



Integrated Strategic Communication: Influencing and Changing Public Opinion and Behavior

Robert Ristino

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Integrated Strategic Communication (ISC) is a primer on how to influence and win the support of key constituencies and, when required, change public policy vital to an organization's success. It presents a 10-step model for organizing and integrating communication strategies in support of strategic initiatives. This field-tested integrated strategic communication model is the result of the author's 40 years practicing and teaching public relations and marketing communications. It also draws on his vast experience in developing and implementing communication campaigns in support of major initiatives, such as mergers, acquisitions, divestitures and new product launches. The model is also strongly influenced by an array of communication theory and research that underpins the practice of organizational communications. Simply stated, the ISC model is based on the five fundamental principles of sending the right message, using the right medium, to the right audience, at the right time and at the right place. Simple to say but difficult to do.

Two main themes flow through this book. The first is that organizations must be actively engaged in the public arena when managing issues and initiatives vital to their self-interest. The second theme emphasizes the strategic use of integrated communication to influence and win the support of key publics concerned with those issues and initiatives. The term integrated is key to this approach. It means that all organizational voices – public relations, marketing, human resources, public affairs, government relations – must be focused, collaborative and coordinated in communicating the organization's overall message strategies. Whether it's a campaign to elect a political candidate or to earn stakeholder support for a merger, the issue always comes down to how effectively you make your case to your publics. We call these efforts the Big Sell because failure to sell your case to your publics can have dire consequences for the organization. Using numerous case studies, examples, diagrams and charts, the author identifies communication strategies that work and those that don't. Take for example the challenges that had confronted the Microsoft Corporation and Major League Baseball's Boston Red Sox franchise, two case histories woven throughout the book. Both were addressing issues that could have seriously affected their long-term market viability. Microsoft was confronting an anti-trust lawsuit brought by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The Red Sox franchise was searching for a new home to ensure its financial competitiveness. Both would confront serious obstacles in successfully addressing these challenges requiring developing message strategies that would appeal to numerous diverse constituencies. To remain competitive both would have to make the Big Sell.

But even when you know what it is you want to say, you have to choose the medium that has the best chance of delivering the message. To select the right medium to deliver those messages you have to know who and where the target audience is. That is why understanding your target audience is a fundamental cornerstone of the ISC model.

Unfortunately, even when you have targeted accurately, getting audience members attention is difficult at best. To do so requires delivering the message at a time and place when audience members are most likely to attend to it. Naturally, there is both art and science to all of this.

That is what this book is all about – the art and the science of organizational communication practice in the context of a multi-step planning process that professionals can use to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate their communication efforts. Written in a lively and engaging style, Integrated Strategic Communication will prove as instructive to the experienced communications professional as it will be to the student of communication.

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