

Introduction to PR

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The purpose of this summary is to introduce you to the basic principles of public relations and help you understand how to approach promotion and media relations.

First and foremost, let's cover the core issues of branding, vision and messaging:

- ❖ Each company spends its life cycle building an **identity** that others perceive. Too often, this identity is not created consciously, or worse, is a consciously contrived falsehood. You should strive to build an image that is a direct reflection of what you believe and who you are. Never rubber-stamp a corporate identity that isn't effective or authentic. Your identity (which is the basis for any PR campaign) should stem from your values, reasons to be in business, promises to customers and quantifiable action.
- ❖ The results you achieve from any promotional project will be directly proportionate to the strength of your **brand**. A brand is nothing more than a promise. A promise of quality... a promise of price position... a promise of delivery... a promise of an exceptional experience... a promise of corporate responsibility. No matter how an identity is created, the only way to sustain it is to live up to it. I cannot stress this point enough – do not make promises you can't keep. You will be destroyed by your hypocrisy down the road, and it will take many months and many dollars to restore goodwill.
- ❖ Once you have established the identity (or brand image) you wish to convey, the next step is to **communicate to the masses**. Tell your story in a manner that is always consistent with your brand. Try to use a human voice, vivid imagery and photography, true and descriptive copy text, stories, and heart-felt causes to get the message across. Earn credibility (as opposed to buying it) by inspiring, amazing and educating consumers in ways that boost free press and encourage word of mouth buzz.

There are a lot of positives to engaging in PR, but there are some negatives as well. Here are my general positions on conducting PR campaigns that may help you understand how to best leverage your own outreach efforts:

1. Public Relations is not 'Free Advertising'. PR is credibility – not advertising. Who do you believe more? A television ad - or a news anchor who gives you the same information in a non-biased format? Advertising is a completely different animal from PR and the two cannot be confused.
2. You can't control the outcome of Public Relations campaigns. By abdicating some control over your message, you put your pitch in the hands of the top-experts in the world at disseminating information. You may lose some control over the message and angle, but you gain excellent publicity and higher credibility as a trade-off.
3. Good PR is about mutually beneficial relationships. I am a huge advocate for mutually beneficial relationships and that is what will ultimately give your message clout with journalists and producers. Don't waste people's time or abuse connections to push for bad-fit placements.
4. Public Relations is not 'Spin'. We consider PR to be TRUTH, and we will never distort the truth to create buzz or media interest. The beauty of good PR is that it motivates companies to focus on quality and accountability, and forces them to become the 'spin' they want to see in print and on the airwaves. So make claims that you believe in and can back up!
5. Public Relations can't close deals. PR generates awareness, inspires interest in buying, and influences potential customers in your favor – but it cannot make sales. Excellent products, friendly service, reliable delivery and salesmanship... that is still up to you!

6. Public Relations is most effective when it has a strong hook. Many companies want to use PR simply to make mundane announcements or advertising pitches. Don't bother to engage in PR campaigns that do not have a carefully crafted strategy and a strong hook. The precise mechanism can be a celebrity endorsement, a worthy cause, an amazing anchor event, a huge giveaway... it doesn't matter. If you aren't committed to building a hook into your business model, the media has no way to promote you.

What angles can you promote most effectively? Here is a quick rundown of what is generally considered 'news' in a broad context:

- ❖ **Conflict** – Unfortunately fights sell. Hopefully a true battle won't ever be a selling point for your company, but friendly competition and contests can be an excellent way to get free press.
- ❖ **Consequences for the Audience** – Some events and inventions become news simply because they impact thousands or even millions of people, and that broad influence makes them widely relevant.
- ❖ **Drama/Emotion** – Human interest stories, causes that tug on people's heart strings, tales of woe, lost love, crime, struggle against adversity... whatever the emotion is - drama sells.
- ❖ **Oddity** – Anything completely off the charts in terms of weirdness and the unknown will get picked up by the media.
- ❖ **Progress** – New technology, innovation and cutting edge products are considered worthy of attention.
- ❖ **Timeliness** – Sometimes there is urgency to transmitting certain information and the element of timeliness makes the subject instant news.
- ❖ **Celebrity** – Proximity to famous people and connections to big names never hurts.
- ❖ **Proximity to the Audience** – Geographically speaking, the closer something hits to home the better.

It's important to think about the entire campaign from the media and the public perspective so that you can develop mitigating arguments for any negative perspectives that may arise and keep publicity focused on the positives. Indirect marketing is all about changing the buying equation to highlight critical issues and consumer benefits beyond price – that's what you want to do through your campaign messaging to translate publicity into sales.

Our goals in executing a PR campaign are always the same: to *create awareness of the brand, educate the public about the product and influence potential buyers to view the product favorably.*

By staying true to these three core principles, you can begin to use the media to maximize your reach and boost revenue.