

How to Be Worth a Journalist's Time

Public Relations (PR), at its core, is a special type of communication used to gain earned media in broadcast, print and online channels. When professionals are leading the charge, PR is an invaluable component of any full-service agency. At times, it can make or break campaigns and is often the best resource in times of crisis, lending itself to third-party credibility.

Many companies develop their own PR in house, some by typing up random contact lists for journalists at publications they've never read and sending out press releases through email blasts. It takes grit to harness the power of persuasion and finesse to win someone over.

To get your news published, you must be worth a journalist's time. Here are a few pointers when considering taking on the public relations role internally.

- 1. It's more time consuming and costly than you'd think.** Even a mid-sized company with a 60 +/- employees and a marketing department of less than 5, could spend \$75,000 a year in salary, benefits and overhead in a mid-sized market, plus approximately \$1,000/mo. in management software such as Cision or Vocus, if done right.
- 2. Personalize** – That means no more email blasts. Each email, letter or fax sent needs to be personalized to the receiving journalist. Get to know their position, what they write about, and take the time to read some of their recent articles to get to know their writing style.
- 3. Be worthy** – If you don't read their publication, your company probably doesn't deserve to be in it. When corresponding with journalists, show that you know their publication and understand its value.
- 4. Know their and your audience** – Even though many companies can't accurately pinpoint their audience's ethnography, the extra effort will need to be made if you want to do your own PR. Does your audience align with viewers of a particular news program or readers of a particular magazine? How do they consume it? When? Where? Know where your audience is and take the steps to reach them "where they live."
- 5. Foster a good relationship** – Ruining a relationship can be easier than you may believe. In some cases, all you have to do is refer to your journalist contact by the wrong name, send them something of non-interest to their audience, fax a news release to the wrong department, misspell a word or pester to see if your release was published – and presto, you may have just lost a contact. Their time is very limited, and they look to seasoned professionals to focus the message, especially since the inundation of social media.

Although the pointers above are not inclusive of all that you'll encounter, it's time to move on to "your" story. Even if you have the perfect journalist at the perfect publication, do you have the perfect story? Don't miss the mark.

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News Values:

- 1. Impact** – The facts and events that have the greatest impact on the greatest number of people are, simply, the most noteworthy. Include numbers, indisputable facts and figures in your release. Without a tangible frame of reference for the media's readership, the context may not be fully recognized by the journalist gatekeeper. They want to write about what their readers want to read. Demand is supply.
- 2. Timeliness** – Events that happen recently are more noteworthy. Newspapers are already competing for readership with electronic media, so know when their deadlines are and work to be in front of them with a timely story, not last week's news.
- 3. Proximity** – Events that happen near the readers or viewers are generally more interesting. Again, context. The reader or viewer has to see or feel the impact of the release, or it may not be newsworthy.
- 4. Relevancy** – Attempt to find a common thread between your company's news and a current issue. A little hint is to look in the national publications and find a local angle for your company.
- 5. Human Interest** – Stories that play to human emotions may be noteworthy. Remember to target only those writers who have written human interest stories in the past and follow their style.

Public relations is an investment that can yield significant results, yet is often the first to be cut from a marketing budget and taken "in house"--unhealthy for the organization.

"Hey doctor, ... cut right here?"