language is strongly business oriented. They talk about the individual as a company, or the individual as a product who is 're-packaged' as something to be sold. Manage yourself as you would manage a successful business is the creed some authors preach. The concept of the market has become the dominant metaphor. To a certain extent, individuals are degraded to purely economic units. Many authors deal with what is actually quite a contradictory topic in a one-sided, yet catchy way and socially critical questions are usually ignored. Against this background it is hardly surprising that the topics of promoting/marketing/branding yourself – at least in Europe – generate a lot of scepticism in many people and are generally seen negatively. Here is not the place to continue the socio-political debate on the sense or lack of it behind such offers (cf. Nessmann, 2005).

COMMUNICATION COUNSELLING MODELS

In a theoretical meta-analysis of published works, the author of this paper identified three different counselling models which vary particularly in terms of conception and planning. Depending on their professional background, the authors approach the topic either from a marketing, branding or a PR perspective. A more detailed analysis would go beyond the scope of this paper but there is enough space for a brief digression.

The branding or marketing model follows the 'people as brands' approach, taking advantage of the findings of modern brand management and marketing. Advocates of this model work with the umbrella terms of personal branding/personal marketing and generally follows the 4 Ps when drawing up their concepts, namely product: services, proposals, individual qualities; price: the conditions under which the person is prepared to offer their services (fees, salary); place: where the person offers their 'products' or services; and promotion: communication tools like advertising, sponsoring, testimonials, public relations, etc., whereby public relations is ascribed a significant role.

The reputation model also exploits the findings of modern brand management and recognizes 'people as brands'. Representatives of this model use the term reputation management, thus avoiding the concept of 'image'. The cornerstones of the reputation model are predictability, calculability and sustainability, as well as orientation towards the stakeholders (investors, analysts, clients, employees, etc.) coupled with potential support for the company or the person which arises from this.

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2 A longer list of "how-to" books published in German and English can be sent by e-mail on request.

3 The criteria for analysis were: Which terms do the authors use? Which theoretical approaches do they base their work on? What is their target group? Which communication goals do they pursue? Which instruments and methods do they propose?
The public relations model takes account of the values attributed to the individual or company, of the relevant stakeholders and the sustainability of the measure. In this context, PR is not to be understood as mere media work or as just one element of the marketing mix but as an independent communication discipline and as an indispensable function of management. Here, cultural, social and economic aspects are taken into account.

The theoretical and methodological elements of these three counselling models are taken up and embellished in the personal communication management model.

THE PERSONAL COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT MODEL

Personal communication management (PCM) as a form of coaching or counselling places special emphasis on individuals and their characters (values, strengths and weaknesses) and positions them in the most important markets (i.e. capital, sales, labour markets or public opinion). PCM consultants/coaches (or personality consultants/coaches) help their clients to achieve the following:

- to recognize their personal potential (strengths, weaknesses, values, visions)
- to leave a lasting impression on groups which are relevant for them, both internally and externally (impression management)
- to create a positive reputation (reputation management)
- to position themselves as a 'brand' in the public eye (personal branding).

If PCM is to be carried out professionally, it should be done so consciously, systematically and continually. The clients' communicative appearances should be planned strategically. In the course of the personal communication management project at the University of Klagenfurt, an ideal positioning concept was developed for clients in politics, business, culture, sport and education, etc. (cf. Nessmann 2005) which has since been modified and adapted (cf. Nessmann 2007, 2008). The main phases are:

- a briefing session to clarify the client's problem(s), viewpoints and goals
- taking stock (image, reputation, how well known, etc.)
- analysing all the data which has been collected (personal image, image as perceived by others; comparison of target and actual results, etc.)
- a clear strategy (goals, target groups, messages and guidelines)
- the tactics phase (selecting appropriate PR measures, instruments)
- evaluation (monitoring success and effectiveness, reflection).

It is not possible to describe the individual steps in more detail in this paper, but I would like to briefly introduce the most important PR measures and instruments in the tactics phase.

- Documentation of personal data: curriculum vitae with the most important personal facts and figures, photo archive, a personal 'branding dossier' (covering strengths, weaknesses, preferences, visions, goals, values, mission statement and other questions which journalists typically like to ask)
- Impression management: strategies and tactics on how to present oneself, conscious use of language, clothing, symbols. Dealing with other people (esteem, recognition, praise, constructive criticism, politeness, respect, etc.)
- **Media and topic management**: press releases, press conferences, in-depth interviews with journalists, letters to the editor, guest commentaries, interviews, home stories, homepage, blogs, business cards, postcards, publications (books, articles, autobiography, etc.)

- **Social management**: taking on social responsibility, getting involved in associations, clubs and interest groups, supporting charitable or social institutions, taking part in public debates, holding seminars or lectures, attending and hosting parties, regularly cultivating contacts and relationships, networking, etc., etc.

When putting these tactics into effect, certain fundamental principles have to be observed. All these activities are only credible when they are honestly intended and not at variance with the client's character, values or personal convictions. Trust, credibility and authenticity arise when statements, actions and values coincide. In other words, individuals appear to be authentic, trustworthy and credible when their deeds (actions) are consistent with their words (statements) and values (ethical and moral principles).

Personality PR concepts cannot be bought off the peg but are always tailor-made. Everybody is an individual and therefore every PR/communication concept is different. As a result, personality consultants/coaches have to be very cautious and take account of individuals and their unique environment.

### CONCLUSIONS

From the perspective of corporate communication, PCM is a responsible management task and the chances and dangers of its strategies must be carefully considered. In terms of 'integrated communication', managers' public appearances must harmonize with the organization's other communicative efforts; the corporate brand and personal brand must be coordinated. Personalization must not turn into an end in itself (ego marketing by vain managers) but must be in the company's service. Personality communication is not just about pure publicity, cheap sales tricks, egocentric self-presentation or short-term attention. Personalization should not be confused with 'privatization' either: individuals' private lives should remain private, if at all possible. The individuals' actions must harmonize with their statements and values.

PR, marketing or communication consultants interested in personal communication management must acquire additional knowledge from the fields of coaching, branding, reputation management and impression management alongside sound experience in their field. It is particularly important to comply with ethical and moral principles, as laid down in PR codices, for there is quite a lot at stake: trust, understanding, acceptance, credibility, integrity and – last but not least – the reputation of the individual and the company.
REFERENCES


