

You are your company's image

by C. Curtis Trent, Trent Technologies, Inc.

The success of your company depends heavily on how it is viewed by the public. All other things being equal, your company will succeed or fail as your public image projection efforts succeed or fail.

The image of a company is the mental picture that is brought to mind when something related to the company is seen or heard. A company's image is created and reflected by all who are identified with the company.

For example, you contribute to the image of your company. You may be the only person in your company who has contact with many sections of the public. To these people, the company is you and you are the company.

A prune by any other name

Image projection is life or death to an industry. For example, when you hear the word "prune," what comes to mind? Decreasing sales motivated the prune industry to find out how the public viewed its product.

What it found was that Mr. and Mrs. America associated prunes with laxatives. The industry decided on a new approach. Look in your national magazines and you will find multi-colored ads featuring prunes as a delightful dessert or snack treat, not a treatment.

Image projection is everywhere you look — politics, books, movies, newspapers, TV, radio, even the United Nations. From our history books, we learned how Benjamin Franklin successfully projected the image of the struggling American colonies and won the French as valuable allies in a time of crisis. Likewise, each of you projects your own image — and that of your company and industry — on a daily basis.

Have you ever wondered what comes to a person's mind when your company, product, or service is mentioned? Is the public aware of the vital services you perform for their benefit? Do they know the contributions you make to the improvement of their communities? Do they know about the efforts you and your company make to improve the quality and control the cost of your product or service?

Are they aware of your mission and your long-range goals? The public has a right to know these things. If you don't tell them, no one will. You have plenty to tell, so plan your story and tell it well.

A favorable image

You may think that doing a good job is enough. It's important, but it is not enough. If your company is to survive in this competitive society, it is important to recognize and put into practice certain basic principles of good public relations.

In my 20 years of organizational work in public service, consulting, and management, I have observed that companies that successfully respond to challenges are those continuously apply the following principles of good public relations:

✓ **Define for yourself what public relations is.**

I prefer this definition: Public relations is the creation and main-

tenance of a favorable climate in which a company can meet the needs of its public.

✓ **Know your company and its mission.**

Know 10,000 things about your company — its mission, objectives, history, products, services, etc. You cannot have confidence in yourself until you do a good job of learning the details.

✓ **Know your public.**

When Jay Leno walks on stage to do his monologue each night, you can be sure he has made a study of what his audience wants. The wrong approach to the wrong audience would spell disaster. Do you know your public like Leno knows his?

Your public includes coworkers and clientele, the owners and managers of your company, fellow professionals throughout the industry, the local business and industrial community, local city councils, union officers, government regulatory authorities, and the news media, to name a few. I am sure you can think of others.

Do you consider the best ways of interpreting yourself and your company to these groups?

✓ **Determine what your**

You may be able to live down honest mistakes, but you can never live down weak-kneed disloyalty.

public image is.

The prune industry went to the people to find out what was wrong with their product's image. You may need to do the same. Unless you know what your image is in the minds of the public, how can you be sure you are taking the right approach when communicating?

✓ **Communicate.**

Speaking well, writing, listening, understanding, and making yourself understood are all important. When you go before an audience or meet someone face-to-face as a representative of your company, you project the image of the entire company. The image of your company is raised when you make a good impression, and it is lowered when you make a poor impression.

✓ **Good public relations demand a continuous effort.**

Develop a comprehensive plan for your relations with the public. Put your plans on paper, and check them off when they are implemented. In the last analysis, effective projection of the true image of your company depends upon you. Your image is that of your company.

It is human nature to relate an industry or organization to a personality. For example, when

Henry Ford lived, he and his cars were part of the same image. Make no mistake about it, your company, as it is understood by the public, calls to mind a mental picture of you.

✓ **Effective public relations depend upon personal attitudes.**

Loyalty — A person who cannot be loyal to his or her company, its goals, and its members is not only useless but a hazard to the company. Disloyalty is deceit. It clouds issues and weakens your position.

Loyalty begins with a mental attitude. You are loyal when you work hard to promote an idea or program you did not originate, and for which you will not receive credit. You are loyal when you openly support a policy of your company, even though you have doubts about its wisdom.

You may be able to live down honest mistakes, but you can never live down weak-kneed disloyalty.

Positive thinking — Always act and think positively. Never miss a chance to say good things about your coworkers and your company. If they know you are

painting a good picture of them, they will try to live up to that picture. Disagree with coworkers and management if you wish, but do so within your own organization. To the outside, you should always present a united front.

Neutrality — If you are neutral about your company, have enough self respect to resign. If you support the company, stand up and say so. If you really believe in the company, go out and sell others on it too. It's up to you.

Image projection is a vital factor in the success of your company. But the effort must not be left to a public relations department alone. Every employee of the company must accept responsibility for the image that is projected.

The foggy concepts the public may have regarding your company need to be burned away, so that your mission and service can be clearly seen and understood.

It's up to you, more than anyone else, to better project your company's image.

C. Curtis Trent is president of Trent Technologies, Inc. He is a management and communications consultant to business, industry, and educational institutions throughout the country and abroad.

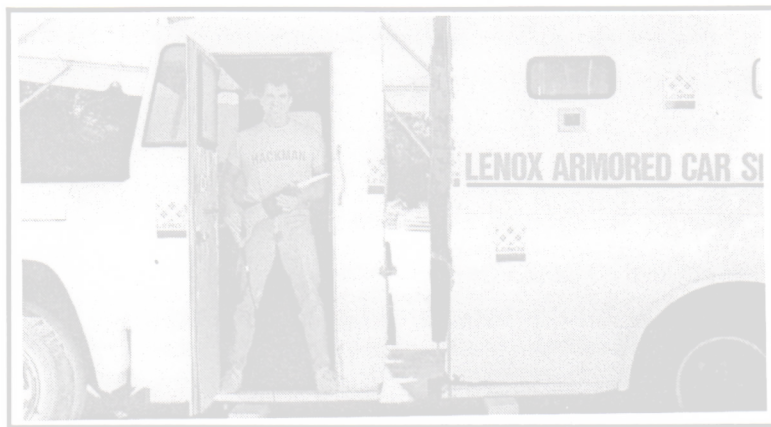
Luxaire plans to expand distribution

ELYRIA, Ohio — Luxaire Heating and Air Conditioning announced that it is planning to expand its distribution in 1996.

According to the company, Luxaire has completely revamped its offering of residential air conditioning, heat pump, furnace, and gas-electric single package unit products. Its commercial line ranges from 3 to 25 tons.

The 50-year-old company plans commercials on television and radio, and is also looking for independent hvacr distributors.

Don't come near my car



AMERICAN SAW'S "HACKMAN" cut an armored car in half using "Lenox" reciprocating blades. The truck was sawed in half as part of a worldwide contest for the plumbing, heating, cooling, electrical, industrial, and construction industries. Two plumbers correctly guessed how long it would take to cut the armored car in half (almost 33 minutes).



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