

How Can an Outdoor Company's
Public Relations Campaign Be Taken
from the Local to National Level?

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Abstract

The following study researches the most effective way for the outdoor startup company, Summit Outdoor Supply (S.O.S.), to take an already established local public relations campaign to the national level. This study will investigate what factors have helped other campaigns succeed for outdoor companies and what changes should be made to see S.O.S. reach that success. My goal for this project is to educate outdoor companies on how to use the most effective communication channels to reach their target audiences. The data, to support these recommendations, will come from my own experience working with a startup company paired with the research put forward from the public relations and marketing community.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Many startup companies, like S.O.S., may find the task of networking and marketing within their local community to be a manageable undertaking. When the momentum of the company begins to outgrow the size of a local public relations campaign though, like it did this year for S.O.S., the company is left wondering what their next move should be to reach audiences they've never met face-to-face before. This issue is common for startup companies who felt the support of their local community but falter when it comes time to expanding awareness to the national level (Max 2013). For outdoor companies in particular, there is a unique target market they need to communicate with. This study will examine how to initially make audiences aware of the company and then ultimately acquire their brand loyalty.

Background of the Stated Problem

In the beginning of 2014, S.O.S. hired two students from Central Coast PRspectives, myself included, to begin their public relations campaign. Eric Frizzie, the CEO of Summit Outdoor Supply, had the vision to reach out to as many Cal Poly students as possible while also gaining media attention within the community. Frizzie's company specializes in outdoor survival gear, and has produced a unique product which pairs well with their mission statement of "giving back to everyday heroes." After a successful local campaign, we regrouped this quarter with the desire to broaden Summit Outdoor Supply's audience to the national scale.

Creating an awareness for S.O.S. was vital, but creating a foundation and relationship with their audience was their primary goal in order to foster a long term customer base. For this

campaign to reach national proportions S.O.S. needed to start with building brand awareness after looking at what did and didn't work for their campaign in San Luis Obispo. This study will focus on how other outdoor companies have exposed target demographics to their products or ideas and how S.O.S. can utilize those findings.

Purpose of the Study

By studying different communication channels, target audiences, and public relations tactics, the goal of this study is to understand just what makes a national campaign successful for an outdoor company. For S.O.S., this study will shed light on how to successfully transition from a local audience to their targeted national demographic. Like any industry, outdoor companies must understand their audience in order to relate and influence them.

Setting of the Study

This study has been worked on for the past six months at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo as a Senior Project. The first three months weren't driven by research, but will still be cited throughout this study because of the insight they provided. The data collection method for this study in the latter three months came from outside research in addition to interviewing individuals within outdoor companies' public relations and marketing.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five components. Chapter 1 lays out the study by highlighting the problem, background and purpose.. In Chapter 2, the literary review provides a basis for public relations and explores the most successful options for outdoor companies by reviewing the current literature on the topic. Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the study. In Chapter 4, the findings are organized to compare the expert interviews with the current literature on the

topic. Chapter 5 is a summary of the study and recommendations made to outdoor companies questioning what their next move forward is after a local public relations campaign.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

For this study to make useful recommendations to outdoor companies, it would be beneficial to foster a better understanding of what exactly public relations is. Every industry utilizes the media through public relations, but the outdoor industry has the opportunity to bring creative, interactive options to the table. For the outdoor industry, understanding what public relations truly is can allow a company to harness its full potential to reach audiences in an engaging and memorable way. The definition of public relations has been widely debated and has changed frequently throughout the past few decades. In the early 1900s, Ivy Lee and Edward Louis Bernays established the first definition of public relations as follows: "a management function, which tabulates public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures, and interests of an organization. . . followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance" (New York Times, 1995). In 1948, historian Eric Goldman noted that the definition of public relations in Webster's Dictionary would be "disputed by both practitioners and critics in the field" (Elliot, 2012). Webster's Dictionary defines public relations as "the activity or job of providing information about a particular person or organization to the public so that people will regard that person or organization in a favorable way" (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

In August 1978, the World Assembly of Public Relations Associations defined the field as "the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs of action, which will serve both the organization and the public interest." The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), a

professional trade association, defined public relations in 1982: “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other.” In 2012, the PRSA developed a crowd-sourced definition as, “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (Wright). The integration of all of these definitions essentially explain public relations as the practice of managing communication between an organization and its publics. With a better understanding of what public relations is, a company can now begin to look at their options to reach their publics. The modern definitions of public relations show the importance of communication between companies and their audiences to facilitate interest instead of static messaging. This concept is known as two-way symmetrical communication, and is the recommended tactic for public relations campaigns (Schafers).

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

The primary way a successful public relations campaign communicates between an organization and its publics is through the two-way symmetrical communication model (Lane). Previously, companies focused on one-way communication where they talked *at* their publics instead of talking *with* them. This two-way model allows messages to be communicated to audiences opening it up to interactive feedback and conversation, instead of solely being transmitted to them. For outdoor companies, along with most other consumer-based organizations, the two-way symmetrical model is ideal because it produces a give-and-take relationship which fosters trust and loyalty.

“Public relations practitioners must help organizations develop a relationship with their publics through the use of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and other social media

channels. Online public relations activity must be open and friendly, have personality, disclose information truthfully and honestly and must be timely” (Glass, 2013).

One of the most successful companies in the past few years at using the two-way symmetrical communication model has been Red Bull. “For Red Bull, it isn’t just the number of followers and ‘likes’ that matter when using social media for their public relations. What Red Bull does exceptionally well is to break out of the mould of simply pushing messages about their brand. Rather, they engage with and respond to publics- a dialogue at the heart of two-way symmetrical communication- and align the brand to a strong ‘lifestyle’ theme which incorporates music, sports, art and culture. These themes are then tethered to interactive campaigns- such as scavenger hunts (both virtual and real-life), Red Bull Mobile Scouts, and Red Bull Art of Can- meaning the social media conversation translates into real-life action” (Barrie, 2012).

For some companies, these approaches may not be feasible, especially in the initial stages of the business, but throughout every step there needs to be clear communication between each party to create a dialogue and generate loyalty from the consumer. A smaller company can achieve this by responding to customer feedback on social media or facilitating contests for discounted merchandise through their website, for example. As companies grow, so do their options. Even if a company is at a loss of how to interact with their audiences, they can use social media platforms to ask for recommendations. This transforms a shortcoming into another opportunity for communication. These examples all use social media, but looking at other successful public relations campaigns has shown there are many other channels that can be used. In the next section, the study will focus on choosing communication channels to best fit a company’s needs.

Communication Channels

This section illustrates the use of communication channels within successful outdoor companies. A communication channel is defined as the method in which information reaches a public. A misstep in choosing a channel can lead to an unheard or misunderstood message. Deciding on the most appropriate channel can be used to generate more positive and profitable results. The options range from television, radio, social media, consumer events, newspapers, magazines, blogs, direct mail, pamphlets, booklets and posters (Skerik, 2013). For the outdoor industry, there are different sorts of communication channels that work best, based off of studying successful completed campaigns. The following companies have discovered where their audiences are looking and how to catch and hold their interest through interactive and engaging public relations campaigns.

The North Face

For The North Face (TNF), a widely renowned outdoor company, they boosted their brand through public relations by creating innovation in-store kiosks, on which customers can watch videos of expeditions and an online magazine called *Epic* that features photography and articles appealing to outdoor enthusiasts. “The North Face also sponsors various sporting events and sponsors a number of athletes and other personalities. It employs marketing sciences to optimize the impact of advertising and promotional spending to identify the types of channels that provide the greatest return on its marketing and public relations investments” (Cheung, 2010).

In the past couple of years The North Face has worked to reposition their brand. They created strong awareness campaigns to emphasize the product technology, developed more

structured community outreach programs to engage customers and create brand loyalty, and worked to keep in touch with customers to maintain long-term relationships. When it comes to communication channels, The North Face didn't hold back. They chose select publications to contact and targeted hiking, camping, mountaineering, snowboarding, biking and running industries. They sponsored events and athletes to better target their customer base. The North Face participated in trade shows specific to the outdoor industry to build face-to-face rapport with their target demographics. TNF also posts surveys every other month to its website and Facebook to ensure customer satisfaction and participate in the two-way symmetrical communication model.

When it comes to social media as a communication channel, The North Face created a 'Never Stop Exploring' blog where they feature customers using their products in creative and adventurous ways. They promoted these posts throughout their other social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and used video to draw more users in. The North Face also used online contests on their site, Facebook and Twitter to generate awareness and garner more attention to upcoming events and products (Cheung, 2010). For The North Face, most communication channels have been utilized to reach a very broad audience. They use social media to target the younger generations while keeping the use of face-to-face communication as an important part of their campaigns. Companies like S.O.S. understand their target demographic is much smaller than The North Face and must strategically plan their channels accordingly. Like The North Face, this next company offers a vast array of unique goods and services thus their communication channels must be able to reach many types of consumers.

Recreational Equipment Inc.

Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI) is a company organized as a consumers' cooperative with an emphasis on outdoor goods and survival gear. REI has mastered the art of storytelling and creative content for online success. "Outdoor retailer REI knows how to be creative when it comes to visuals. Search drives commerce for REI in a big way and they are open to spontaneity. In April, REI announced that it would be selling 'Adventure Kitten Gear' including rugged kitten boots and a wild cat backpack" (Harrigan, 2013). REI got 25,000 shares on Facebook with no paid media in 24 hours, and was included in multiple online stories which was an unexpected perk. When using social media, REI has stated they see a significant lift when putting video on product pages.

"Member stories are not just customer stories. We hired a freelance videographer to go across the country -- we wanted our stories to be told in a bigger way," said Paolo Mottola, REI's Digital Engagement Program Manager. Lulu Gephart, manager of digital management at REI, said that the member-owned co-op's goal is to have *daily* interaction on social media as REI has "such a passionate member base, and as long as we are there in the right context and providing value and inspiration to them, they will welcome us into their lives. It's pretty powerful" (Slabaugh, 2013). REI knows its customer base well enough to see that video has been their most powerful communication channel. This understanding can only come through plenty of two-way communication and engagement of an audience. In this day and age, the primary way for companies to understand their customers on that level is through social media. The interactivity it has provided companies with has resulted in stonger connections and strengthened brand loyalty (Schafers).

Other Outdoor Companies

With the advent of social media, this daily interaction of reaching users across the nation has become an achievable endeavor. Social media has essentially only been around for the past two decades, but it has already changed the way businesses are communicating with their consumers. Larry Weber, the CEO of Racepoint Global, an advanced marketing services agency and globally known public relations expert, explains why startups need to be utilizing social media at all stages of their campaigns.

“Social media tools are definitely worthwhile for startups. However, for social media to be effective, companies must be able to wrap their products and services in well-designed experiences that people can get excited about and share with their friends. To be effective, startups must be selective about their social engagement, choosing to be involved only in those social environments that make the most sense for their customers and their business needs. For example, while over 1 billion people are active on Facebook, a high-tech startup is likely to get more mileage out of being part of Spiceworks, a social community where over 2.5 million information technology folks gather to talk all things tech” (Schwabel, 2014).

Some of the most influential CEOs within the outdoor industry explained how their brands use social media. Jeff Paro, the CEO of InterMedia said, “social media is all about making connections, and for the 50-million plus sportsmen we engage at InterMedia Outdoors, social media is the virtual campfire around which we can gather every day to share our favorite stories, photos, tips and experiences.” Rick Elder, the CEO of Smith Elite said, “I have found social networking to be a startlingly effective brand magnifier. If done correctly, the return on investment is found in both depth and breadth. The depth of the experience is limited only to the

imagination and is enriched by the communities that it touches. The breadth is limitless as this medium becomes the community nexus of current and upcoming generations.”

Lou Reilly, the CEO of Gamo Outdoor USA said, ”we use social media primarily as a tool to continue an ongoing dialogue with our consumers and brand awareness of our new exciting products of all our portfolio brands of products. We are very flattered when we receive posts on our social media sites about of how our consumers use our products and spend hours of enjoyable time using our products. Social media allows us to bring our Gamo Outdoor teams closer to our consumers.” And Brad Gebhard, the CEO of Magnum USA said, “instead of relying solely on traditional means of advertising and outreach, which primarily is a one-way street, we’re using social media to not only connect with our end users, but to generate two-way conversations. We want to learn more about who they are, what they’re using our product for and how we can continue to build better products based on their feedback. In this day and age, more and more consumers are turning to each other to find opinions on products and service, and we’re committed to providing the online forums for our consumers to connect with each other” (Hopkins, 2013).

These forums are allowing consumers to communicate with each other and the company which creates an open and transparent experience for everyone. This type of communication channel has allowed companies to truly understand their audiences which in turn leads to clearer communication and trust. As mentioned above with The North Face and REI, their diverse products allow them to reach out to many types of audiences, but there are companies who have

yet to understand who their audiences really are. The next section will discuss how to determine an audience and then where to go from there.

Target Audiences

A part of figuring out which communication channel to implement is understanding who a company's target audience is. An outdoor company that has tapped into their specific audience to create noticeable success for themselves is Patagonia. Patagonia used public relations to 'make it personal' with their 'do no harm' mission. Everything it sells and does can be linked directly to its core values. It focuses on its fundamental audience, which they've determined as outdoorsmen and women, placing the most attention on people with whom they already have an established connection. As the company connects with its core constituents, the customers help spread the word that the company is living up to its hype. From the brick-and-mortar retailer that sells Patagonia products, to the company's website Facebook page, and sponsored events, Patagonia speaks to its customers in a consistent voice that reinforces its mission and core values (Torossian & Kelly, 2011).

Another option for specialty outdoor retailers is to appeal to a broader audience by softening their marketing communications with images and messages that emphasize the outdoors as a great place to have fun and relax with friends and family. "Non-core consumers often find images of a kayaker plunging over a 40-foot waterfall, a hiker nursing a nasty blister or a rock climber sleeping in a hammock suspended halfway up a cliff as not only inaccessible, but intimidating" (Outdoor Industry Association). Playmakers, a running and outdoor apparel store in Okemo, Michigan, has used their marketing strategies to reach new demographics.

Earlier this year, Playmakers hosted its first Color Run, which uses the tagline “The Happiest 5K on the Planet.” Participants are not timed, but get dusted with a new color every time they reach a kilometer marker. The event drove more than 10,000 people through the store and provided a documented increase in women’s apparel sales by targeting a broader audience (Outdoor Industry Association). This approach opens up opportunities to everyone, thus having no target audience. It works to generate an excitement through being inclusive which can cause someone who may have never been interested in a company’s product to give it attention.

Another option for companies is tailoring their message by the audience they’re targeting. “Most successful campaigns identify target publics in their campaigns. These campaigns identify multiple target publics and develop messaging strategies tailored to those publics. The data show that the techniques of framing are widely used and are embedded in key message development. For example: The battle isn’t just having your message understood the way you intended it to be within somebody else’s frame of reference, it’s also having them judge it to be a fair and true statement and then they might accept it” (Heath, 2009).

To reach a very large audience, a tactic that has proven to work for many companies, The North Face included, is to sponsor or work with athletes, celebrities or other influential personalities. “I recommend an influencer strategy: identify the key people and organizations that can inform a desired customer base and get to know them well. As an entrepreneur reaches out, personally, influencers develop an appreciation for the company’s unique story and begin to see how their base of followers can benefit from getting to know the company as well. This shared storytelling can help entrepreneurs build brand awareness, create and activate content, and build partners for crisis management, product development, competitive analysis, and event and

product promotion. Influencers can be journalists, experts, athletes, analysts, regulators, bloggers, celebrities, and customers; their influence can be earned organically or purchased in the form of sponsorships or paid blogging” (Schawbel, 2014).

Companies are left with the decision of tailoring their messages to reach certain bubbles of consumers or to approach the situation to be all-inclusive. After determining a target audience and the appropriate communication channel to reach them, an outdoor company can begin to engage in interactive two-way communications to get their audiences excited and interested in a new product or idea.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, we will outline the methodology used to collect data for the study through the use of interviews of public relations and marketing experts and professionals in the outdoor industry.

Data Sources

For this study, three professionals in the public relations industry were interviewed. They each work in different facets of the industry, spanning from a director of marketing for a well-known outdoor gear supplier, to an account manager at a public relations firm specializing solely in outdoor companies, to the founder and owner of a successful agency in the outdoor, tactical and lifestyle markets. The interviews were specifically developed to answer the original research question in addition to providing insight from accomplished specialists.

Participants

Sarah Niklas is an account manager for Terra Public Relations, a boutique firm, specializing in full-service public relations and integrated brand communication strategy for top-tier companies and products in the outdoor industry. Gareth Martins is the Director of Marketing for Osprey Packs, a company which offers premier packs and bags for hiking, cycling, snowboarding, travel, urban pursuits and more. Kate Ketschek is the founder and owner of Revolution House, with an extensive background in public relations and marketing coupled with a passion for the outdoors.

Interview Design

The following questions were created for the participants based on this study's focus on the outdoor industry and how it relates to startup companies moving towards a more national audience:

1. What communication channels have you found to be most successful in reaching the outdoor industry?
2. Who have you discovered is your target audience to market to and tailor your message towards?
3. How do you work to set a company apart from the competition?
4. Do you have any recommendations for startup companies in the outdoor industry?

Data Collection

For all three participants, the interviews were conducted over the phone throughout the month of May. Each interview allowed the participants to tailor their responses based off of their own personal experience. Each participant answered the same set of questions to supply this study with a consistent level of understanding.

Limitations

Due to location and time constraints, I was unable to get in-person interviews with the participants, which takes away a level of personability within the interview. Another limitation that occurred was the sample size. I reached out to 15 individuals within the public relations and marketing community within the outdoor industry and only three replied. When sampling such a

small number of professionals out of a very large pool, their beliefs can either be too generalized or overly specific thus skewing the study.

There were also limitations that were presented because of the timeframe constraints under which the study was produced. Because the study was designed under the parameters of a 10-week Senior Project, the data collected may not be as extensive as necessary to cover a complex, multi-faceted topic.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Chapter 4 will provide additional background on the respondents interviewed in the study and summarize each expert's responses. They provided different perspectives because each respondent has a unique background in the type of public relations and marketing work they do. The collected data information will be organized according to the research that it supports in the form of direct quotations and paraphrased ideas. The answers will then be analyzed and compared to the original research questions and the existing literature and how it applies to startup companies working for national awareness.

Description of Participating Experts

Sarah Niklas

Niklas is currently an account manager for Terra Public Relations in Jackson, Wyoming. She is a graduate from the College of Charleston with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. She also has an extensive background in sales, social media marketing and event planning. Terra Public Relations, the firm Niklas currently works for, has 15 years of experience in the consumer product and media relations industry. Terra works with clients in the outdoor, snow sports, action sports, fitness and sustainability industries to create conversations around a wide range of companies through story pitching and product placements. Terra's mission statement aligns with what most outdoor companies aim to do -- "Our focus is to help our clients to reach beyond core and even secondary audiences, through positive media coverage, wide-reaching social media campaigns, and brain-scratching consumer publicity" (Terra, 2014).

Gareth Martins

Martins is the Director of Marketing for Osprey Packs, Inc. in Cortez, Colorado. A graduate of the University of Washington in Seattle with a Master's Degree in music, he has pursued a career as an outdoor enthusiast and environmental advocate. Martins helps lead Osprey's "Green Team" which guides environmental policy and sustainable operations for the company. He is a board member for the Colorado Environmental Coalition and has personally and professionally advocated for sound environmental policy in the state of Colorado for most of his life. Osprey Packs, Inc. was founded in 1974 and specializes in outdoor packs and travel gear. The owner and founder of Osprey, Mike Pfothenauer, says the innovative designs and commitment to top-notch manufacturing shows in every product, even, or especially, decades later.

“Osprey is, in large part, about exceptional relationships,” says Pfothenauer. “Between the pack and its wearer. The pack and its makers. The company and its staff.” He continues, “So many of our staff have been with the company for decades. It shows how fervently we believe in our process and products. The All Mighty Guarantee proves it.” No wonder there’s such a close relationship between the words “Osprey” and “quality”. You could say it’s a lifetime commitment (Osprey, 2014).

Kate Ketschek

Ketschek has a broad and impressive background in public relations. Before opening her own public relations agency, she had a combined 15 years of experience in the outdoor industry with Big Sky Resorts and NEMO Equipment, Inc. While working at NEMO Equipment Inc. as the director of public relations, she learned the ins and outs of the outdoor market. She also

assisted the brand in winning 21 national awards, including multiple Editors' Choice from Backpacker and Backcountry; Gear of the Year from Outside, Men's Journal, and National Geographic Adventure; multiple Best in Show from Gear Junkie and the Value Award from Overland Journal. She successfully positioned the company into niche outdoor channels to create brand recognition and gain respect.

Now, as the owner and founder of Revolution House, Ketschek continues to work within the outdoor, tactical and lifestyle industries. Revolution House delivers quantifiable results through media relations, editorial coverage, social media management and strategic partnerships. Their mission is to tell a unique story at the right time to the right audience.

Interviews

Each expert was asked the same basic questions, with some additional probing and background regarding the use of public relations in the outdoor industry.

1. What communication channels have you found to be most successful in reaching the outdoor industry?

Question #1 was designed to provide insight into what has been successful for other public relations practitioners while trying to market their products and companies in this specific industry.

- Sarah Niklas: “Our tactics are primarily media sweeps, which are larger events to reach out to the media. These tend to be more expensive though, so our fall back options is usually emailing and stalking the media until we get their attention. Once we’ve made contact and pitched the product, we’ll take them hiking or take them to dinner and really explain to them how this product could benefit their readers. We don’t go straight to the

consumers usually, our primary goal is having the media spotlight our clients or their products in guides, reviews or articles” (Appendix A).

- Gareth Martins: “We rely heavily on our social media content and hosting different consumer events. We’re extremely active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest with a lot of video content on our YouTube channel. For our content, we talk about our product and feature our consumers using and enjoying the product. We also work with different athletes to promote our product and then feature that throughout our social media” (Appendix B).
 - Kate Ketschek: “I have a background in marketing but I started working in public relations because of work with a startup company actually. When there’s a tiny team and a small amount of funding, you need to find a balanced approach between marketing and public relations to really get your company’s name and their product out there. For me, the best way to get media coverage is getting your product directly into the media’s hands so they can get the word out for you. If it’s coming from the company or the public relations firm, it’s a sales pitch, but if the media is talking about it, the consumers are more likely to trust the product. Getting that media attention boils down to having good relationships with all the right writers, and that just takes time. And when it comes to social media, we’ve found that videos work well at garnering attention to a product” (Appendix C).
2. Who have you discovered is your target audience to market to and tailor your message towards?

Question #2 was designed to help outdoor companies know who to spend their time and money reaching out to.

- Sarah Niklas: “Well first and foremost, as a public relations firm we want to reach the media. We’re strategic with the media we work to get coverage from, but we also want media that will reach anybody. I’m working with a company NiteIz right now, which is an LED lighting product, and initially of course we think of reaching out to running magazines but then we broaden the pitches to media like Marie Claire or Penthouse Magazine. You just never know who is going to be interested in your client until you reach out. I always try and put my clients in new categories we would never have thought of before. For your product (Barkley Series), with the fishing line included, reach out to fishing magazine like In-Fisherman. Find those niche media markets but target broad organizations as well” (Appendix A).
- Gareth Martins: “Because we have a broad line of products and make something for everyone, we’re able to reach out to anyone. Our athletes are definitely utilized for their reach because we work with people who are interesting and dynamic themselves so they can not only market our product but market the type of people who use it. A lot of the relationships we use have been fostered from the ground up, they’re very grassroots, which has definitely benefitted us” (Appendix B).
- Kate Ketschek: “Getting that media attention boils down to having good relationships with all the right writers, and that just takes time. Depending on your startup, you may want to hit local and regional media or go straight to the national level. I recommend contacting national publications because so much of the content is online now, I’d say

about 60 percent, so it's easier to reach a wider population. For you company I'd recommend contacting Outside, Men's Journal and Backpacker Magazine" (Appendix C).

3. How do you work to set a company apart from the competition?

Question #3 was designed to garner ideas for S.O.S. on what they can do to break through the array of companies fighting for the same consumers and media attention as them.

- Sarah Niklas: "Get your product in the editor's hands. Most media will be more likely to publish about your client if they're actually invested in the product or company. It's also all about following up, it takes a lot of stalking. When you're contacting them, get straight to the point, it's not a sales pitch, you're explaining why this product will not only benefit their readers but benefit their publication" (Appendix A)
- Gareth Martins: "For us, the way we set ourselves apart is with our product. We offer a lifetime guarantee to replace or repair any item, and we make sure our audiences know that. It gives us a leg up because it shows that we care. We're also active in a lot of consumer events, where we'll get there and not even see our competitors there. So we work a lot directly with our consumers and target consumers to demonstrate that we care as a creator of goods for them. We do work with an outside public relations agency to reach out to media and editors to get them testing and reviewing our products" (Appendix B).
- Kate Ketschek: "Establishing relationships with publications with individual emails really works to increase the likelihood of coverage. I may blast a press release to every outlet I know but then research specific writers and find out who this is relevant to

professionally and personally and follow up with them. Make sure whatever you're pitching, you have available inventory for people to purchase. If not, start contacting outdoor retailers to sign contracts with so you can have more product on hand.

4. Do you have any recommendations for startup companies in the outdoor industry?

Only Ketschek had further recommendations for S.O.S.

- Ketschek: "When you're pitching to a magazine or other publication, decide if you want to take the news angle of 'ROTC student builds tool he wishes he had during deployment,' or if you want to pitch primarily the product. For your product, find publications who center on lightweight backpacking, then explain how this product is perfect for their readers because of its multi use functionality and how compact it is. I would also look into SNEWS and Outdoor USA. SNEWS is a source on the latest outdoor and fitness trends and products and Outdoor USA allows you to share your press release and get coverage alongside other developing companies" (Appendix C).

Discussion

These three interviews provided insight into how communication channels and target audiences affect the outcome of a public relations campaign. It is important to note that two of the experts interviewed work exclusively for public relations firms which are then contracted by outdoor companies, while the third, Martins, works for a company and does their marketing in-house. These distinctions are the reason their responses about the media differed some. For a public relations agency, their primary focus is to be featured by the media and for their client's product to be highlighted in a publication. For Martins, with Osprey, that may also be important,

but engaging with their publics directly has proved successful for them. When it comes to S.O.S., they must marry the two tactics in their preliminary stages to reach national awareness.

Ketschek and Niklas shed valuable light on reaching out to publications. For S.O.S.'s campaign within San Luis Obispo, garnering media attention was difficult. Based off of what both practitioners said, if done correctly, contacting national media at this stage could greatly benefit S.O.S. For S.O.S., sending multiple press releases out was the first and last step.

According to Niklas though, the main determinant is following up. This is great advice for any company trying to get media coverage. After the follow up, if possible, Niklas also recommends sending over the product or some type of sample to get the editor's attention and work to have them invested in the company or product. This tactic isn't plausible for every company or product, but S.O.S. could definitely stand to allocate a set amount of product solely for the media.

Martins' principles seemed most congruent with the research found in the literature review for this study. He works directly with Osprey's consumers to create relationships which ultimately lead to awareness, profit and loyalty. This idea of face-to-face interaction is similar to the tactics used by The North Face, REI and Patagonia mentioned earlier. Martins also discussed the importance of video within social media, which is something S.O.S. decided to implement for their own campaign. Because S.O.S. is releasing a new product in the summer of 2014, a promo video was created to be blasted throughout their social media to help create awareness. The video will also be embedded into press releases and used to create dynamic emails (Appendix D).

Martins also brought up their use of athletes when gaining attention for a product. This supplements the literature review of The North Face's practices and tactics. Outdoor companies don't need to rely on sports professionals alone, any type of public figure who embodies their brand can be utilized. S.O.S. has already made steps to include this in their public relations strategy. Jared Johnson, a professional fisherman, and well-known individual and expert in his field, has publicly endorsed S.O.S. and their products. This has created a broader market for S.O.S. outside of their current demographic of outdoor enthusiasts and military personnel. S.O.S. has also been in contact with Joseph Teti of Dual Survival on Discovery Channel, a reality cable show featuring survival experts in challenging environments. Joseph Teti is a veteran as well as an outdoor enthusiasts, so when pitching the product, S.O.S. hit the survival aspects of their product, in addition to their mission statement of giving back to everyday heroes -- military, police officers and emergency personnel.

Ketschek reinforced the idea of targeting a specific market or audience within the outdoor industry. While there are benefits of marketing to a broader range of consumers, discussed in the literature review, finding niche publications or demographics allow a company to tailor their messages more accurately. For example, Ketschek mentioned contacting publications for lightweight backpackers where S.O.S. can market how lightweight their product is. Since all those survival tools are in one bracelet, it also won't add any weight to a pack. This tactic can be used either directly to the consumer or when pitching the product to publications.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Summary

This study was done in order to understand the dynamics within public relations for the outdoor industry. This study looked at two-way communication and best practices for its implementation. To understand how to create a successful public relations campaign, this study examined different communications channels used by top outdoor companies and who their target audiences are. With the literature focusing primarily on social media, personal communication, niche audiences and tailored messages, it was essential to also obtain feedback directly from public relations professionals working in the field. For the most part, their advice and tactics lined up with the literature, and in some cases, supplemented it. Regardless of the communication channel being used to reach any audience, this study showed that two-way symmetrical communication is essential to the success of a public relations campaign.

Recommendations

For outdoor companies looking to expand their public relations campaigns to the national level, S.O.S. in particular, this study provided significant and practical findings. S.O.S. must engage in a dialogue with its publics through various communication channels both online and in-person. They need to learn from The North Face and build awareness through outreach programs which capture customers leading to brand loyalty and long term relationships. S.O.S. can take a page from REI's book and focus on storytelling through video to reach their consumers. This allows their audience to feel a connection to the brand and potentially have their own story told. Although S.O.S. already has a decent social media presence, according to the

findings of this study, strong community engagement is essential. Through these online connections, S.O.S. can learn more about who their customers are and build better products based on their feedback. S.O.S. can also choose to tailor their messages to a broad audience to reach a larger amount of consumers, or they can find niche markets where their product truly fits in and will be appreciated. Building more relationships with key influencers in the outdoor industry, like they have with Jared Johnson, will prove to garner the same type of success The North Face and Osprey Packs have achieved. For media attention, S.O.S. needs to cater its message to the publication and outline exactly how their product will benefit the readers. Persistency is key when pitching their product to editors or journalists, in addition to building relationships with the right writers. Generally, securing national attention for an outdoor company takes time and a strong understanding of who your audience is and how best to engage with them.

Study Conclusions

In conclusion, given the findings of this study, the success of an outdoor company is reliant on the use of two-way communication within public relations. This type of communication allows a company to truly know their audience, which in turn gives them the ability to adjust their message and select the communication channel best served to deliver it. There is no cookie-cutter formula for every company to use; a company's public relations approach will differ based on their product and mission statement. For S.O.S., the communication channels which have proven to be successful thus far have been social media and radio to reach their target demographics of college students, servicemen and women and outdoor enthusiasts. After reviewing the presented advice from experts in the outdoor industry and the

existing literature on the topic, S.O.S. may choose to revamp their current campaign to foster more two-way communication with their consumers. This study can be beneficial to any outdoor company looking to raise company awareness and create lifelong relationships resulting in brand loyalty.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcripts: Sarah Niklas

Interviewer: Devon Swanson

Date of Interview: 5/24/2014

When asked about the communication channels that work best for them:

“Our tactics are primarily media sweeps, which are larger events to reach out to the media. These tend to be more expensive though, so our fall back options is usually emailing and stalking the media until we get their attention. Once we’ve made contact and pitched the product, we’ll take them hiking or take them to dinner and really explain to them how this product could benefit their readers. We don’t go straight to the consumers usually, our primary goal is having the media spotlight our clients or their products in guides, reviews or articles.

When asked about their target audience:

“Well first and foremost, as a public relations firm we want to reach the media. We’re strategic with the media we work to get coverage from, but we also want media that will reach anybody. I’m working with a company NiteIz right now, which is an LED lighting product, and initially of course we think of reaching out to running magazines but then we broaden the pitches to media like Marie Claire or Penthouse Magazine. You just never know who is going to be interested in your client until you reach out. I always try and put my clients in new categories we would never have thought of before. For your product, with the fishing line included, reach out to fishing magazine like In-Fisherman. Find those niche media markets but target broad organizations as well.”

When asked how to set a company apart:

“Get your product in the editor’s hands. Most media will be more likely to publish about your client if they’re actually invested in the product or company. It’s also all about following up, it takes a lot of stalking. When you’re contacting them, get straight to the point, it’s not a sales pitch, you’re explaining why this product will not only benefit their readers but benefit their publication.”

Appendix B

Interview Transcripts: Gareth Martins

Interviewer: Devon Swanson

Date of Interview: 5/24/2014

When asked about the communication channels that work best for them:

“We rely heavily on our social media content and hosting consumer events. We’re extremely active on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest with a lot of video content on our YouTube channel. For our content we talk about our product and feature our consumers using and enjoying the product. We also work with different athletes to promote our product and then feature that throughout our social media.”

When asked about their target audience:

“Because we have a broad line of products and make something for everyone, we’re able to reach out to anyone. Our athletes are definitely utilized for their reach because we work with people who are interesting and dynamic themselves so they can not only market our product but market the type of people who use it. A lot of the relationships we use have been fostered from the ground up, they’re very grassroots, which has definitely benefitted us.”

When asked how to set a company apart:

“For us, the way we set ourselves apart is with our product. We offer a lifetime guarantee to replace or repair any item, and we make sure our audiences know that. It gives us a leg up

because it shows that we care. We're also active in a lot of consumer events, where we'll get there and not even see our competitors there. So we work a lot directly with our consumers and target consumers to demonstrate that we care as a creator of goods for them. We do work with an outside public relations agency to reach out to media and editors to get them testing and reviewing our products."

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts: Gareth Martins

Interviewer: Devon Swanson

Date of Interview: 5/24/2014

When asked about the communication channels that work best for them:

“I have a background in marketing but I started working in public relations because of work with a startup company actually. When there’s a tiny team and a small amount of funding, you need to find a balanced approach between marketing and public relations to really get your company’s name and their product out there. For me, the best way to get media coverage is getting your product directly into the media’s hands so they can get the word out for you. If it’s coming from the company or the public relations firm, it’s a sales pitch, but if the media is talking about it, the consumers are more likely to trust the product. Getting that media attention boils down to having good relationships with all the right writers, and that just takes time. Depending on your startup, you may want to hit local and regional media or go straight to the national level. I recommend contacting national publications because so much of the content is online now, I’d say about 60 percent, so it’s easier to reach a wider population. For you company I’d recommend contacting Outside, Men’s Journal and Backpacker Magazine. When it comes to social media, we’ve found that videos work well at garnering attention to a product.”

When asked about their target audience:

“Establishing relationships with publications with individual emails really works to increase the likelihood of coverage. I may blast a press release to every outlet I know but then research specific writers and find out who this is relevant to professionally and personally and follow up with them. When you’re pitching to a magazine or other publication, decide if you want to take the news angle of ‘ROTC student builds tool he wishes he had for deployment,’ or if you want to pitch primarily the product. For your product, find a publications which centers on lightweight backpacking, then explain how this product is perfect for their readers because of its multi use functionality and how compact it is. Make sure whatever you’re pitching, you have available inventory for people to purchase. If not, start contacting outdoor retailers to sign contracts with so you can have more product on hand. I would also look into SNEWS and Outdoor USA. SNEWS is a source on the latest outdoor and fitness trends and products and Outdoor USA allows you to share your press release and get coverage alongside other developing companies.”