

Getting PR for your Business -

promotion without a big budget

Expert knowledge means success

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Note: This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

Introduction

When most people think of ways to promote their business, they probably think of traditional advertising methods. These methods have their place. The problem is they're generally expensive and everyone uses them. Unless you have a big advertising budget, you probably have competitors who can outspend you and get the lion's share of the business.

How can you promote without a big budget: By learning ingenious, low cost, but very effective methods to promote your product or service.

Although it may not be a popular form of marketing to secure clients in the short term, public relations can help you solicit additional clients in the long term. By getting your name and your company name in print, public relations lets you position yourself as an expert in your field and lets you flush out prospects whom you could not reach by other marketing means¹.

How to use PR effectively

Public relations means getting free advertising, usually in the print media. You need to write a newsworthy press release that provides valuable information to the publication's editor and to the publication's audience - otherwise your press release will end up in the proverbial editorial bin.

Many freelancers who use PR to market their businesses develop press releases that offer a free report for the publication's audience to request. Your free report should be related to your freelance services. For instance, if you're an ad copywriter, you might create a free report about "10 Ways to Improve Your Ad Headlines". If you're a direct mail writer, your free report might be "15 Ways to Increase the Response of Your Direct Mailing".

You'll want to get your press release published in only those print media markets that attract your type of clients, otherwise

you'll be soliciting people who'll only want your free report and have no intentions to invest in your services.

No amount of press coverage can make you what you aren't. The stodgy can't become innovative or the authoritarian enlightened merely by journalistic fiat. That's the one PR rule to remember. A good agency can help you polish your story; it can package it perfectly and may have great connections in the press. But you're wasting your time and retainer unless your company has something good to say. Effective PR is the truth that is effectively communicated to an organisation's many publics - not just an illusion foisted on the press.

To get publicity you must be newsworthy to do which you'll have to meet one of the media's three goals - (1) inform, (2) educate or (3) entertain. Your story must also be timely. Before pursuing a story, editors, reporters and producers ask themselves, why would our readers, viewers or listeners be interested in this now?

PR can provide the competitive edge for your business

Peter Walker, the president of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (Tel: 0207 766 3333), Website <http://ipr.org.uk> wrote in the NatWest Corporate Quarterly magazine² about PR providing a competitive edge.

He argued that no one questions the potential value of PR, but for too many managers doubts remain.

Perhaps the contrast between the high profile public relations successes or the equally spectacular failures is just too far removed from the everyday experiences of most managers. But PR is a management function and a function of management. Like any other specialist management discipline it only works to the best advantage in partnership with the whole management of the business.

Sadly, despite all the evidence of success, far too many managers of medium-sized businesses see PR as an essential only for major multinationals, or a press relations activity that an intelligent assistant or a one-time/some-time journalist can handle. In



some ways of course they are right – but they are also wrong. PR should be one of the key elements for consideration in any management decision process and resulting action plan.

In the 1980's, Harvard Business School set out its checklist for the successful personal and corporate management of PR:

- Is effective public relations (management communication) given a high priority?
- Are all issues clearly thought through before any communication is attempted?
- Are communications clear and concise?
- Do communications answer all the important questions at hand?
- Are communications properly tailored to address all possible audiences?
- Does each communication have the proper tone, as well as correct content?
- Does the information being communicated have style, substance, conviction, honesty and humour?
- In Britain today, the PR professional would put two key questions in front of those seven pillars of wisdom:
- What are our criteria for success and how are we going to measure it?
- Has the need for a carefully considered timetable been factored into the plan?

Setting clear business and operational objectives have always been at the heart of good management. Identifying and prioritising the audiences, establishing the messages, agreeing on the method of implementation and setting a timetable can be a salutary experience in a world where the touch of a keyboard publishes news three continents away, instantly.

A Checklist to work out your "PR Appeal"

Ask yourself the following questions to help find out how your product, service, event, or activity can be newsworthy. You should answer yes to number 1 and to at least one other question:

- Is it timely? Consider how directly the impact will be felt and whether it affects individuals or groups;
- Is it innovative? This means no product or service is similar;

- Is it different or distinctive? If there are similar products or services, what sets your offering apart from your competitors?
- Will it instigate a change that will affect your customers or many people in your community?
- Could it impact the public's health and safety?
- Could it impact an area's economy? The relocation or expansion of a small business could be big news in some communities;
- Is it something that has never been done before, or has never been done before in your community?
- If it has been done before, how is it being done differently this time?
- Does it tie in with a current item in the news?
- Does it tie in with a trend?
- Does it tie in with a particular season?
- Is it information that previously did not exist? (Such as results of a survey or study);
- Does it have emotional appeal? Is it a moving, amusing or an inspiring story?
- Is it information that can help people make an important decision or avoid a serious mistake? (such as how to spot fraud, avoid a tax or VAT investigation, select the right IT-solution for your business, hire and retain the best people etc.);
- Is there a public recognition issue involved in the story? Is the problem already recognised as an issue or is it relatively unknown?

Advantages and disadvantages of PR

A published press release offering a free report can:

- Solicit leads of interested prospects - if the prospect is interested in your free information, you know he'll also be interested in your copywriting services, since your free report is related to your services;
- Put your name and company in front of thousands upon thousands of faces and position yourself as an expert in your field;
- Flush out prospects that are inclined to invest in your services.

On the other hand, due to editorial lead-time, it can take between three and five months

(sometimes longer) before your press release is published. Or due to space requirements or a poorly written press release, your press release may not even be published - and there's usually no way of knowing.

If you want to use PR effectively, send out a different press release to editors each month - this way, you increase the chances of getting your press release published and editors begin to recognise your name and business name which creates credibility and rapport.

What "public" are you appealing to?

Penny Haywood³ in "DIY PR" says that a business has several different 'publics' - the several groups of people whose good opinion is vital to the smooth operation of the business. Whilst some 'publics' are obvious, some are not so obvious to the extent that they are typically neglected by small businesses - sadly, with adverse consequences as a result.

Penny Haywood suggests that the first step in creating your own PR Plan is to choose from the following list, the 'publics' that impact on your business. Typical 'publics' that are important to small businesses include:

(In a rough suggested order of importance, although this will vary according to each individual business)

- Customers: without their goodwill, a business will have no future;
- Potential customers: without them, a business won't have a future;
- Staff: without people, the business cannot function - even if it's only you at the moment (this might come first on many PR lists);
- Suppliers and contractors: without their willingness to supply you, your business cannot make or do anything;
- Advisers: without them to keep you legal and tax efficient, you could go out of business;
- Investors, bankers, backers or shareholders: without them, many businesses would fail. Even if it's only the potential for a small overdraft facility at the bank, or a loan from friends or family to tide you over a rough patch;
- Family or immediate circle: without their support, business life could be

very difficult;

- Friends: without their help, few business people could cope;
- Neighbours: without their cooperation, you could be forced out of business;
- Authorities and regulatory bodies: without their goodwill, they could spell the end of your business;
- Local community: without their goodwill, business is a struggle;
- Competitors: help to stimulate demand in your market sector. They can be a surprisingly good source of business;
- Opinion formers: in all business and industrial sectors there are those whose expert opinion is sought, whether it's for resolving disputes or giving general comment in the media. Their support confers extra status on your business;
- Potential recruits: without them you would be unable to cope with growth and staff replacement;
- The media: can carry your messages to almost all the groups on this list;
- Trade unions: if they are a traditional force in your line of business;
- Local and national government: if they are intending to change the regulatory framework in a way that will impact on your business - such as business rates and taxes, or employment legislation, health and safety or environmental issues.

Effective PR efforts enhance credibility

For obvious reasons, most small businesses exhibit a decided reticence to pursue public relations as a marketing tool. And yet, in terms of affordability, efficiency and effectiveness, it's one of the best communications weapons available to any business, large or small.

As consumers continue to become more jaded by the cluttered and boring advertising environment that surrounds them, PR will assume an added importance as a means of communicating with the customer base.

But PR is a state of mind ... an attitude. You must believe in it, want to engage in it, and approach it with an obsession and discipline that most small companies have neither the time nor the energy to apply. PR is a marketing weapon that gathers strength over time. Staccato bursts provide little value and

are, in the main, a waste of time and money.

Smart business managers understand that a PR effort, well applied, is a benign form of "water torture" that gradually conveys its message with the drip-drip-dripping of time. The list of PR tactics is long, but the following few will indicate the breadth and depth of activities that will help get your company or product recognised and accepted:

- Take on pro bono assignments - these are assignments where you will work on an unpaid basis for civic and charitable organisations. Seek those assignments and serve those organisations that have a high-visibility factor and that will get you involved with the "movers and shakers" in the community (particularly within the business environment that you habituate);
- Seek ink - be willing to submit stories and press releases incessantly to relevant trade and general publications. Eventually, your story will be picked up or a reporter will call. But obviously, concentrate on publications that are specific to your business sector. Be honest in your press releases. Avoid hyperbole, exaggeration and chest-thumping. If you've got something to say, say it clearly and concisely. Remember that reporters are not fools. They can sniff out a bogus story in an instant;
- Learn how to "schmooze" the press - media relations is an acquired skill, but it requires an understanding and respect for the other party. Treat the press as you would expect to be treated yourself. But most importantly, form a relationship.

How do you get good PR?

You can get good PR in a number of ways⁴ - here are some of them:

- Seek breakfasts or lunches. Maintain ongoing correspondence once you have initially formed the relationship. Be willing to provide expert advice and be available as an industry source at a moment's notice;
- Be prepared to provide story ideas. The press is always on the lookout for a good story. Don't ignore the "new-product" features. Remember that the industry trade-press is always seeking new products to feature. If you have a new product, service or application, send it in, but make sure to accompany it with the relevant

information, e.g., spec data, photography, client applications, etc.;

- Enter industry award programmes. Remember that award programs within your particular industry sector get you noticed ... and they also generate trade-press coverage. Winning awards also indicates talent and leadership, and it's the one area where small companies can operate on a level playing field with their larger competitors;
- Sponsor low-cost research programmes within your industry. If you have the time and money, sponsoring an industry research programme can be an immediate step toward gaining respect. It provides media credibility and should generate a certain degree of media coverage;
- Hit the speech circuit. Be willing to talk to trade, industry and community groups anywhere, any time customers and prospects congregate. Be prepared to give at least one speech a month;
- Hire a PR firm. It's advisable, if you can afford it. Experienced, independent PR counsel will provide the elements of discipline and experience that many internally managed PR programs lack. But if you engage PR advisors, treat them as partners and professionals. Keep them in the loop and follow their advice.

Remember, most PR efforts take time to build ... whether it's seeking awareness or introducing a new product. Public relations is a discipline that will pay off over time, but you have to be willing to stick with it. Continuity is good; sporadic activity is bad.

Your PR activity must follow a specific plan with goals, objectives, strategies, tactical elements, costs, timing, etc. This will enable you to enforce discipline and track results because accountability is equally important in the PR field as it is with any other marketing activity.

How to write a successful Press Release

A press release is one of the best ways you can communicate news about your company to the media. Reporters, editors, and producers are hungry for news, and they often depend on releases to tip them off to new and unusual products, company trends, tips and hints, and other developments. In fact, much of what you read in newspapers,

magazines, or trade publications, hear on the radio or see on television originated in press release form. Unfortunately, the average editor receives several hundred press releases each week, the vast majority of which end up getting filed in the waste paper bin next to the editor's desk. Your challenge is to create a release that makes a journalist want to know more and discover that your story is one they must tell.

Use these 10 tips to write a release that will get noticed:

- Use an active headline to grab the reporter's attention. The headline makes your release stand out. Keep it short, active, and descriptive; in other words, use something like "Pollins Named Man of the Year" instead of "John Pollins Gets Award";
- Put the most important information at the beginning. This is a tried and true rule of journalism. The reporter should be able to tell what the release is about from the first two paragraphs. In fact, chances are that's all they may read. So don't hide good information. And remember the "5 W's and the H" - make sure your release provides answers to Who, What, When, Where, Why and How;
- Avoid hype and unsubstantiated claims. An editor can smell a sales pitch a mile away. Instead of making over-inflated statements, provide real, usable information. Find legitimate ways to set you and your company apart and stress those points. To promote your business, write a release that answers questions about your business, rather than one that provides only general statements about how great or interesting your business is without saying why;
- Be active and to the point. Use language that will get the reader as excited about your news as you are. If your release is boring or meandering, they may assume that you will not be a good interview;
- Keep your release to two pages or less. On the rare occasion, you can opt for a third page if it is necessary to provide critical details. Otherwise, if you can't state your message in two pages, you're not getting to the point;
- Include a contact. Make sure your release has a person the journalist can contact for more information. This person should be familiar with all the news in the release and should be ready to answer questions. And issue the release on your company letterhead - it looks professional and gives the writer another way to reach your firm;
- Keep jargon to the minimum. If you're in a technical field, try not to use technical terms. Many reporters are not as intimate with your company or your industry as you are. Real English, not jargon, best communicates your story;
- Stress the benefits not just the features. This falls into the category of "Don't say it, show it." Avoid saying something is "unique" or "the best." Instead, show how people will benefit - i.e. save time, save money, make their life easier, etc.;
- Be specific and detailed. The reader needs to be able to visualise a new product or know how a new service works. If in doubt, have someone unfamiliar with your product or service read the release and ask them to describe what you trying to publicise. And it's better to use too many details than too few.
- Proofread (and then do it again). When you've finished your press release, remember to proofread it for typographical errors. If you don't have a good eye for spelling or grammar, give the release to a friend or colleague who does. If your release looks sloppy and careless, so will you.

Tips and Traps on how to get your Press Release published

Today, as we approach the next millennium, everyone is busy, but nowhere will you find busier people than in the media. With information coming from all directions, decision-makers in various media have to think on their feet. That's why it's important to write the kind of press release an editor or reporter can use - the kind that will get your product or service in front of prospects. Otherwise, you've wasted your time and theirs.

Here are some tips for writing the press release that decision-makers use:

Things to DO:

- Get to the point in the first paragraph. Editors and program directors don't have time for flowery prose. Save those eloquent descriptions for the articles you'll write, or give them to the reporter who calls to write the article;
- Put yourself in the editor's shoes. Is

this product, service, event or idea going to be interesting to readers of that publication. The press release is your chance to show that it is - and most importantly, how;

- Remember that the editor needs to know other basics, too - who, what, when, where, and why, are as important as the topic of the press release. Readers need enough information to make informed decisions. When that information is lacking, your press release may end up in the circular file (the bin). It's not the editor's job to track you down to get information. It's your job to make sure necessary information is included in the press release;
- Validate the information in your press release by using quotes. When promoting a product, try to quote the developer and, if possible, someone who's used the product and had a positive experience. For a service, the service provider and a recipient are good sources. Even for an event, a quote from the person in charge adds credibility for the reader. People connect with people;
- Make the title short and to the point. Don't write: "Local Hospital, After Serving Community for Ten Years, Celebrates 10th Anniversary" but write "Local Hospital Celebrates Decade of Community Service";
- Include a photo or graphic if possible. Editors like using visuals to liven up text;
- Make follow-up calls five to seven business days after you send the press release. Be ready with more than one idea to "sell" the editor. Sometimes the angle you take in the release won't work for a particular publication, but another angle will. Try as many angles as you think might apply. Even if the editor doesn't publish the press release, your client may be quoted as a source or mentioned in an article;
- Be assertive when making follow-up calls. If "no" is the first answer you get, try to find out what kind of story the editor might be interested in. Can you apply your press release to this in any way?

On the other hand:

- Don't confuse the terms assertive and aggressive. You don't want to be so pushy that the person you're talking to will remember you in a negative light. You may want to target that program or publication in the future, so don't close the door;
- Don't write in too technical terms. Jargon and buzzwords tend to make editors uncomfortable with a press release. Use general terms that

everyone in an editor's audience can understand;

- Don't assume that "no news is good news." No news probably means your press release is sitting at the bottom of a pile somewhere. Make follow-up calls. Often, the follow-up call entices the editor into pulling your press release from the hundreds and sometimes thousands of others received;
- Don't step over the creativity line. A press release to a business or trade magazine will speak in an entirely different voice than a press release to a popular women's monthly or children's magazine. Know your audience;
- Don't overdo when giving information. While the main points are necessary, minor details can make a press release mundane and lengthy. Save them for use as verbal ammunition during your follow-up calls. Sometimes these details act as the "hook" that gets your press release published.

Types of Press Releases

Most books on PR will tell you that there is only one type of press release to use.

However, in recent years editors have become more sophisticated and flexible in what they'll accept. Here are three types:

- Standard Release - this is still the most common type of press release in use. It's designed primarily to get the facts across and is still used by many companies today. Editors use this type of release as a part of a larger story or as a framework for a short filler piece;
- Article Release - today, more and more press releases read more like a short article. They tell about your product or service in a broader sense. Busy editors appreciate them and will sometimes use them just as written . . . as long as you don't come across as overly promotional. Taken to the next level, you can even write an actual article with your information buried in a sentence or two in the middle of it. If done properly, sometimes you even get paid for the article promoting you! How's that for having your cake and eating it too!

- Tease Release - this press release teases the editor with just enough information to hopefully get them to call you. If done properly, this could lead to an interview, which could result in a complete article on you, your product or service. This adds greatly to the testimonial factor, because the editor can brag about you in ways you could never do yourself and builds your credibility to new levels.

Other promotional ideas

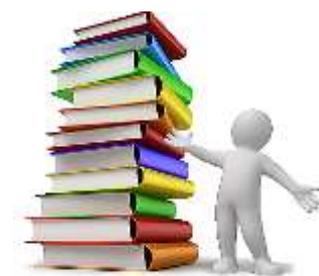
Try these promotional ideas and see if they might work for your organisation:

- News Sheets and Action Alerts - One or two page sheets communicating urgent or recent information. The intent is to motivate the reader to take some type of action - such as to write a letter to a public official or change a purchasing habit. It could also be a tip sheet - a one or two-sided sheet containing advice, instructions, or other information of particular use to your customers. The objective is to show off your expertise. These sheets are usually formatted as bulleted or numbered lists;
- Special Events - Events draw attention to your organisation or bring people to your place of business. Open houses, fund-raisers, trade shows, awards ceremonies, contests, stunts, receptions, speeches by VIPs, are examples of special events;
- Newsletters - Often, newsletters are four to 12 pages in length, although some are longer with short articles intended to keep your customers, members, investors, or donors up-to-date on what your organisation and its people are doing. It may also contain advice or other information of particular interest to your audience;
- Letters to the Editor - Promote your expertise by responding to items in the news by writing a letter to the editor of an influential paper or other publication that you know is read by the audience you're trying to target.

Recommended Reading

Books that you might like to read are:

- "DIY PR", by Penny Haywood, published by Batsford Business Books, 1998;
- "The Publicity Handbook", by David Yale, published by NTC Business Books, 1991;
- "The Copywriter's Handbook", by Robert Bly, published by Holt, 1985.
- "Handbook for Public Relations Writing", by Tom Bivins, published by NTC Business Books, 1991;
- "Bulletproof News Releases", by Kay Borden, published by Ad-Lib Publications;
- "The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations & Integrated Communications", by Clarke L. Caywood (Editor), published by McGraw-Hill;
- "Value-Added Public Relations: The Secret Weapon of Integrated Marketing", by Thomas L. Harris, Phillip Kotler, published by NTC Business Books;
- "Fundamentals of Public Relations", by L Ron Hubbard, published by New Era;
- "101 Ways to Promote Yourself", by Raleigh Pinskey, published by Avon Books;
- "Public Relations", by Frank Jefkins, Daniel Yadin, published by International Ideas;
- "Six Steps to Free Publicity," by Marcia Yudkin, published by Plume, 1994;
- "The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual", published by Addison-Wesley, 1992;
- "The Elements of Style", by William Strunk and E.B. White, published by Macmillan, Revised 1979.



Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues. We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

References:

¹ This idea for this publication was inspired by the work of Brian S. Konradt of BSK Communications and Associates, a mail-order/publishing business in New Jersey, USA. Readers can visit his company's website at: <http://www.freelancewriting.com/> or call him at 001 201.262.3277.

² See NatWest Corporate Quarterly, October 1998, Page 4.

³ Penny Haywood has written an excellent book on PR which is well worth reading: "DIY PR", published by Batsford Business Books, 1998, ISBN: 0 7134 8369 5. She runs her own PR Company from Edinburgh, Scotland. Telephone: (0) 131 669 5190, Fax: (0) 131 669 5290, E-mail enquiries@phpr.co.uk, Website: http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Penny_Haywood_PR/PHPRHOME.HTM.

⁴ This section is attributed to Alf Nucifora, an Atlanta-based marketing consultant. He can be reached at Nucifora Consulting Group, 6520 Powers Ferry Road, Suite 300, Atlanta, GA 30339, USA, Phone: 001 770.952.2112, Fax: 001 770.952.7834, E-mail: alf@nucifora.com Internet: www.nucifora.com

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