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## BRAND MANAGEMENT - BEYOND MARKETING

In the past, the management of an organization's brand has usually been the sole domain of the organization's marketing team. However, with the evolution of the Internet and people's need for instant information, there is a greater call for public relations professionals to become more directly involved with an organization's brand management.

The Dictionary of Business and Management defines brand as: a name, sign or symbol used to identify items or services of the seller(s) and to differentiate them from goods of competitors.

But according to Colin Bates, a brand management specialist from [www.buildingbrands.com](http://www.buildingbrands.com), brand means much more than that. "More accurately," he says, "brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer."

Essentially, brand is more than simply a corporate logo; it is anything people can associate an organization with, whether it is a paid advertisement or an article found in a newspaper. This is where brand management becomes important and PR professionals must be vigilant.

It is not enough for public relations professionals to simply communicate news to the media; they must somehow communicate the persona of their organization.

For example, Google, the company that runs the best-known and most-used search engine on the Web, has a very distinctive brand. Most Internet users could visually identify its logo. However, Google's branding efforts do not stop there.

The company has worked hard to combat Internet users' doubts about the quality of Web search results. Most of the main stream search engines sell advertising in order to make money and many people have accused these companies of skewing search results for money - giving certain web sites a higher ranking in exchange for purchasing paid advertising.

However, Google is well-known for the clear division it places between its search results and its advertising business. The visual separation on Google's Web site is an example: search results are prevalent on the left and occupy at the very least 90 per cent of the page, while advertising occupies very little space and is not intrusive to the user. Most importantly, the search results are generated from the intelligence of Google's product and are not influenced by purchasing advertising.

Google makes this very clear each and every time it speaks to the media. When a spokesperson does an interview or the company issues a press release regarding its search engine, it is quick to point out the division. In fact, it says it is part of its corporate philosophy - hence, it has become part of its brand. Google is known for its technical innovation and the quality of its search results, and not as a company that is just interested in money.

Furthermore, to ensure the organization's branding is being effectively communicated to the media, it also must be properly managed.

If the brand or persona of the organization is not being properly communicated, problems can be identified through analysis of the media coverage and the necessary adjustments can be made by the PR team to get the proper message out.

By tracking key messages, taglines, or buzzwords in the media coverage, the public relations team can measure how well its organization is communicating. It could be there are stop words the PR team wants to avoid using to prevent confusion and miscommunication. These too can be measured.

Media coverage can also be measured against other performance indicators such as sales and stock prices. This could be a good indicator to measure how well a brand is being perceived in the media and with an organization's key publics.

To most companies, brand is just as important as the products they create and services they provide, and it must be properly managed. Public relations professionals have a key role to play in shaping and maintaining an organization's brand - this responsibility cannot be left solely to the organization's marketing team. Not only is the PR team responsible for communicating the brand, but it also must be vigilant through media analysis.