



Public Relations

Training Manual for Adventist
Communication/Public Relations



GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is Public Relations	7
An Adventist Use of Public Relations	9
Analysis, Strategy and Tactics	11
Church Branding	14
Developing a Public Relations Strategy	16
Reaching All of Our Publics	18
Bibliography	19
Contact Information	20



WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

From an early point in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders saw both the need and the advantage in connecting with the public. It went hand in hand with the thrust for evangelism in the new denomination.

In 1912, the Bureau of Public Relations—or the Press Bureau as it was also called—was first formed. It was headed by Walter Burgan, a professional journalist in Baltimore, Maryland, who had been covering a public evangelistic campaign by Carlyle B. Haynes, a 29-year-old Adventist minister. Burgan was moved by the message and Haynes was impressed by Burgan, who proceeded to tutor him with the skills of utilizing the public press. The positive results attracted the attention of the General Conference and, on their invitation, new believer Burgan established the department which he would lead the rest of his life. As the *Adventist Encyclopedia* says, “he promoted friendly relations with the secular press and trained others to present [Adventist] beliefs in the newspapers.”

In its simplest form public relations is defined as the art and science of building relationships between an organization and its key audiences or publics. All organizations use public relations, whether they intend to or not. Any communication from an organization affects its relationship for positive or negative. And, whether it is a for-profit company or a spiritual organization, the principles for positive public relations remain the same:

- educate and inform
- strengthen credibility
- promote understanding
- heighten awareness and increase visibility

These principles can be achieved in two ways:

Direct public relations—Things under your control which you originate, such as press releases, direct phone contacts and mailings, events, etc.

Indirect public relations—Things that are generated by others in which the name or a connection to the church is evident, such as sponsorships, participation in charity functions, community service, etc.

The outcome of such relations also vary from the direct to the indirect. In some cases, you can see how many attended or responded and how positive they reacted. In other cases, you have no idea who saw or how they were impressed. In either case, your goal over time is to steadily gain trust with the community and with church members.



AN ADVENTIST USE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

A public relations textbook states the supposedly rhetorical question, “...and what could be farther from the practicality of public relations than spirituality?” Ironically, the author then proceeds to make the case that everything is related; that obstacles are not the opposite of, but rather the other end of opportunity—a phenomenon he relates to “zen” but which we connect to God, the One who works all things together for good.

If the basic definition of public relations is to relate well with the public, then all who call themselves Adventist Christians should do well in that area, for we are all called to love our neighbor. To assume, however, that all Adventists will be good at loving their neighbor would be a mistake for, just as some excel in the gifts of hospitality and nurturing, so others must possess and cultivate the gift and skill of public relations. That’s where you come in. Public relations doesn’t just happen; it must be planned and directed.

The intended outcome of public relations for the Adventist is similar to the commission of the church as a whole—to take the gospel everywhere and baptize them. However, the specific PR goal is a bit different. Public relations intends to influence the public to be favorable for hearing the message. It doesn’t close the deal and baptize—that’s the work of evangelism. But PR intends to make evangelism possible by changing perceptions in the public.

PERCEPTION

A perception in this case is a conclusion or assumption someone draws based on what they have perceived through their senses. And of course we know that many people don’t always come to an accurate conclusion, particularly in matters of a church like ours, because of what their senses have told them. The primary job then, in public relations, is to give people something new and more accurate to perceive so that they can draw a new and more favorable conclusion.

To do that with good results requires some knowledge of how people have received their original opinions. Perceptions are generally based on information people have gleaned through word-of-mouth, through newspaper articles, websites and other forms of media and also through experiences happening to them personally or to someone they know.

If we know, for instance, that the inaccurate perceptions of a community group about Adventists is based on some long-standing traditions or stories that have been told for years, those perceptions won't be changed with a newspaper article or a letter to the editor. It will take an extended effort of establishing friendships, relationships and connections with that community before they will let go of things their parents might have told them. It won't be an overnight fix. If, on the other hand, an erroneous story in the newspaper started a rumor or inaccurate perception, that can best be countered through the same medium that started it all—along with those extended relationships with the community.

Public relations incorporates that basic Biblical principle to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.



Here are some basic steps towards affecting those perceptions in a positive and deliberate way that can achieve definable results. These steps are basic to public relations and can be learned from any good book on the subject. The primary book we have drawn from for this part is *Strategic Planning for Public Relations* by Ronald D. Smith. You'll find it listed in the bibliography at the back of this manual. The steps noted here are particularly focused on how they relate to an organization such as ours—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

ANALYSIS

Steps one, two and three involve figuring out what you are dealing with.

First you analyze *the situation*. What is the problem or issue that we must confront? For many Adventists around the world, these issues often involve a lack of awareness of who we are, or a misconception of who we are. Sometimes there are negative opinions or feelings based on something real or imagined that is linked to our name. Or it can be as basic a matter as needing to get the public behind us in order to build a church, open a school or even hold an evangelistic meeting. A careful analysis of our real need or issue is the first step towards focusing the proper resources on the problem.

Second, we must analyze *ourselves*. What is it about our organization that has contributed to this problem? Is there something we can do first that will help the situation? In most cases, it would be easier to change ourselves than another person, provided of course that we have that moral or spiritual option. If we cannot make an effective change on our end, then we must see how we can convince others to make that adjustment.

Third, we analyze *our publics* or *audience*. A public is a grouping of people with something in common, particularly as it relates to our problem at hand. The right public for our purposes is the one that would make the greatest difference for our situation if we could persuade them. They hold the keys to the answer, or at least they stand in the door leading to the answer.

A public can be a local, regional or worldwide audience, but it is more usually a segment of a population. This is often referred to as “demographics,” such as “women ages 18-35,” but in public relations an audience is often more defined than that, being whoever we want to reach. For example, an audience can be “young camp meeting attendees” or “new mothers.”

In addition to audiences, there are stakeholders, literally people who have a “stake” in a given issue. All audiences are stakeholders (or presumptive stakeholders), but not all stakeholders are audiences. For example, a church congregation creates a fundraising campaign to help the victims of a local disaster. The congregation and the disaster victims are stakeholders, but the audience is anyone who is likely to donate money.

Sometimes widely differing audiences and stakeholders are joined in a common public relations effort, necessitating the use of several distinct but complementary messages. This is not always easy to do, but it can work when the publics or audiences are clearly identified.

One cannot assume that a collection of people with such things in common as denominational beliefs is one audience. Many well-meaning messages have been lost by communicators trying to treat such a diverse group as one. It’s a fundamental principle that Christ recognized when He described His church as a body, with many parts. Good public relations will recognize the same.

STRATEGY

The next three steps involve strategy, based on what we learned from our analysis. The strategy is where we figure what we’re going to do about the situation.

First there is the establishment of *goals and objectives*. We know what the problem is and now we determine the outcome we are looking for. If you don’t have clear goals and objectives, you don’t know which direction you are heading and you won’t know when you’ve gotten there.

Second, we must plan our *actions and responses* that will help us reach these goals and objectives. Actions are proactive moves that are totally under our control; we plan them and accomplish them according to our timetable and our needs. Responses are reactions to others actions; sometimes we can only respond to what has already happened. It is not

necessarily on our own timetable, but the carefully planned response can still work to our advantage and accomplish our own goal.

Third, it is time to choose *effective communication*. This is when the rubber begins to meet the road, so to speak, and we actually start producing that which our job and our training has been pushing us to do all along. By this point, however, we have a much clearer idea of the type of communication that will produce the effective results and we can create our masterpiece work with greater confidence. This is where we choose the type of communication that will best serve our purpose. Will it be the spoken word, a print campaign, or news releases that will convey our message? Will we use spokespersons, or create a familiar theme or a visual image that will catch people's attention? We can mix and match our answers but they are all geared to the message we are trying to convey to the audience we have identified.

TACTICS

The next two steps are closely related and follow the choices we started in choosing effective communication.

First, we must select our *communication tactic*. This is where we create the things people actually see; the website, the advertisement, the brochure, book or radio spot. Depending on what we've decided would be effective, we may produce several different and varied tactics that will make sure our audience receives the message. Our creativity here is paramount to ensure that the message is not only received but remembered.

And then, we must *implement the strategic plan*, which is where we lay out the timetable, the budget required, the professionals to hire, and all the little details that will make this plan a reality. When the strategic plan is fully implemented, we are done. We have accomplished what we set out to do. Well, actually we don't necessarily know that we've accomplished our goal until our next step.

EVALUATION

We must look back and *evaluate our strategic plan*. This step is necessary both to justify the time and money we spent and also to help us fine tune our efforts for future similar needs. We learn from where we've been and so do others, especially if we can show them what we did and how we got there.



CHURCH BRANDING

One of the most important aspects of maintaining credibility and awareness in the public is through the proper and consistent use of corporate identification. This brand, when it becomes widely known to the general public, acquires *brand recognition*. One goal in brand recognition is instant identification of the organization by the name and the logo, or through the use of either one by itself. This familiarity happens over time and requires consistent placement in front of the public.

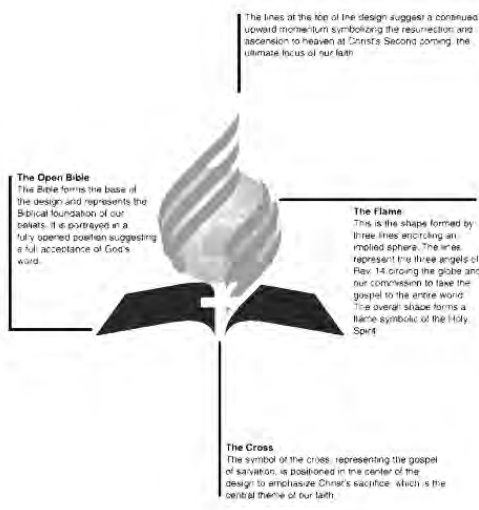
To ensure this consistency and recognition, this brand, both the name and the look, must be protected from misuse that would confuse either the look or the meaning of the brand. And the only method to keep that protected is through the legal authority granted owners of a *trademark* and consistent policing of that mark.

This is why the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1996 adopted a newly-created logo and logotype as its official mark, properly registered in countries around the world. Previous to this, the church had never had a logo or trademark. Many and varying graphics had been used to represent the church on stationery, signs and printed material, but there was no consistency and consequently, there was nothing that could legally be protected. Anyone and everyone was free to use or misuse the name and graphics associated with the church.

Now the church has moral authority and legal recourse to protect against misrepresentation of what the church is and what it stands for. This official logo carries with it all the perceptions that are associated with the church and it communicates that in any language. The official logo, which is both the graphic element and the text, is to be used by all official organizations operating under the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These are defined by those listed in the annual publication *The Adventist Yearbook*. There are still many different logos used by entities within the structure of the church, such as hospitals, schools, publishing houses, etc. Although the corporate church has not made the church logo a mandatory usage as a

primary mark, it is available as such within the published guidelines and, above all, should be included within the identity of any affiliated institution as a secondary mark.

The *Global Identity Standards Manual* can be downloaded from the official church website (www.adventist.org/logo) and should be consulted as the guide for proper usage.



The choice of the Church's logo reflects the core values that Seventh-day Adventists are committed to. The foundation is the Bible, the Word of God, shown open since its message must necessarily be read and put into practice. Central to that Biblical message is the Cross, and is also central in the logo. Above the Cross and the open Bible is the burning flame of the Holy Spirit, the messenger of Truth.





DEVELOPING A PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY

There are two overall goals that usually drive public relations strategy: managing your *reputation* and creating a *relationship*.

These two are often intertwined; each one affects the other. If one were to be emphasized more than the other for purposes of the work of the church, it would seem that *relationships* should be the primary focus. Our reputation is a valuable thing, but it is not so much our creation as it is the result of who we are and what we do. Our mandate as Christians is to love (relationship) and that is how others will know who we are (reputation).

Unfortunately we as an organization have often placed a greater concern on what people think of us and have not gone out of our way to create relationships with the publics around us. This is the great challenge of public relations for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the days ahead.

Polls and surveys show that the percentage of people on earth who know who we are and what we're about is declining, at least in some areas of the world. Yet, we know that where we have connected with communities, where we have established relationships, their knowledge and opinion of us is strongly positive. So we do not fight an uphill battle. After all, Christ did promise that if we lift Him up, He will draw all unto Him. And He said the way we lift Him up is through how we relate to our neighbor. It's that simple.

Our challenge is to expand our community, both within and outside of our church. We as an organization must be sure to embrace our total body—the young, the old, the ethnic minorities, the conservatives, the radicals—any and all who call themselves followers of Christ must become a part of our public relations picture, for it takes all parts of the body to relate to all parts of the world. Our public relations picture must take in more than what we stereotypically assume to be the representative Adventist. Whoever comes in our door and becomes part of us is an

important part of the body. They become a public relations tool that we can use to reach a public or audience where we didn't have access before. Do not restrict the scope of what God wants to do.

SUGGESTIONS ON IMPLEMENTING A STRATEGY

There are two general directions that can be chosen to reach the public relations goals you have determined are necessary for your church community. One is events or activities *that you control* and determine and the other is events or activities that you may influence or even *have no control* over.

The first case is the event which is known to be Adventist sponsored and managed. This is the concert at the church, the health fair in the school, the Pathfinder parade, the Community Services work day in the community. These events connect to the community in the way we want to be seen and can give them a feel for who we are. It can have a strong value, especially as we shape each event so that it is not just comfortable for us but is also comfortable or attractive for the community.

The second case, events over which we have no or little control, can include a concert in which we are invited to participate, a fund-raising event by the community for our hospital, a story in the news such as the recent feature on CNN and in the National Geographic Magazine about Adventists and longevity—in each of these cases others set the agenda and tone of the event.

The advantage of the first scenario, which we control, is obvious in that it can accurately reflect exactly what we want to convey. On the other hand it can be seen as a self-serving commercial or promotion (which is exactly true) of which people know there is an ulterior motive (and there is). In the second scenario, the disadvantage can be that we have no idea how it will turn out (or at least no control) and it may include elements we wouldn't choose to represent our church. On the advantage side, however, when someone else speaks highly of us, someone who has nothing to gain from their promotion of what we do, then it becomes a credible message to the public as an unsolicited endorsement.

Both of these methods of public relations events are helpful and useful in our strategies and each should be taken advantage of.




REACHING ALL OF OUR PUBLICS

A challenge for Adventist public relations is to reach beyond our comfort zone and our usual audiences. It is a concern we can't avoid because our commission from God is to reach *all* peoples in *all* the world. One tool God has already placed in our laps for this purpose are the members of our church who He has already brought into the “fold”.

Our members come from and represent all demographics of the world and many of them come with the gifts and skills that we need to reach their own group. Sometimes we marginalize these potential contributors because we don't feel they represent the “mainstream” of Adventism, or at least not the way we would like to see our church represented. This is something we must keep open as a matter of prayer, for these who don't fit our norm may be the very ones God has placed in the body to reach those we would not normally reach.

PUBLIC RELATIONS—IT'S SERIOUS!

To summarize, public relations is as much an integral part of our mission to the world as is preaching and teaching. It is something which must happen with deliberation and planning, and it is an avenue which can help bring diverse people together, both within the body and within the world. Let it take its rightful place in your communication ministry.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Smith, Ronald D. (2005) *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Morley, Michael (2002) *How to Manage Your Global Reputation: A Guide to the Dynamics of International Public Relations*. Washington Square, New York: New York University Press.

Parkinson, Michael G. & Ekachai, Daradirek (2006) *International and Intercultural Public Relations: A Campaign Case Approach*. Pearson Education, Inc.

RELATED REFERENCE MATERIALS FROM GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION

- Media Relations Manual
- Crisis Management
- Adventist News Network Manual
- Global Identity Standards Manual

REFERENCE LINKS

www.adventist.org

www.adventist.org/logo

www.news.adventist.org



CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS PUBLIC RELATIONS STAFF

Reger C. Smith, Jr.,

Associate Director of Communication

Director of Public Relations

301 680-6313

smithr@gc.adventist.org

John E. Torres III,

Public Relations Assistant

301 680-6310

torresj@gc.adventist.org

Ray Dabrowski,

Director of Communication

General Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists

301 680-6300

dabrowskir@gc.adventist.org

John Banks,

Associate Director of Communication

Director of Media Relations

301 680-6307

banksj@gc.adventist.org

Lynn E. Friday,

Administrative Assistant

Communication Department

301 680-6300

fridayl@gc.adventist.org

Office of Public Relations ■ Communication Department
Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters
12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904, U.S.A.
Phone: + (301) 680-6300 ■ www.adventist.org

© 2006 Copyright by Communication Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

A People of Hope Production

Written by: Reger C. Smith, Jr. and John E. Torres III ■ Text edited by: Lynn E. Friday