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# The importance of IMC in dealing with negative, nongenerated publicity in the organisation

Charmaine Scriven\*

## SUMMARY

*This article addresses the implications of the absence of an IMC (integrated marketing communication) approach to negative nongenerated publicity by referring to two cases experienced at the University of South Africa (Unisa).*

*The article takes, as its point of departure, the emergence of the IMC approach and the position of publicity in the marketing communication mix, and concentrates on nongenerated publicity in that this has always been problematic for organisations due to its uncontrollable nature. This article proposes that an IMC approach can be used in overcoming the obstacle of negative, nongenerated publicity in organisations in that it allows better control of such publicity through application of specific criteria.*

*In conclusion, the author proposes that negative nongenerated publicity should be dealt with by using an IMC approach as part of the organisation's strategic marketing plan.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION: EMERGENCE OF THE IMC APPROACH: A PARADIGM SHIFT

Over the past decade there has been significant change to the way organisations market themselves. Some factors that have led to this new era of marketing communication include the empowerment of consumers, significant political and social changes and rapid technological development such as in the area of computers and the Internet. These factors represent a significant paradigm shift which has impacted dramatically on marketers in that they can no longer assume they are communicating effectively with their target audiences. In addition to consumers becoming far more selective with regard to the media, tough local and foreign competition in the marketplace has meant that organisations need to plan their marketing messages far more skilfully than previously (Koekemoer 1998:2).

The American Association of Advertising Agencies defines IMC as (Belch & Belch 1998:9):

*A concept of marketing communication planning that recognises the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines, for example*

*general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations, and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact.*

In the past, the various elements that make up the marketing communication mix (cf section 2) were regarded as separate functions. Each element was handled by an expert in the relevant area. This approach unfortunately led to an overall marketing communication effort that was uncoordinated and frequently inconsistent with poor results (Koekemoer 1998:2).

However, as a result of the paradigm shift, a different view of the market has developed. The fragmented view, whereby the elements of marketing communication are planned and managed separately with distinct and unique budgets (also known as the traditional view of marketing), has been discarded. Both academics and marketers have given credit to a relatively new holistic approach known as IMC which basically constitutes a new way of thinking and a better way to do things by considering the "bigger picture" (a broad view of marketing) (Belch & Belch 1998:11).

Despite the fact that marketers have a fair amount of control over what customers and prospective customers hear or learn regarding the products and services of an organisation managed through paid and non-paid publicity, information has generally become more freely available. Consumers now have more opportunities to gather information about an organisation's products and services than ever before. This information can come from a wide range of uncontrolled sources outside of the organisation, such as databases, newspaper articles or the Internet (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn 1992:38).

In order to influence the more sophisticated consumer of the 21st century, messages must be clear and consistent about an organisation's product or service, no matter the source or system of that message. So many differing sources can also result in conflicting messages about the organisation, which in turn leads to confusion on the part of the consumer. Negative responses to nongenerated publicity can be controlled

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if managed centrally through the adoption of the IMC approach (Schultz et al 1992:38).

However, this control can only be achieved if marketers adopt a more holistic approach to their marketing efforts by addressing all factors such as for instance, negative nongenerated publicity, that might influence the effectiveness of the organisation's strategic marketing plan (cf section 2).

According to Skinner (1994:37), a strategic marketing plan "is the continuous process of developing and implementing marketing strategies to achieve specific marketing objectives, which in turn lead to the achievement of an organisation's overall objectives". Belch and Belch (1998:32) underscore the above view and state that an organisation should have a strategic marketing plan "if it wants to exchange its products or services in the marketplace successfully".

The primary purpose of any product or service is to meet the needs of a target audience. However, this cannot be achieved without a good product, a place or channel of distribution that delivers that accessible product to customers, a pricing strategy that clearly determines the product's worth and value to customers and a communication programme that informs consumers precisely how that product meets their needs. This coherence between the product, its distribution, the price and marketing communication (being the four Ps of the marketing mix – product, place, price and promotion) is essential. The management of an organisation should work together strategically with its members of staff in order to communicate the same message (ie integrated marketing communication) regarding the product, its price and distribution.

To ensure essential cohesion between the four Ps of marketing, an organisation needs to develop a total marketing communication strategy that recognises that all of that organisation's activities, and not only its marketing communication, communicate different messages to the organisation's target audience. In this way the organisation will avoid sending out conflicting messages to its target audiences when dealing with negative nongenerated publicity (Belch & Belch 1998:10).

In this article it is proposed that IMC can provide a solution in dealing effectively with negative, non-generated publicity in that the organisation will be better prepared to coordinate and plan their communication messages for the media and their publics as part of that organisation's strategic marketing plan.

## 2 THE POSITION OF PUBLICITY IN THE MARKETING COMMUNICATION MIX

Marketing communication is the element in the marketing mix which is used to highlight the important features of the other three elements (product, price, and place) to increase the chances of a consumer buying a particular product or making use of a specific service. If marketing communication is included in an organisation's marketing plan, that organisation has a better chance of persuading the target audience to use that organisation's services or

products. In fact marketing communication and the other three marketing mix elements are the four categories of strategic decision making in a marketing plan (Burnett & Moriarty 1998:4). The overall role of marketing communication is to support the marketing plan by sending messages to the target audience that an organisation's products or services are simply better than those of competitors (Burnett 1993:241).

According to Belch and Belch (1998:14) the marketing communication mix<sup>1</sup> (often referred to as marketing communication tools) include:

- advertising
- direct marketing
- sales promotion
- publicity/public relations
- personal selling

Burnett and Moriarty (1998:4) explain that marketing communication messages can be either planned or unplanned. Planned messages are, for instance, delivered through marketing communication tools such as publicity, whereas unplanned messages include all the other elements associated with the organisation or brand that are capable of delivering definite messages to consumers, such as nongenerated publicity.

### 2.1 Publicity/public relations

Publicity is part of a larger concept, namely public relations. When an organisation systematically plans and distributes information in an attempt to control and manage the nature of publicity regarding the organisation's image, this is known as public relations. The definition of public relations adopted by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) in 1998 states that "public relations is the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders (Koekemoer 1998:348).

Publicity on the other hand according to Belch and Belch (1998) refers to the securing of free space in print media and free-airtime on broadcast media by the public relations practitioner and involves non-personal communication about an organisation, its products, services or ideas. Publicity is a very powerful communication medium in that it is considered more trustworthy by the target audience than paid advertising and results in free, credible, word-of-mouth information about the organisation and its products (Belch & Belch 1998:531). To many marketers, the concepts of publicity and public relations are synonymous. While this is correct, publicity is a short-term strategy, while public relations extends over a long period of time (Belch & Belch 1998:528).

Publicity which is not generated by an organisation, and which in some instances may be negative, is considered part of business life. Publicity is not always positive, nor always under the direction of, nor paid for by the organisation. The chances of an organisation receiving negative publicity from the media are much higher than of receiving positive

media attention because of the media's emphasis on negativism as a news value. Publicity is considered to be negative whenever the organisation's image or reputation is detrimentally affected as a result of an unfavourable message about that organisation in the media, for instance during a crisis such as Unisa's election of a new principal (cf section 3). An organisation's image is a valuable asset and can be as crucial as its financial performance in maintaining viability. This image is only partly determined by the media. A favourable corporate image is also derived from sales or contracts, personnel and shareholders and is distinct from the organisation's strategic marketing plan (Belch & Belch 1995:16).

As a result of the uncontrollable nature of negative, nongenerated publicity, all organisations need to deal with such publicity without worsening the situation by ignoring the news media, mishandling their enquiries or sending them conflicting and inconsistent messages. If negative nongenerated publicity is handled professionally and within a predetermined plan, damage can be contained or minimised or even in some instances be used to enhance the organisation's reputation (Skinner & Von Essen 1997:335).

## 2.2 Dealing with negative, nongenerated publicity in the organisation

Negative nongenerated publicity not only damages the image of an organisation considerably but also has a detrimental effect on its strategic marketing plan resulting in long-term financial losses for the organisation.

Renkema and Hoeken (1998) found in a study conducted in The Netherlands that negative publicity in the press severely damaged the corporate image of the Public Prosecutor's Office. This negative publicity resulted from a new media policy which called for the office to disseminate information about charges made against organisations more actively. The resulting damage worsened as the accusations against the office became more categorical. Effects generated by the initial publication could still be felt some two weeks later.

Nelson-Horchler (1990) concluded that it was important for an organisation to listen to the right people, to communicate quickly and effectively and to act proactively in times of negative publicity. Nelson-Horchler (1990) refers to the cases of Ashland Oil Corporation and Exxon Corporation who used different approaches when dealing with negative publicity in separate traumatic incidents. Both Exxon Corporation and Ashland Oil were associated with ecological disasters in January 1988 when the sea was polluted with 11 million gallons of crude oil (in Exxon's case) and four million gallons of diesel fuel (in Ashland's case). Ashland Oil admitted openly to making a mistake. This dramatically boosted its corporate image. On the other hand, Exxon's handling of the oil spill still perpetuates today in billions of dollars in lost contracts and sales, despite a \$1,7 billion clean up operation. The Ashland Oil Corporation's handling of its crisis is today considered a textbook case on how to handle negative publicity.

Renkema and Hoeken (1998) also found that not only does negative publicity severely damage an organisation's corporate image, but the way in which that publicity is handled, also plays a crucial role in influencing the public's perception of that image. Examples cited by Renkema and Hoeken (1998) include:

- Tyler's (1992) analysis of the Exxon Valdez disaster in which she found that Exxon's communication strategies increased the damage to the organisation's corporate image instead of minimising it (in Renkema & Hoeken 1998).
- Benoit and Czerwinski's (1997) study showed that USAir's responses to negative publicity in *The Times* were also less than adequate. Such findings have generated interest in the ways in which organisations handle negative publicity (in Renkema & Hoeken 1998).

Harrington (1996) suggests that organisations should develop a written plan, distributed throughout the organisation which details a strategy for handling negative nongenerated publicity. Harrington bases this suggestion on her conclusions drawn from Cenex Corporation. Cenex, a transport organisation, had to deal with negative publicity when one of its tankers was involved in an accident which posed an environmental danger because of escaping anhydrous ammonia gas. Following the accident, Cenex immediately implemented its written plan which involved putting a specially equipped emergency response team into action. Cenex also sent a public relations practitioner to the scene to handle the media and because only one person spoke to the media, no inconsistent, conflicting messages appeared in the media.

Slahor (1989) found it was imperative to have a good relationship with the media during times of negative publicity. The groundwork to achieve this relationship should be established long before negative publicity is generated. This can be achieved through periodic media releases, media conferences and interviews that will be of interest to the community. However, during a crisis there is no time to build a positive relationship with the media and reporters will use all the information they can gather, either positive or negative, about the organisation and the associated crisis. Because an organisation's activities are of interest to the community, any bad news will be news and generate negative publicity. Slahor (1989) emphasises that opinions and suspicions have no place in an organisation's communications with the media and that media personnel should always admit to the facts and the truth. Slahor (1989) also recommends proper training be provided for all staff who may be involved in a resolving crisis so that they know how to deal with the media in order to present a professional image of the organisation despite the crisis.

Scriven (2000) established that an IMC approach can assist in preventing or ameliorating conflicting or damaging messages in the media when communication is centrally managed and planned. The following

criteria are suggested for handling negative nongenerated publicity using the IMC approach:

- An organisation should have a formal, written plan to deal with crises resulting from negative nongenerated publicity and this plan should be updated regularly. This plan should form part of an organisation's IMC programme in the organisation's strategic marketing plan.
- All communication should be centrally managed and planned. The organisation should therefore appoint only one media spokesperson to ensure a consistent message reaches all media and thus avoids conflicting messages. The media spokesperson(s) should be trained, coached and rehearsed to interact with the media. The written plan should be widely distributed, especially amongst key members of staff, inside the organisation.
- The organisation's mistakes should be openly acknowledged and not denied as this may be a source of conflicting messages.
- The organisation should always be open and honest about any negative incident. The truth when known should always be told.
- The organisation should establish a good working relationship with the media through regular interaction in the form of media releases, media conferences and interviews that will be of interest to the community.
- Communication should be fast, effective and proactive.
- Whenever an organisation is the victim of negative nongenerated publicity, the organisation should increase its promotional activities to counteract the effects from this negative publicity.
- Organisations should learn from their past mistakes and adapt or change to improve or prevent a repetition of the problem. The organisation should not only "say" the right thing, but also "say and do" the right thing.

### 3 IMPLICATIONS RESULTING FROM THE LACK OF AN IMC APPROACH

The following two cases associated with negative nongenerated publicity concerning Unisa will be used to illustrate the impact resulting from the lack of an IMC approach. Scriven (2000) qualitatively evaluated 18 newspaper articles in the sample according to the various criteria that she suggested to handle negative nongenerated publicity in an IMC approach (cf section 2). These newspaper articles were published in *Beeld*, *The Pretoria News*, *The Star* and *Die Volksblad* during the period 1 July to 31 December 1998. A purposive sample was drawn since the parameters used to draw the sample were circulation figures and the geographic availability of the newspapers. Seven regional newspapers and one urban newspaper were selected in order to provide an overall picture of publicity regarding these two cases in South Africa (*The Star*, *Beeld*, *The Pretoria News*, *Die Volksblad*, *Die Burger*, *The Cape Times*, *The Natal Mercury*, and *The Daily Dispatch*).

### 3.1 Election of a new Principal

The election of a new Principal during 1998 to fill the vacant Principal's post represents a newsworthy and controversial period in Unisa's history. During the sample, 13 articles were published in newspapers in the sample, five in *Beeld*, seven in *The Pretoria News*, one in *The Star*.

The themes contained in these articles were about the possible abolition of the election process, the inclusion of the Vice Principal of Tuition's name on the shortlist of candidates and political claims surrounding the debate on the election of a new Principal.

The controversy started when the election process was almost abandoned because of pressure from organisations within Unisa, such as the Progressive Alliance, which was not satisfied with the shortlist of candidates, as well as pressure from the Broader Transformation Forum (BTF). The situation worsened when one of the applicants (the Vice Principal of Tuition) wanted to sue Unisa for not including his name on the shortlist. When, after much deliberation, his name was placed on the shortlist, he did not accept it. The Selection Committee made it clear that it would not act upon threats of legal action by candidates and that it would continue the search for a new Principal.

The Selection Committee then postponed all interviews for the position of Principal following a recommendation by Unisa's Broader Transformation Forum (BTF). The Selection Committee then included a fifth candidate to the shortlist of names which was followed by protests by student bodies at Unisa regarding the election procedure and requested that the search for a new Principal be started again.

These events were reported by the media as an institution that did not know how to elect a new Principal in an orderly way, and as an institution ruled and manipulated by student bodies, organisations and politics. In the 13 newspaper articles Unisa was portrayed as being in a crisis and not knowing how to deal with it. For example, *Beeld* referred to the process as "omstrede" (contentious), and "kontroversieel" (controversial) (*Beeld*, 21 July 1999:5). *The Pretoria News*, on the other hand, was more negative and referred to the process as "a dilemma" and "a crisis", saying that "Minister of Education might intervene" and "public concern" (*The Pretoria News*, 21 July 1998:3).

*The Pretoria News*, in particular, approached various unofficial media spokespersons in Unisa, who not only provided subjective views about the election process, but in one case also provided contradictory statements. For instance, in an article in *The Pretoria News*, referring to the University Council's decision to postpone all interviews (*The Pretoria News*, 1 September 1998:5), the Chairperson of the Selection Committee stated that the University Council would be guided by the BTF's decision because all stakeholders were represented on this forum. But in the same article, the Chairperson of the University Council stated that to "scrap the process, the decision won't

be automatically endorsed by the selection committee". These two contradictory statements sent a confusing message to the newspaper's readers.

The Vice Principal of Tuition was approached several times by *The Pretoria News* and *Beeld* for comment. In an article in *The Pretoria News* (23 July 1998:3), he was quoted as saying: "A member of the Council said my legal action minimised my chances of getting the post. He also referred to the election process as "prejudicial" and "unfair".

An article in *Beeld* (22 July 1998:22), quoted the Vice Principal of Tuition as having said: "die situasie word 'n verskriklike verleentheid" (the situation has become a terrible embarrassment).

*The Pretoria News* also quoted several anonymous members of staff. In an article in *The Pretoria News* (21 September 1998:3), one senior academic was quoted as having said that all shortlisted candidates, except the Vice Principal of Tuition had links with the ANC. In another article in *The Pretoria News* (23 October 1998:2), a University Council member was quoted as having said: "the process to appoint a Principal is being protracted by individuals within the Broader Transformation Forum (BTF). This is costing the University a fortune". In an article in *The Pretoria News* (1 September 1998:5), some comments were referred to as from "a well-placed source".

Further, the Chairperson of the Selection Committee in an article in *The Pretoria News* (27 July 1998:3), did not wish to comment on the contents of a letter submitted by the Vice Principal of Tuition to the Selection Committee. However, the Chairperson promised to provide the media with a statement later that day. No record of such a media statement can be located.

During this period Unisa responded only with three formal media releases, only one of which was published in the sample. This was possibly due to shortcomings regarding the content and technical presentation of the media releases (Scriven 2000:132).

Following a detailed analysis of these articles according to the criteria for nongenerated publicity in an IMC approach (cf section 2), a negative perception of the election process was enhanced in the reports by the following factors:

- Comments were made by unofficial media spokespersons who were not trained to communicate with the media. Subjective comments were also made by an anonymous University Council member and other "well-placed sources", and by one of the candidates who was involved in the controversy.
- The media apparently preferred to approach members of staff instead of the official media spokesperson, possibly because they were able to obtain information more rapidly than via official channels. Possibly the media did not know who to contact at Unisa for an official statement.
- Conflicting messages in the media, such as comments by the Chairperson of the BTF and the Unisa Council differed in *The Pretoria News* of 1 September 1998 regarding Unisa's decision to

postpone all interviews following a recommendation by the BTF.

- A promise was made to the media by an unofficial media spokesperson that a statement would be issued providing details concerning the contents of a letter submitted to the Selection Committee by the Vice Principal of Tuition. This statement was never issued.
- Unisa's Department of Corporate Communication and Marketing issued three formal media releases, of which only one was published. None of the media releases, however, complied with the contents and technical requirements for a media release.
- Subjective and harmful statements were issued to the media by the Progressive Alliance Party operating at Unisa.

If Unisa had adopted an IMC approach, it would have been able to plan, manage and centralise all communication to the media thereby avoiding conflicting, subjective statements appearing in the press. Unisa would also have been able to counteract negative publicity as stipulated in its formal written plan. Unisa could have dealt with this negative nongenerated publicity in the following manner:

- Unisa should have immediately implemented various actions, as stipulated in its written plan, of which all key personnel should have received a copy. As this written plan should be part of Unisa's IMC programme in its strategic marketing plan, key personnel should have held a meeting to streamline all communication actions during this period of negative publicity beginning with the first negative article to appear in the press.
- Members of staff should have been told to refer all queries from the media to the official media spokesperson who should have communicated one consistent message to the media. Members of staff need to be made aware of the fact that only trained members of staff should speak to the media during times of negative publicity. Unisa's communication to the media needed to have been centrally planned, coordinated and managed.
- Unisa should have issued many more media releases in addition to a media conference in order to keep the media informed thus leaving no room for speculation by the media. Media releases should have been written correctly and in such a way that the contents could be easily used by the media.
- Unisa should have monitored its negative publicity more closely and acted proactively during this period by feeding the media with more positive news in an attempt to boost its corporate image and to counteract its harmful effects on its strategic marketing plan.

### 3.2 Rationalisation of the use of Afrikaans and courses

During the same period in which Unisa received negative publicity regarding the election of a Princi-

pal, a decision to use only English as the language for internal communication and to rationalise some courses generated additional negative publicity. A total of five articles was published, two in *Beeld* and *Die Burger* and one in *Die Volksblad*. The Freedom Front Party attacked Unisa in the media accusing it of discriminating against Afrikaans students. Unisa's media spokesperson was approached for comment, and the explanation was given that correspondence could be conducted in any official language, and that the Committee was still deciding on a formal language policy.

The then Acting Head of the Department of Corporate Communication and Marketing responded that Unisa was aware of the Freedom Front Party's criticism and that the Principal would react to this criticism as soon as he returned from leave (*Die Burger*, 5 October 1998:8, *Die Volksblad*, 3 October 1998:6). However, no formal statement was issued to the media by Unisa, giving the Principal's reaction to this criticism.

All the articles of this theme published in these three newspapers (which belong to the same news group), have more or less the same contents. They, for instance, referred to the Freedom Front Party as "op die oorlogspad" (on the warpath) and quoted the Freedom Front's spokesperson for Education as having said: "Ek neem met ontsteltenis, wrewel en afkeer kennis van die afskaling van Afrikaans by Unisa. Dié optrede deur Afrikaans-onvriendelike groeperings vind plaas terwyl byna 20% van studente en die meerderheid van personeellede by Unisa Afrikaanssprekend is" (I take note, with dismay, rancour and disapproval of the downscaling of Afrikaans at Unisa. This action by Afrikaans-unfriendly groups is taking place while almost 20 percent of the students and majority of the staff at Unisa are Afrikaans speaking).

*Beeld* (31 August 1998:6) based an article on a media release issued by Unisa regarding the state of transformation at Unisa. But the information given in the media release was used negatively and focused the article on Unisa's rationalisation of courses. The article was featured on page 6 of the newspaper and included a prominent headline. The article also referred to Unisa's financial problems and the lifting of a moratorium on the promotion of internal personnel originally imposed due to financial problems to accommodate affirmative action. *Beeld* (3 Aug 1998:6) reported the following: "Dié moratorium het groot teenkanting uitgelok toe die universiteitsraad vanjaar net swart personeellede uitgenooi het om om bevorderings aansoek te doen as deel van sy regstellende-aksieprogram ..." and "Na verneem word, heers ongelukkigheid ook in van die taaldepartemente oor die uifasering van spesiale kursusse omdat die inkorporering daarvan op eerstejaarsvlak blykbaar tot 'n verlaging van standaarde sal lei . . ." (The moratorium drew much opposition when the University invited black staff to apply for promotion as part of its affirmative action programme).

There was no formal statement issued by Unisa to

counter the argument that the University was no longer promoting Afrikaans. Owing to Unisa's lack of a formal statement, its image in the media as an Institution that is not in favour of Afrikaans, was reiterated. No formal statement was ever made by the Principal and this gave the impression that Unisa was hiding something. If Unisa had followed the IMC approach with regard to negative nongenerated publicity, it should have openly admitted to a reduction in the use of Afrikaans based on a need to make the University more efficient. This would have ended negative references to the use of language at Unisa.

Negative publicity was perpetuated as a direct result of Unisa's lack of response to the media on the issue regarding the rationalisation of Afrikaans. In commenting on the Road Accident Fund's decision to use only English for internal communication *Die Burger* (5 October 1998:8) referred back to Unisa as having established a precedent.

However, a media release was issued on 25 August 1998 by the Department of Corporate Communication and Marketing but only returned to matters associated with transformation at Unisa focusing on Unisa's rationalisation of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Instead of generating positive publicity, the content of the media release was turned around and used negatively. This was possibly because of shortcomings in the preparation of the media release (Scriven 2000:140).

With regard to the coverage of the issue of rationalisation of Afrikaans, the image generated by the press was one of an institution not in favour of using Afrikaans. Factors which contributed to this negative nongenerated publicity, included the following:

- No formal statement was issued by Unisa to explain or justify its decision to use only English as an internal communication medium.
- As a result, Unisa was branded by the Afrikaans press as an instigator of an English-only policy for internal communication.
- Promises made to the media that the Principal would react to allegations was never fulfilled.
- The negative publicity generated by the rationalisation of Afrikaans was in turn underscored by a single media release to explain the decision to rationalise several of its undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

The adoption of an IMC approach would have generated positive publicity to counterbalance the negative publicity. The University would then have been able to react proactively, thus preventing further damaging negative publicity regarding the various issues discussed here. This media release provided scope for additional negative publicity by having too many messages. Unisa should have dealt with this negative nongenerated publicity in the following manner:

- On the publication of the first negative report, a previous mentioned (cf 3.1) predetermined plan should have been launched.
- Negative publicity regarding its decision to use English as a medium for internal communication should not have been ignored, as this left room for much speculation by the media. A media release should have been issued to explain the rationale behind its decision to use only English for internal communication so as not to alienate its Afrikaans speaking target audience. Media releases should have been written to accommodate the contents and technical requirements for media releases.
- Media releases should focus on one message only in this case providing a rationale for Unisa's decision to use only English for internal communication rather than rationalisation of courses.
- Negative publicity should have been monitored more closely and proactive action taken by feeding the media with positive news in an attempt to boost its corporate image. This would counteract only harmful effects on Unisa's strategic marketing plan such as alienating its Afrikaans speaking target audience.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Both the cases described here clearly indicate how negative nongenerated publicity can impact on the corporate image of an organisation. Distinct lessons can be learnt from these cases as both point to a clear need for implementing an IMC approach to counter future negative nongenerated publicity. To summarise the action an organisation needs to take includes the following (cf section 2):

- Adoption of an IMC approach to negative publicity strongly outweighs a knee-jerk reaction.
- Staff need to be given guidelines in talking to the media in order to eliminate confusing, inconsistent and potentially harmful messages which in turn produce negative, subjective and contradictory news.
- Positive reaction on the part of the organisation can go a long way to counter the effects of negative messages in the media.
- A formal written plan is required when dealing with negative nongenerated publicity.
- Good relations with the media can quickly aid in countering negative publicity through the timely provision of user-friendly media releases.
- Promises to provide the media with information must always be upheld in order to maintain good faith.
- A satisfactory media policy is highly essential so that the organisation can speak to the media with one voice.

IMC can be a solution to deal with negative nongenerated publicity in a highly effective manner. An IMC approach to nongenerated publicity is not dealt with in isolation but rather is centrally managed and planned through the development of a written plan for dealing with crisis communication as part of an organisation's strategic marketing plan. Dealing with nongenerated publicity is the responsibility of trained communication people only who, because of their skills, are better positioned to plan and manage communication with the media. The media also need to be monitored more closely so that the media office can act immediately in order to counteract any harmful statements in the media. Although beyond the scope of this article, it goes without saying that a well-informed staff is essential to the successful implementation of crisis control in any organisation.

Implementing the IMC approach successfully poses a challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century organisation but it should at the same time attempt to overcome several obstacles facing IMC. This include members of staff that may feel that they are already integrated, while few organisations are prepared to develop totally integrated communication programmes from the customer's perspective. The history, tradition and experience of the organisation may also be difficult to overcome. The way the organisation is structured can pose a problem in that members of staff want to keep that structure in place because they are familiar with it and like it (Schultz 1993). Adopting an IMC approach requires a totally different way of thinking. Dramatic changes to an organisation's structure and culture always encounter stiff resistance unless handled very carefully. Some organisations lack horizontal communication programmes while integration requires more horizontal communication. Most organisations have great difficulty communicating across groups, divisions, units or functional specialties and since each group operates separately, it is unnecessary for them to communicate with one another (Schultz 1993).

Despite the many obstacles facing the implementation of an IMC approach in an organisation, the positive benefits during times of negative publicity make the exercise worthwhile. No organisation is exempt from negative nongenerated publicity and will experience a crisis at some time or other. How well the organisation can emerge from a crisis needs to be taken seriously by its top executives. No insurance policy can cover the losses caused by negative publicity, while the damage can literally take decades to repair, if ever. Despite clearly documented case histories, the number of organisations with ineffective or even no media policy is alarmingly high. The IMC approach can assist in making the organisation's media policy more effective.

**NOTES**

- 1 Various theoretical perspectives exist with regard to the inclusion or exclusion of different components in the marketing communication mix. Some academics/theorists argue for the inclusion of additional elements such as the Internet, relationship marketing and product publicity/PR marketing.

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