



The 'Secret Recipe' for PR Success

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Successful public relations (PR) isn't really free. Although businesses don't pay for PR the same way they pay for advertising space, to get results PR requires time, expertise, and effort.

PR success isn't mysterious. It comes down to a mix of old-fashioned research, savvy trend-watching and good people skills. It is the age-old talent of telling a good story. That's really the essential difference between PR and advertising.

Advertising is about selling. PR is about storytelling. People don't like to be sold to; they're suspicious of salesmen. But human beings have been passing along their most precious stories since before recorded history. We hand down our most essential information—about our families, our beliefs and our history—through stories.

Here's the "secret recipe" for telling your business story through public relations.

Start with good research

Do your homework. Before you're ready to pitch, you need to know which media reaches your decision-makers and gatekeepers and whether they prefer online or traditional formats.

To find this out, think about your ultimate consumers' age, education, economic background, ethnicity, professional and social interests, self-image, and worldview. Then find the media outlets that match and deliver an audience similar to your ultimate consumer.

It's also important to know whether your target consumer gets information online or via TV, radio, or newspapers/magazines.

Tell a compelling story

Get to the heart and passion of why your company exists: Did the owner start the company because of a personal connection to the need that the product/service meets? Did the business overcome great adversity to get started or grow? Is there an interesting story about how the product came to be created? Does your company have a mission to change the world? Can you tell a memorable story about how you saved your clients?

Once you identify the Real Story of your business, you have a unique marketing tool no one else can copy.

Match the story to the reporter

Reporters cover certain subjects. They absolutely hate to be bombarded with pitches that have nothing to do with what they or their magazine/newspaper/show cover.

So don't send business news to the lifestyle editor. Don't send lifestyle news to the banking editor. Don't send anything to the editor-in-chief if you can possibly help it. Show them you've done your homework.

And while you're at it—read, watch, or listen to the reporter's column or show before you pitch and make a reference in your pitch to what you've seen/heard.

Follow up persistently

Reporters are busy. Silence is not the same as "no." Silence may mean that the pitch never reached them or that the first copy was discarded. It may mean that they're too busy to get back to you even if they're interested. It may mean that they've been reassigned and someone else is now covering that topic. Maybe the email address didn't work.

I've been told by hosts and reporters that it can take six follow-ups to get a story. Be polite but be persistent. And if the answer is "no," ask why. Was it wrong for them or their paper/show? Off season? Similar to something they've recently done?

You can learn a lot by asking why and listening. (Hint: Never call to follow up late in the afternoon, when reporters are usually on deadline.)

Match your pitch to what's in the news

Has there been a flood? If you sell disaster recovery services for small businesses, pitch stories about clients who have bounced back—with your help—after a flood. Is it spring? Now is a good time to pitch a story about professional organizing services or mobile shredding to help with office "Spring cleaning."

For best results, be at least a month or more in advance of predictable seasons and holidays. For breaking news tie-ins, try to be within 24 hours, or it may be old news. The 24/7 news cycle means there is a lot of time and space to fill—reporters are always looking for hot related items.

Answer, show up, deliver

Woody Allen said, "Half of life is showing up." Showing up is 100% of dealing with the media. Never cancel an interview unless you're in the hospital.

If you're booked to be on radio or TV, get there early. Be ready to deliver a personal, entertaining, reader-valuable, and benefit-rich story. Remember that the media isn't there to give you free publicity. The media exists—and gets to remain in business—only when they entertain and inform their listeners.

If you don't present information that entertains or that can be used immediately by listeners to solve a problem that matters to them, readers or listeners will walk away—and might not come back. Entertain and inform, and you'll be asked to return.

Build relationships

It's not over when the interview ends. Reporters are always looking for good information and good sources. You can become a subject-matter expert by letting reporters know you are available any time they need an expert opinion on your area of specialty.

When you come upon a good story idea, an interesting fact or a connection you can make for the reporter with another person, offer to help. You'll become a reliable source, and see yourself quoted again and again.

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Combine the above elements, and let it simmer. You'll see your PR success begin to rise in no time.



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