

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE PROMOTIONS MIX

Rotary – the most famous unknown organisation in the world?

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My colleagues in the university are surprised as every Wednesday I wear a suit and tie. For people not knowing the reason it is just a mystery. However, there is a simple explanation for this behaviour. Every Wednesday morning there is a meeting in my Rotary club. In a rather Swedish way it is accepted to come to the meetings dressed any way you want to, but since most of the members there have jobs, we are expected to be more properly dressed. I dress as most of the others do.

Some of my colleagues asked me the reason after years of this 'strange' behaviour. I explained and all of them looked very understanding. This prompted a discussion about this global organization called Rotary. To my surprise very few of them had any idea about what Rotary do, and if they did it was often a completely erroneous idea about the organization. Many of them thought it is an organization for older men in society with some sort of VIP profession that meet every week to have a dinner and feel good about themselves. Recently there was an article in a newspaper saying the prices for food in Sweden are decided at Rotary meetings. Of course this is far from reality, but Rotary has for many years had a problem to get the good PR they deserve. The media frequently prefer a negative picture or no report at all. As one member responsible for PR in my club said, "Again the local newspaper have shown that they are Rotary allergic". An important question here will be: Is Rotary something that deserves positive publicity or not? If so, why is it so hard to get it?

Background - what is Rotary International?

In Rotary International's own words: "Rotary International is a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders united to provide humanitarian services, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace throughout the world". It is in this text that you have some sort of leadership position if you want to be a member. In reality this has been a rather flexible definition, and you find all sorts of people in the organization.

To get a better and correct understanding of the organization we will look at some official facts concerning Rotary International. There are approximately 1.2 million Rotarians who are members of more than 30,000 Rotary clubs in 163 countries. Rotary members represent a cross-section of the professional and businessmen and women volunteering to improve the quality of life in their local communities and around the world. Rotary clubs meet weekly and are open to anyone who wishes to join.

Mission

The main objective of Rotary is service — in the community, in the workplace and throughout the world. Accordingly, Rotary's motto is "Service Above Self". In 1921, Rotary adopted, "the advancement of international understanding, goodwill and peace," as part of its official mission.

From this it is clear that Rotary doesn't exist just for people to meet some friends and to have lunch every week.

History

The world's first service club, the Rotary Club of Chicago, Illinois, USA, was formed on 23 February 1905 by Paul P. Harris, an attorney who wished to recapture the same friendly spirit he had felt in the small towns of his youth. The name "Rotary" is derived from the early practice of rotating meetings among members' offices. The organization became truly global — transcending national boundaries, race, language, and religion — as clubs mushroomed throughout Europe, South and Central America, Australia, Africa, and Asia. By 1921 Rotary was represented on six continents.

Service Today

Today, Rotary is one of the world's largest service organizations, well known throughout the world for its dedication to service and international goodwill, at least amongst those people who really know what the organization stands for and is achieving. Rotary clubs are autonomous and determine service projects based on their local communities' needs. Rotary clubs also work on projects at an international level, often co-operating with other clubs around the world to aid communities worldwide. Clubs are encouraged to base their projects on today's most critical issues, such as youth, health, hunger, disaster relief, literacy, the environment, and peace. The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International has been selected to receive the 2002 Gates Award for Global Health, a recognition that carries with it a US\$1 million award. This is a great honour, both for the Foundation and for all the Rotarians who participate in and support its vital humanitarian and educational programs. The award recognizes Rotary's leadership and impact in the field of public health, most notably the organization's top priority of eradicating polio by 2005. Rotary has contributed over US\$462 million toward polio eradication, and over one million Rotary members have volunteered their time and personal resources to help immunise more than 2 billion children in 122 countries.

The activities can be divided into different areas according to the following:

Community: Rotary members have a history of building safe communities. Rotary clubs help communities deal with illiteracy, escalating crime, homelessness, unemployment, and poor environmental conditions through a variety of projects. For example, clubs build public parks, establish street schools, sponsor medical and dental clinics, run AIDS awareness programs, and teach youths vocational skills.

Youth: Rotary members work to address challenges faced by young people today. Programs include mentoring, tutoring, leadership development, vocational training, local and international scholarships, and urban peace initiatives. Rotary clubs also work to provide children in need with basic health care and to equip young people with the tools they need to learn, such as books and computers.

Health: Rotary clubs work together to improve medical conditions around the world. Members help communities in need by supplying medical equipment, providing doctors to those who cannot afford them, and building clinics and health facilities. Clubs also send doctors to different regions to provide free surgeries to those in need and to administer immunisation to those at risk of disease.

Hunger: Rotary International's board of directors gives high priority to the worldwide alleviation of hunger, with special emphasis on helping women with children and the aged. Rotary clubs have implemented a myriad of projects to achieve this, for example, members hold food drives, provide people with tools and training necessary to produce their own food, and work to provide communities with safe drinking water.

Disaster Relief: Rotary members consistently provide support to victims of natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. From raising relief funds, reconstructing medical and educational facilities, to providing emergency supplies, shelter and services, Rotary members have responded to tragedies all around the globe. In addition, members have recently supplied much needed assistance to Afghan refugees and those affected by the events of 11 September 2001.

Literacy, Technology, and Vocational Training: Helping people to learn basic skills and become self-sufficient is one of Rotary's priorities. Literacy projects conducted by clubs include primary education, vocational training, teacher training, adult education, and supplying communities in need with books and technology.

Environment: In response to growing environmental concerns worldwide, Rotary launched its Preserve Planet Earth program in 1990. Many clubs are helping to solve environmental problems through projects including reforestation, establishing animal sanctuaries, reducing toxic waste, encouraging sustainable development, sponsoring environmental educational activities, and promoting ecological practices.

Peace: Rotary clubs work through a number of programs for a more peaceful world. These programs encourage understanding between communities both large and small. Rotary International also maintains official relations with many global organizations that promote world peace. In 1945, nearly 50 Rotary club members participated in the creation of the UN Charter. Currently Rotary is formally involved with organizations such as the UN, UNESCO, Council of Europe, and the World Bank.

This makes an impressive list of important projects for society and mankind. Still we need a closer look at perhaps the most impressive part of Rotary International, namely Rotary Foundation.

The Rotary Foundation

The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International provides an opportunity for Rotary club members to work for international understanding and peace. Through the foundation, Rotary members implement international educational and humanitarian programs.

PolioPlus: This campaign is Rotary's commitment to eradicating polio by the year 2005. Through the efforts of Rotary and its partners in the fight against polio, more than two billion children worldwide have been immunised since 1985. In 1999, 154 nations reported no cases of polio, up from 85 nations when PolioPlus began. By 2005, Rotary's contributions to eradicate this crippling disease will reach a half billion U.S. dollars. Equally significant are the volunteers organised by Rotary International for social mobilisation, vaccine transport, and immunisation activities.

Humanitarian programs: Rotary's international network links people in need with Rotary club members in other countries that can provide resources. The foundation's humanitarian programs provide health care and supplies, clean water, food, job training, and education — particularly in the developing world.

Educational programs: The Rotary Foundation is the world's largest privately funded source of international scholarships. Each year, the Foundation sends nearly 7,100 students to study in another country through scholarships such as the Ambassadorial Scholarships, Group Study Exchanges, and Rotary Grants for University Teachers. In 2002, the Foundation launched its partnership with eight prestigious universities worldwide to offer two-year master's level degree programs focusing on conflict resolution, peace studies, and international relations. Seventy scholars will be chosen each year to study peace and conflict resolution.

After this explanation most people would agree that Rotary International deserves to get support from the media. It is in the interest of presenting news, supporting society, and the media's way of keeping in touch with people. Sometimes a message from the world head office to the media will be issued and maybe even mentioned as news. However, for the local club the situation can be different. Between the global PR department and the local club there is, in most cases, no organization that exists for PR activities. The responsibility to create a positive image of Rotary will usually be a task for the local club. We will have a look at the Rotary Club 'Three Hearts' in Sweden trying to do this.

A Local Example

Halmstad Three Hearts Rotary Club consists of 44 members. All are very active in society and almost every day two or three articles in the local newspaper report something that these people do. It could be a gold mine for every reporter to be a member since many things that will happen in the city will be presented in meetings a long time before there is any 'official' press meeting. However, reporters on the local newspaper refuse to become members. They say it could be a problem to be neutral when being a member. If they didn't enjoy this particular club, there are four more clubs in the same city. Also, being a member in one club, you are also always welcomed to all clubs in the world.

During the spring of 2002 the club arranged an exhibition with six internationally famous artists to support doctors going to Africa. Rotary pays the flight ticket but the doctors work without payment for six weeks. All of the artists agreed to give 50% of the income from the exhibition to volunteers for this Scandinavian-based 'Doctor Bank'. The hotel let the club use its premises without any cost. The artists agreed to take the risk for accidents etc so no insurance was required. After a few days the club was able to send about £5,000 as a support to the 'Doctor Bank'. It is hard to estimate, but 'exchanged' into human lives it could be worth many more thousands. It gave the PR group in the club the opportunity to get some PR and they worked really hard to do this. In some cases they succeeded, but the local newspaper's reaction was that it was, - "not interesting enough". Members from the club contacted the newspaper again and after some discussions the paper agreed to write an article the following week. The argument that made them change their mind came from one artist who was also a member of the club. She knew that the newspaper wrote quite long articles and were very interested when she did almost the same type of charity project a year ago. In fact she even said "don't you like the children in Africa?". They finally agreed to produce the article. Feeling good about her success it was a great disappointment the following week when a tiny article came in the paper. It got less text in the newspaper than another club giving 20 umbrellas to busses in Halmstad.

QUESTIONS

1. Can you give some arguments for a local newspaper to show the same interest in a local incident as for a global incident? Lets say – an earthquake on the other side of the world with 2,000 people killed and a baby with a funny hat eating an ice-cream on an extremely warm weekend in the newspaper's city.
2. Since it is hard to get reporters to become members of Rotary Clubs or any other organization that is not thought of as 'neutral', how could you influence them to write favourably about the Club and it's programs (or at the least write something)?
3. I magine you work for Rotary I nternational and have to plan three short PR campaigns to improve the image of the club. Describe what you would choose to include in these campaigns, and why you choose them over other ideas.
4. Discuss how the concepts of 'target group' and 'market' is important when it comes to PR and Rotary I nternational.
5. I t is possible to consider the PR possibilities when electing new members to a club. Describe the occupations you would look for when doing this.
6. Rotary is an organization that doesn't sell anything to anyone, has a lot of people in a decision-making positions, can finance its activities with the members' own resources, etc. Does this organization really need PR?I f so – describe the reasons.

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Rotary I nternational <http://www.rotary.org>

Rotary facts <http://www.icufr.org/abc.htm>