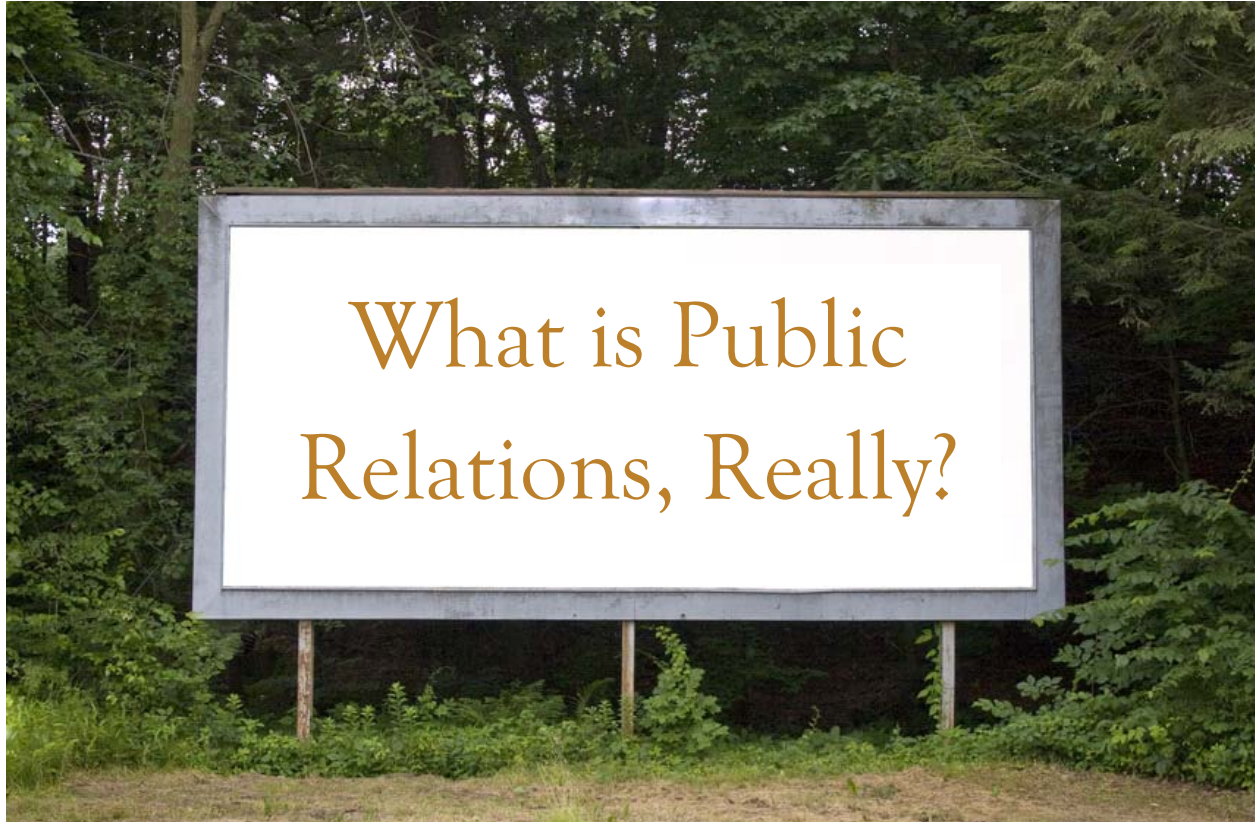


The Power of PR – Part Two



By Rhoda Struhs, Chair and Rhonda Hauter, Vice Chair 2009-2011 Communications Committee



While we all think of PR as a planned and methodical tool used to influence public opinion, the truth is that Public Relations is more than that. Public Relations is how an entity (corporation, non-profit, municipality, university, or member association like Altrusa) portrays itself to everyone that it has contact with. That portrayal sets the image that everyone will remember. It seems like an overwhelming task for Altrusa, but actually comes down to you and me and how we communicate every day. How each of us portrays ourselves as Altrusans, and Altrusa as an organization, will influence those around us. If you think about it, we each are our own PR firm in our personal lives, knowing that our behavior has an influence on how others think of us. We just need to expand that idea to Altrusa.

Why is PR important?

My Crisis Communications professor often reminded us that if you don't tell your story then someone else will, and it may not be the story you want heard. We see examples of this standard in the news media almost daily. If a company or prominent figure in pop culture or sports doesn't respond to some crisis in their lives, then the media will dig up a story to tell. Often it creates a worse news headline than if the pop star had released his or her own explanation.

The other hazard of not telling one's story is that **nothing** gets heard. We have seen businesses in our own communities close shop because they didn't advertise. If our communities don't know about Altrusa, then we are going to struggle to stay open as well. Being unknown makes it more difficult to fund raise, research new projects, and bring in new members. Once our communities recognize what our clubs accomplish, it will cause growth in all areas, and maybe more importantly, it will give each member a sense of value.

For Altrusa, it is critical that we are heard. It is just as critical that the message is positive and effective. It is time that our clubs and the members think strategically about how to share their story of Altrusa. In Part One of this Power of PR series, Rhonda Hauter, Communications Vice Chair, spotlighted the public relations success of a club in District Twelve. She highlighted several good points to help us all get motivated to strategize within each of our clubs. Below are more ideas to get things started in your club:

Every Altrusa member is a PR Star

That's right – each one of us is doing the work of public relations every time we talk about Altrusa. Whether you think of yourself as a PR Star or not, you are influencing how others see Altrusa. That not only includes those people outside of Altrusa, but our fellow members. Nothing can kill a positive outlook faster than someone who speaks poorly about the club, District or International organization to other members. Word of mouth is the best form of public relations, just ask any realtor, hair stylist, etc. Always portray a positive image of Altrusa. One negative comment, even among our own members, can destroy a lot of positive image building. Show your pride within your club and it will shine to those outside. Be supportive of club activities and your community will take notice of your hard work.

“Talk Altrusa” to everyone. For some of us it is difficult to start the conversation, but remember if you don't start the conversation it won't take place. And if you aren't “talking Altrusa” then your friends, co-workers and community members won't know what great things your club does. While our organization is working on a rebranding strategy, we can all start the dialogue now. Don't worry too much about explaining “what is Altrusa.” Focus on telling your story – your favorite project, a guest speaker that you especially liked, the camaraderie of your fellow club members. Talking about how Altrusa connects with people is a powerful message. We each have our own Altrusa story, share it!

Use the tools

Altrusa International has some very helpful PR tools that you can access on the website. You may even have some of them in your files. They are publications from the past, but are still very usable, and accessible on the Altrusa website (www.altrusa.com). You can find sample PSAs and press releases, as well as the new letterhead, sample recruitment letters and other interim marketing materials.

- The Communications section of the President's Handbook has good materials. You will find it on the website with your President's login.

- The Media Guide, that you can find under the Committees tab (then click on Communications), is a collection of a lot of good ideas and helpful tools.
- The handout given at the Communications workshop at Convention is a summary of tips from those publications and other sources. You can find Tips for Using the Interim Marketing Kit, also under the Committees tab (then click on Communications).
- All of the materials in the Interim Marketing Kit are available once you log in. Click on the Membership tab and you will find the Kit under the Marketing tab.
- Can't log in? Don't have a password? You can set it up at:
<https://secure.altrusa.com/MemberLogin.aspx>

Make a commitment to tell Altrusa's story

Don't wait for someone else in your club to step up and volunteer to start your club's strategy. It's not just the responsibility of the club president or club communications chair. Everyone should wear their "PR hat" and think about and watch for opportunities to tell Altrusa's story. Make it happen now. Make it a club priority. Create a committee to research ways to spread the Altrusa story. Make time to brainstorm and create a PR plan for each club fundraiser and project. Make it fun by challenging each member to share how they are a PR Star.

Make contacts with the different media in the area - TV, radio, paper. Develop a relationship with those people. It takes time, but it's worth it. Don't wait until an event to talk to the media. Continue to nurture those relationships between club activities. It will pay big dividends.

The Power of PR = Altrusa's Future

Think to the future of Altrusa and your club. Building your club's public relations reaps long term benefits. It is worth the effort to cultivate your club's place in the community. All it takes is you and the commitment of the members of your club to make it happen.