



Dealing With The Media:

Avoiding A PR Nightmare

| By Julie Morgan |

Doing your own PR (public relations) can be a double-edged sword – do it right and you can achieve priceless publicity for your business, but get it wrong and you could struggle to regain credibility and your reputation. That is why a few expert tips could go a long way and boost your chances of do-it-yourself PR success.

What is PR?

Public relations is the art of generating free publicity for your business. Until recently, it was a job done by experienced media professionals or PR agencies who crafted timely campaigns, events and stunts for clients with substantial budgets. But now, with the advent of social media, more business owners are doing it themselves and getting great results.

What Can Go Wrong?

If you are not experienced in dealing with the media, doing your own PR can be risky. Two common mistakes that small business owners can make are calling the wrong journalist at the wrong time, such as when they are on deadline, and not knowing enough about the publication or program they are pitching a story to. Like preparing any business proposal – it helps to do some research first.

Other pitfalls to be wary of are sending journalists sales pitches instead of story ideas or newsworthy press releases and expecting editorial coverage because you have paid for advertising. In most cases, editorial and advertising are run independently and editorial is selected based on its merit alone.

Getting It Right: When And How To Write A Press Release

Step 1 – Identify your news and the relevant media you want to target. In business, your news could be a new product launch (particularly if it is unique to the Australian market), or a new contract or export deal. You might want to announce a new partner, a record turnover or sales result, or highlight a business milestone such as celebrating ten years in business. New research with interesting trends or statistics can also be newsworthy. Alternatively, you can also generate publicity by offering comment on current news stories or trends through writing letters to the editor. Once you have decided on your news, make a list of the kinds of publications and programs you would like to appear in.

Step 2 – Plan your messages. Offer a news angle and highlight your points of difference. For example, what makes your product or service unique to what your competitors are offering. Be believable – do not make any claims you cannot substantiate. Journalists love facts and figures, so use specific examples and numbers to back up your statement.

Step 3 – Think about timing. Most magazines plan their editions two to three months in advance of publication, so if you want your news to appear in a glossy magazine, you need to plan ahead and get in early. This means getting all of your media materials together months in advance of your product launch or news event.

It also pays to know your competition. Getting your story in the news often depends on what else is happening on the day, so you need to consider your timing when planning your PR. For example, Melbourne Cup day is not a particularly great day to announce your news because media attention will focus on festivities and glamour. So, pick a quieter

time and avoid major events, public holidays and so on. Sundays are great for softer news stories or pictorials. If you are after regional media, make sure you do not choose a day that your local newspaper is finalising its weekly edition.

Step 4 – Write a press release. Journalists receive hundreds of press releases everyday and most do not get much more than a cursory glance. That is why it is important that your press release stands out. The best way to do this is to have a relevant, attention-grabbing heading and a tightly written opening paragraph. It has to be presented in a clear and easy-to-read format and pasted into the body of the email (not attached as a file).

Here are ten things every press release must have:

- A catchy title that captures your news in a nutshell
- The who, what, when, where, how and why of your news in the first paragraph (remember to make your most important point as early as possible)
- Short sentences of no more than 25 words
- Interesting, relevant facts, sales figures, statistics or survey results
- A quote or two from your spokesperson (for example, you the business owner) or a third-party endorser such as a client to substantiate your claims
- The words 'media release' or 'event notification' at the top of the page
- The date that you want your news announced at the top of the page (if it is in advance of the date you are sending it out write 'For release')
- Your company's logo at the top of the page
- An 'About us' paragraph at the bottom of the page explaining what your business does. Do not forget, it is important to search engine optimise this description to increase your chances of pick-up by Google and so on.
- Your name, contact phone number, email and website at the bottom of the media release (for media enquiries)

Once The Media Is Interested, Prepare For Interviews

The best preparation for doing a media interview is to know your facts, practise your key messages and anticipate the questions you may be asked. Do not assume journalists know about you or your company, so be prepared for some basic background questions. Sometimes the hardest question to answer succinctly is 'tell me about your business' so it is good to rehearse an answer.

When working with the media, time is of the essence. If a journalist cannot reach you for comment, you might miss your opportunity for a story. So, make sure you are easily contactable – keep your mobile on and charged and always carry

a copy of the press release with you. That way, when a journalist calls you, you will have your key messages and facts on hand and can give them comment immediately.

Avoid saying 'no comment'. If you are asked a difficult question, do not feel pressured to provide an answer immediately. If you need to check facts or if the matter is out of your domain, you can ask to get back to the journalist or refer them to another spokesperson. Never get caught out answering a question you do not know the answer to, as this can damage your credibility.

A Note On Being Business Ready

A good piece of publicity can have an instant effect on your business, which means your phones could run hot or your website traffic could explode. Before you send your press release to the media, make sure that your website content and social media pages are current and that all relevant links, including email links, e-commerce facilities, contact details and internal traffic reports are working so you can track traffic during the campaign period.

It is also a good idea to brief your staff before contacting the media. Send a briefing note to your team members, management and reception staff and include your press release. Remind them of your media policy and spokespersons. It is best to nominate one or two spokespeople to handle all media enquiries – that way you can better ensure your messages stay consistent and on track.

Finally, good PR is all about doing your research and preparation. If you know your news, understand what the media want and can provide them with good-quality, timely information, you are on your way to success. **ABS**

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