Two Tech Specs for Outrage Management

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1. If powerful stakeholders are already outraged....
   They can affect your bottom line and their attitude toward you is already attentive and
   hostile (or at least skeptical): They're listening but unlikely to swallow one-sided self-
   promotion.

2. If powerful stakeholders may one day be outraged.... Or outraged
   stakeholders may one day be powerful.... Or stakeholders who are
   neither may one day be both....
   Time to buy some outrage insurance. Act now to prevent the outrage you don't want to
   face later.

So what about stakeholders who are permanently powerless?
   Ignore them. But are you sure? Three warnings: (1) Activists often target highly
   outraged but traditionally powerless groups; that's what the environmental justice
   movement is all about. (It's also what revolutions are all about.) (2) Powerful but
   apathetic stakeholders sometimes rouse themselves to action out of sympathy for the
   oppressed. (3) Like industry, outrage has globalized. Thanks to the Internet, the
   powerless oppressed in one country may inspire powerful (and costly) outrage halfway
   around the world.

And what about stakeholders who are permanently apathetic?
   Sell them. These are the tech specs for traditional marketing and public relations: An
   audience that is – and is guaranteed to remain – apathetic but credulous. You've got one
   precious 15-second sound bite, during which you can shove anything you want down
   their throat; why waste it apologizing? But beware. Activists often target powerful but
   apathetic publics. And when such publics learn from activists the "other half" of the
   story, the half you left out, outrage is a predictable outcome.

What about ethics?
   That's your call. Ethics aside, whenever stakeholders meet the two tech specs, manage
   the outrage. Ignoring stakeholders is betting that they will never be powerful. Selling
   them is betting that they will never be outraged.

For more about my take on this issue, see:
   • Stakeholders (June 2003) – www.psandman.com/col/stakeh.htm

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