



TOP TEN PUBLIC RELATIONS TIPS

By: Barbara K. Mednick

“Public sentiment is everything. With it nothing can fail. Without it nothing can succeed.”

— Abraham Lincoln

These days the media plays a much larger role in our lives than it did in Abraham Lincoln’s time. The need to gain public sentiment, however, has not changed — causing public relations (PR) to be more important than ever. In today’s competitive global marketplace, a good reputation is a must for all businesses. An effective way to build and enhance a company’s reputation is through effective PR.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

PR offers low cost and high credibility, compared to other types of advertising and marketing. PR is a long-term strategy, however, that requires relationship-building, creativity, persistence and an understanding of how the news media works. PR is a powerful, cost-effective way to:

- Enhance a company’s reputation
- Build and maintain a corporate brand
- Increase visibility or create “buzz in the marketplace”
- Drive a company’s sales and revenue
- Position a company as a market leader
- Influence opinions and beliefs of key stakeholders
- Launch a new product or service

PR ESTABLISHES CREDIBILITY

In their 2002 book, *‘The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR’*, authors and highly-regarded marketing experts Al and Laura Ries contend that today brands are born with public relations, not advertising. In fact, virtually all of the brands created in recent years have been PR successes, not advertising successes. That’s because PR creates the credentials that provide the credibility for the advertising.

In addition, a new study of 91 new product launches concluded that highly successful products are more likely to use PR-related activities than less successful ones. Commissioned by Schneider & Associates in collaboration with Boston University’s Communications Research Center and Susan Fournier, an associate professor of marketing at Harvard Business School, the study is one of the first of its kind.

Remember however, that the news media receive hundreds of news releases and media advisories a day from numerous businesses and organizations. To avoid the circular file, your news release or story idea must have a ‘news angle’ that grabs the attention or piques the interest of a specific reporter or editor.

TIPS TO HARNESS THE POWER OF PR

To break through the media clutter and harness the power of PR, keep the following tips in mind:

1. News is not advertising and promotion and what is important for your business or organization may or may not be important or of interest to the media. News value and relevance drive coverage; meaning that the media decide what is newsworthy by evaluating your story idea against news criteria.

2. Target the growing number of Internet and mainstream print and broadcast media outlets that reach your intended audience and/or market. Use media directories to create a customized media list.

3. Once you have identified the right media channel, identify the person you need to contact. For example, with a daily newspaper you would contact a reporter covering a specific beat such as business or health care, or an editor who would assign the story to a reporter. If it is a weekly newspaper or a monthly magazine, you should contact the editor. If it is a TV station, contact the assignment desk. If it is a radio station, you should contact either the news director or the producer of a specific talk show.

4. Remember that today's journalists, producers and editors prefer to receive news via e-mail and to instantly access company or organization web sites to secure the facts. Put your media materials (*i.e. news releases, fact sheets, etc.*) on your company website and keep them updated and accurate.

5. Consider news criteria. Having one or more of these news criteria helps to sell the story:

- **Timeliness** - did it happen recently? Is it connected with a current trend?
- **Proximity** - is it in the geographical area targeted by the media organization?
- **Impact** - will it affect a lot of people? Does it have consequences for the audience?
- **Prominence** – is someone famous involved? Is it important to the audience?
- **Conflict** – does it involve conflict, which captivates the attention of the audience?
- **Novelty** - is it unusual? Is the product/service the first of its' kind?

6. Determine specific PR goals to produce the best results. For example, are your PR goals to:

- Establish your company as a leader in the industry?
- Introduce your target audience to a new product or service?
- Increase your visibility to increase sales?
- Persuade people to buy your product or service?
- Enhance the reputation of your company?
- Counteract misconceptions about your company, industry or product/service?
- Attract shareholders and support your stock price?

7. Develop your 'news angle' or 'news hook' to pique the media's attention and increase the chances for media coverage. Ask yourself, who cares about this information beyond your company? Why is the story significant? How many people does it affect? Here are several possible news angles:

8. Avoid hyperbole - Editors and reporters can tell whether your news release or story idea is newsworthy. They don't need inflated prose or statements to convince them, so don't even try.

9. Manage the message – Remember, you can't control the media, but you can manage your message and help to shape media coverage and public perception of your business through effective PR efforts.

10. And last, but not least, remember what one of my favorite journalism professors used to say: "*When dog bites man, that's not news. But, when man bites dog, that's news!*"

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