

Litigation public relations



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What is litigation public relations, and what are its pro and cons? Litigation public relations (LPR) is the set of communication activities that a company undertakes during the process of a litigation. The core objective of litigation public relations is to reduce damage to the image of the company; and this objective is usually achieved through skilful handling of media and a positive portrayal of the company's case. There are both pros and cons to LPR, which are discussed in the rest of the essay. One important question that PR managers need to answer is whether their activities as part of LPR are not a cover-up of fraudulent or unethical activity of the party they represent. One should remember that litigations against companies are only brought about when there is a strong suspicion of wrong-doing, and the litigation is raised usually by competing companies or the general public. While lawyers can argue that every company has the right to defend itself, PR managers on the other hand usually act out of loyalty as well as their own investments in the company. In this sense, one can see that ethics are not the primary motivation for LPR exercises. As opposed to publishing and reporting the truth as it exists, LPR efforts attempt to color this truth and make it favorable to the company's cause. This might ultimately prove beneficial to the company by reducing negative publicity and consequently not affecting its bottom line, but the general public and the broader industry might suffer due to the misinformation being generated. To be fair to the defendants, one has to concede that media coverage generally tends to be hostile to them. For example, most law-suits are covered from the viewpoint of the plaintiff or the prosecutor and their case gets presented in greater detail. There is a slight negative bias toward the defendant, for they are deemed as wrong-doers until proven otherwise. So one can justify LPR processes as a way of

compensating for the prevalent media bias against the defendant. In this regard, LPR can be considered to present a 'balanced' and 'neutral' view of the case. LPR practices can also be justified on grounds that they help educate the general public by detailing complex legal issues in easily understandable language and in an easily accessible medium. But ethical concerns with LPR remain, for often, in defense of powerful defendants, the media can end up putting pressure on the judiciary. Sometimes, despite their best efforts to remain objective and neutral, the jurists and judges succumb to this external pressure and either moderate their punitive sentences or (in the worst case) give a verdict in favor of the defendant. In this scenario, the general public as well as the plaintiff (usually a competing company) are the losers, as they are denied proper justice. Hence, in conclusion, litigation public relations has both pros and cons attached to it. On the positive side it helps bring completeness to the media coverage of a lawsuit. It also helps educate the general public and helps prevent negative publicity for the defendant. On the negative side, it can unduly influence the decision making process of the jurors and as a result lead to unjust verdicts. Moreover, LPR exercises have in many cases been carried out to deliberately manipulate public opinion through misinformation campaigns. Works Cited: Gibson, D. C. (1998). Litigation public relations: Fundamental assumption. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 43, 19-23. Haywood, R. (2002). *Managing your reputation: How to plan public relations to build and protect the organization's most powerful asset* (2nd ed.) London: Hogan Page.