

Two Tech Specs for Outrage Management

Copyright © 1998 by Peter M. Sandman

1. **If powerful stakeholders are already outraged....**

They can affect your bottom line and their attitude toward you is already attentive and hostile (or at least skeptical): They're listening but unlikely to swallow one-sided self-promotion.

2. **If powerful stakeholders may one day be outraged.... Or outraged stakeholders may one day be powerful.... Or stakeholders who are neither may one day be both....**

Time to buy some outrage insurance. Act now to prevent the outrage you don't want to face later.

So what about stakeholders who are permanently powerless?

Ignore them. But are you sure? Three warnings: (1) Activists often target highly outraged but traditionally powerless groups; that's what the environmental justice movement is all about. (It's also what revolutions are all about.) (2) Powerful but apathetic stakeholders sometimes rouse themselves to action out of sympathy for the oppressed. (3) Like industry, outrage has globalized. Thanks to the Internet, the powerless oppressed in one country may inspire powerful (and costly) outrage halfway around the world.

And what about stakeholders who are permanently apathetic?

Sell them. These are the tech specs for traditional marketing and public relations: An audience that is – and is guaranteed to remain – apathetic but credulous. You've got one precious 15-second sound bite, during which you can shove anything you want down their throat; why waste it apologizing? But beware. Activists often target powerful but apathetic publics. And when such publics learn from activists the "other half" of the story, the half you left out, outrage is a predictable outcome.

What about ethics?

That's your call. Ethics aside, whenever stakeholders meet the two tech specs, manage the outrage. Ignoring stakeholders is betting that they will never be powerful. Selling them is betting that they will never be outraged.

For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Stakeholders (June 2003) – www.psandman.com/col/stakeh.htm

Peter M. Sandman, Ph.D.

59 Ridgeview Road
Princeton NJ 08540-7601

Email: peter@psandman.com
Web: www.psandman.com

Phone: 1-609-683-4073
Fax: 1-609-683-0566

Consulting, Training, and Research in Risk Communication