

Skip the rabbit hole — boost the bottom line

By Bob Berry | Posted: Friday, March 8, 2013 12:00 am

George Bernard Shaw told us once that, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” I submit that the same is true for strategic planning. And, for better or not, that illusion often comes home to roost when PR and/or marketing departments and agencies are asked to submit plans for a product roll-out, a community relations campaign, a crisis management issue or any of the dozens of PR activities that usually begin with the phrase “we need to put out a press release!”

No, you do not. What you need is to do is stop and think, and that, hopefully, will begin the planning process. But, like Alice’s white rabbit, the rush to get somewhere can take communication down a rabbit hole into Wonderland. It’s great to be there, and for the moment it feels good, but if we don’t know where “there” is we can’t expect to reach the end of the rainbow (sorry — different story) anytime soon.

“There” is too often a stand-alone communication goal. When I get “the phone call” asking me to develop a PR or communication plan, my first request is to see a copy of the organization’s business plan. That request is often followed by an awkward period of silence on the other end of the phone and then... “We don’t have one.” OK. Now I know where to start.

The truth is that the organization probably does “have one,” it’s just not in the form of a formal written document. And, after some discussion, a little brainstorming, reality checks, and exploring expectations, aspirations, goals and even more reality checks we arrive at a road map that bypasses Wonderland and sets in place achievable objectives for both the business of the organization and the three-legged stool we call Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) — advertising, public relations and sales.

The map is the guide for the communication pathways that help the business plan succeed.

But without the business plan first, the rest is busy work. As Thomas Edison said, “Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing.” And “doing” without a clear understanding of how each leg of the stool achieves the goal set forth in the business plan is at best counter-productive and sometimes detrimental to the success of the business itself.

While Shaw questioned the veracity of some communication, Woody Allen wondered “What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists? In that case, I definitely overpaid for my carpet.”

Avoid overpaying for your carpet and move the results of your communication programs from illusion to reality by connecting and coordinating PR, marketing, advertising, social media and sales support

plans with your organization's business plan to create an integrated happy ending.

Contact Bob Berry, APR, Fellow PRSA and a senior counselor with Kingdon-Nichols LLC, atbob@kingdon-nichols.com. Berry is a member of the Public Relations Society of America, Southern Arizona chapter, whose members write this monthly column.