

Richard Gee

From: John Shattock [john@shattock.net.nz]
Sent: 18 July 2006 08:59
To: richard@geewiz.co.nz
Subject: Perception problems predicted [Get Your Message Across PLSE FWD]

Hi Richard,

John Shattock here with your copy of "Get Your Message Across", the email newsletter which helps you do just that.

Reading time: Less than 4 minutes

In this issue:

- How large organisations' perception problems provide lessons for smaller businesses

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This month's article:
Perception problems predicted

Sometimes the way large organisations handle communication with key audiences provides useful lessons for small businesses and not-for-profits.

With hindsight and a dispassionate viewpoint, it's easy to identify where things went wrong and even to forecast what's coming next.

When the issues are public and we can hear and see opinion being expressed, the role of communication in forming or shifting perceptions can be observed first-hand.

And public perception can be a potent force.

Here are three issues caused by perceptions which I predict will leap back into the headlines shortly:

1. Ratepayer activism will raise its head again throughout the Auckland region after assessments incorporating increases several times the inflation rate arrive in suburban letterboxes.
2. Contact Energy's "independent" directors will face calls at the company's annual meeting for their resignation in the wake of Origin's failed merger attempt.
3. Lower police entry standards will prove insufficient to boost recruitment in the face of mounting staff turnover and plummeting public support.

If local government leaders had signalled large rate increases as options during Draft Annual Plan consultation earlier this year (they didn't), ratepayers would have had an opportunity to voice support or opposition.

With the decision now made, councils have only a short window of opportunity to communicate and justify the increases. Attempting this after rates assessments arrive will be too late. Ratepayer action groups will become well-organised and active right through to the next election.

Contact Energy's Australian majority shareholder Origin tried to convince minority shareholders a merger was a good idea. Instead, they saw it as a takeover in disguise.

Worse, it was promoted by directors who were charged with protecting the interests of

small shareholders. The merger offer was withdrawn before an independent report was due to be sent to shareholders. The directors now refuse to make it available.

Shareholder activists and institutional shareholder representatives have stirred normally disinterested and apathetic shareholders. A well-attended and interesting annual meeting is guaranteed.

Police should listen to what human resources specialists say < high staff turnover and difficulty recruiting the right people are signs something is wrong with an organisation.

The force is more exposed to potential negative perceptions than most organisations. Many of its common "touch points" have potential for forming bad perceptions if not handled correctly < slow responses to burglaries, excessive responses to minor offences, and traffic policing "quotas" are just three examples.

While media outlets daily report the police jargon that a person "is helping police with their inquiries" (an indication a suspect is being questioned), there are fewer genuine public-spirited individuals assisting the law.

In each of these organisations "perception management" alone is not the answer.

Realistic policies and attitudes coupled with adequate two-way communication planned beforehand would have made a difference.

What is the lesson for businesses and not-for-profits, even small ones?

Think about the potential negative perceptions which might be formed, sometimes on the basis of little or incorrect information. Use communication (both ways) to confirm audiences not only know, but understand.

Plan this before the decision is made. In fact, make perceptions and communication considerations part of the decision-making process.

If you have not already asked for a copy of my free "PR Starter Pack", you can request it through this link:
<http://www.shattock.net.nz/refer.php?id=7>

If your organisation faces significant risks from this not being well-handled, or you are unsure how to proceed, get professional help.
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