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## **PLANNING OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Ukraine is in a condition of political and economic crises on the end of 2008. For cutting-edge companies it is essential that a total communication program be integrated.

Something new and different is growing from the amalgamation of public relations, marketing, advertising, and promotion and this new tree is becoming identifiable as a separate species with its own theories and practices. These are the integrated marketing communications – IMC.

In the model of IMC, annual planning begins with a clean slate rather than with last year's communication plans and budgets. What makes IMC planning different from conventional communication planning is that it first identifies the communication objective and then matches that objective to the communication area that can best deliver success. At this level of planning, public relations is equal to the other IMC communication areas in that they all have their own strengths and can be used effectively to solve certain types of communication problems. The plan doesn't start off, in other words, with advertising getting 75 percent of the budget because it has in the past, and the other areas getting pieces of what's left.

If, for example, the message objective is to create broad public awareness of an issue or product, then advertising may be the appropriate function to lead the effort. If it is to create believability, particularly about product claims or corporate viewpoints, then public relations should lead. If you want to increase involvement, then perhaps a special event should lead the effort. The other communication areas are not forgotten; they provide support in reinforcing the main message strategy.

IMC planning also acknowledges a principle that is that every organization has more than one target or stakeholder audience with whom it must communicate. If a new product is being announced, then stockholders may want to know about the R&D costs and the projected breakeven point and what these two aspects of business development planning mean in terms of shareholder returns. The local community will be interested in whether the new product means more jobs and

plant expansion. Employees must be kept informed because they are often sources of information for family and friends. The media, of course, will be interested in the project as business news as well as other aspects of the product development that impact upon the community.

Specifying this range of target audiences in a structured way helps determine which communication specialists will be addressing which targets and with what messages, thus ensuring that each audience is reached in the most effective and efficient manner. It also provides a mechanism for checking for message conflict--i.e. telling the shareholders that this will be a banner year at the same time the employees are hearing that their salary increases will be held down because of unanticipated costs. Since stakeholders overlap, it is very likely that some employees are also shareholders and these conflicting messages will be sent to the same person. Public relations professionals, who have been aware for a long time of these cross-message conflicts, are in a great position to help manage this aspect of communication integration.

Another aspect of planning in a campaign is timing. The effectiveness of product publicity, for example, depends upon its ability to announce something that is news, so public relations frequently makes the announcement before the message appears in advertising and sales promotion. If public relations is working on its own, then that kind of timing will rarely happen by chance. Public relations has to be sitting at the planning table with all the other marketing communication functions in order to be able to execute integrated strategies effectively. Once again, an integrated communication plan provides the mechanism for planning this cross-function timing and for PR to be recognized, in many cases, as the first soldier onto the beachhead.

Finally, IMC planning should begin with communication audits, as well as opinion and consumer behavior research. The IMC approach has developed an IMC Audit to identify communication contact points as well as the activities of all the various communication functions. It maps the message objectives as well as the messages sent to the various stakeholders and evaluates consistency through content analysis. The audit also investigates the communication network within a company using a knowledge and attitude assessment to identify integrative and specialist attitudes and practices. Most public relations practitioners are familiar with communication audits and can take the lead in adding this dimension to the planning for integrated communication.