

Nov 04, 2016 by *Simon Anholt*

Public Diplomacy and Brand Image ^[1]

The critical success factor for any government's public diplomacy function is whether its connection to policy making is one-way or two-way.

If the purpose of "PD" is simply to promote government policies, it is likely to be superfluous or futile, depending on the good name of the country or its government at that particular time: if the country is in favor, then unless the policy is patently wrong-headed, it is likely to be well-received and simply needs to be communicated. Little art or skill are required to do this. If on the other hand the country is not in favor, then no amount of promotional skill can cause the policy to be received with enthusiasm, and it will either be ignored or taken as further proof of whatever evil is currently ascribed to the country.

If there is a two-way mechanism that allows the PD function to pass back recommendations for policy making, and these recommendations are taken seriously and properly valued by government as critical "market feedback," then PD actually has a chance of enhancing the good name of the country, thus ensuring that future policy decisions are received in a more favorable light. It's a virtuous circle, because of course under these circumstances the policies need far less "selling."

The brand image of the country was not built by communications, and cannot be altered by communications. It was created by many deeds over a long period, and only many more deeds over a long period will change it. As Socrates said, "the way to achieve a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear," and any attempt to manipulate public opinion directly, without proper consideration for the root causes of that opinion, is mere propaganda. Fortunately, we live in an age and in an environment where propaganda is no longer a dangerous evil: it is simply ineffectual. We are all -- at least in richer countries -- by now so thoroughly innured to paid-for messages that attempts to manipulate our opinions through the media are highly unlikely to achieve anything at all. Apart from waste taxpayers' money, of course.
