

FREE



GUIDE 2019

**Writing a
business case
for PR**

A guide to writing a business case for PR



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathy Hayward is managing director of Magenta Associates, and a communications specialist with more than 18 years' experience in a range of journalistic, publishing and marketing roles. She founded Magenta in 2011 after a journalistic career spanning a number of different titles including *FM World*, the award-winning magazine for the British Institute of Facilities Management, *Marketing Week*, *Financial Management*, *Soccer Analyst*, *Supply Management*, *Unions Today*, *People Management* and *Director*. She holds a Masters degree in journalism, as well as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' post-graduate diploma in PR.

Introduction

Think of public relations and either the publicist Max Clifford, the political spin doctor Alastair Campbell or Patsy and Eddie, the stars of *Absolutely Fabulous*, spring to mind. PR can mistakenly be seen as either a necessary evil, for instance in seeing off negative press, or as a 'nice to have' and a bit of an indulgence compared to the nitty gritty of above-the-line advertising and sales campaigns.

Yet, put simply, PR takes a holistic approach to the marketing of an organisation, and helps build its reputation, from the overall brand perception to the profile of the people who run the company. This is reflected in the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' (CIPR) definition of PR:

"Public Relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you."

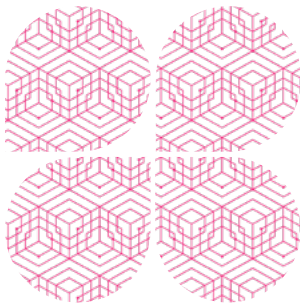
Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

In other words, every organisation, whatever the size, ultimately depends on its reputation for survival and success. This can be internal staff and shareholders, or externally, among clients, customers, suppliers, the media and competitors. PR can help all of these stakeholders form the opinion they have about a business, which will help to influence their dealings with a brand and in the longer term will help to determine if they want to support, invest or work with an organisation in the future.



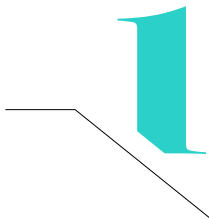
Unfortunately, and rather ironically, to those not involved in marketing and PR, public relations can be misinterpreted as a form of ‘publicity’, whether putting the ‘spin’ in politics or helping to manage the fallout from a celebrity misdemeanour. This rather glamorous persona can also result in some businesses, particularly small or medium-sized organisations or those working within a business to business sector, erroneously concluding that PR is not for ‘the likes of them.’

Yet, done properly, PR can not only help to convey a positive brand image of any type of organisation – but by using PR specialists, a business can explore new possibilities they may not have discovered on their own. It’s worth noting too that public relations professionals have a special obligation to practise their craft ethically, with the highest standards of truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public. Within the UK, members of the CIPR are bound by the Code of Conduct. They make the commitment on joining the organisation and renew this annually with their membership.



Benefits of PR

There are a wealth of benefits that PR can bring to the marketing mix. PR can:



Generate business leads within a specific market: By receiving editorial coverage in select media outlets, a brand can establish credibility, which attracts potential customers. A well-executed PR campaign can forge new leads by raising the profile of a company in the media and therefore amongst target customers, leading to more sales prospects.



Generate business leads in potential new markets: Because PR has the ability to reach unique markets with traditional, digital and experiential techniques; it can communicate effectively with specific segments that don’t typically respond to traditional marketing campaigns. For instance, a younger target audience that prefers digital media to traditional media.



3

Attract new talent: PR promotes brands and increases brand awareness, which in turn increases the number of applicants when hiring. By using PR to promote a company's activities, successes and that of its staff, an organisation can help to establish itself as a great place to work. And it is a great way to inform the public and staff members about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities they might not be aware of.

4

Retain talent: Not only does PR boast a company's profile externally, it can also have a positive effect on staff members. Employing a PR strategy, from publicising positive news to reporting back on company activities - can raise the morale of employees. On an individual level, by acknowledging employees' awards and accolades through internal or external PR activity will really boost employee morale. And this can be achieved using a variety of outlets, including digital PR tactics -according to the Harvard Business Review employees at businesses with CEOs that actively use social media feel more inspired than those that aren't socially engaged.

5

Encourage sharp judgment: PR forces senior management to look outside the organisation to see how the brand is perceived. Those at the top of the corporate ladder in particular might be so imbued within the brand that they don't know how well it is understood externally. Companies that use public relations are made to think carefully through their branded messaging and market differentiation strategy under the guidance of competent PR professionals.

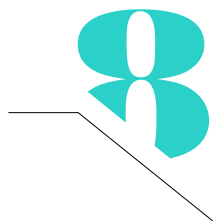
6

Attract investors: PR is not only an important means of engaging staff, customers and clients. A key justification for engaging in public relations is that the right media placements attract investors and potential backers. When executed properly, PR tactics authenticate your business as a stable, financially viable investment. Research has shown that media coverage corresponds to empirically proven moves in stocks. Researchers out of the University of California, Irvine and INSEAD published a study which found that a fund, on average, buys \$100,000 more of a stock that gets media coverage than of a stock without media coverage. Even if a journalist does a basic profile on the public company, explaining what it is and what it does, this statistic is applicable.

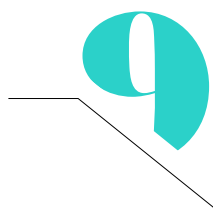
7

Inform potential buyers: The above point can go a stage further, as any executives that wish to sell their companies, or their stake in their organisations, may want to engage a PR strategist to help them to first raise its profile to help to attract a potential buyer. A well-thought-out PR strategy raises media awareness of a company and positions a business as a smart acquisition with opportunity for growth.

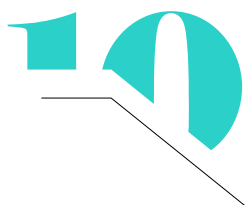




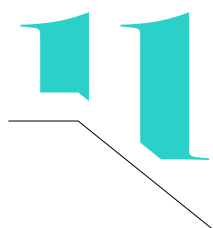
Promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): According to research by marketing consultancy Goodbrand, companies that promote their ethical stance are more likely to attract and retain affluent consumers; while a report published by PR Newswire has shown that the role of marketing and public relations in these CSR initiatives is to make sure customers are aware of a brand's programmes and efforts. Well-planned campaigns can help build relationships and demonstrate a company's commitment in an authentic manner.



PR is a relatively inexpensive part of the marketing mix: Compared to the cost of advertising, public relations can work out as less expensive than other forms of paid communication. For instance, according to an article in Forbes a client paid for a full-page ad in a popular weekly newsmagazine that cost him \$125,000 and got zero response, but being quoted in the New York Times, Forbes and Reuters resulted in speaking invitations, calls from new and existing clients, and solid credibility. The cost of engaging a good PR agency which can both advise on a PR strategy, including where and when to place content marketing features, compose and send out press releases which are carefully targeted to recipients, takes a lot less off the bottom line than an ad campaign. That is why some businesses rely on PR primarily to get their brand messages out into the market.



PR content is a lot more flexible than advertising, which is why PR professionals are responsive to news and possible crisis situations. By providing market intelligence, not just results, a PR consultancy can become a strategic source of information for executives to approach in order to make more informed business decisions. As a result, companies that engage in PR are more likely to be effective, quick-witted communicators – an important reason for engaging with a PR agency.

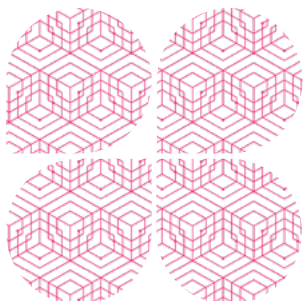


Give an organisation the human touch: One unique attribute about PR is that it is inherently human. It is not a tool that a robot could make or reproduce. Behind every brand, company and person, there is a human story – whether the way in which a product affects someone, or the philosophy behind the company, it is never just about the product or service. PR can highlight these stories to help leverage the brand and from there, customers, clients and other stakeholders can engage and interact, reinterpreting the message and continuing the dialogue. And because all press material – be it releases, articles, or other content – have to be written by a human and must be passed through editorial filters before they reach their final audience, PR is always personal. A human touch makes marketing better and elevates public relations above many other channels.



Increase trust: While traditional advertising has something to sell, PR can reach out to people on a more personal level. It has been shown^[1] that organisations which reduce or eliminate their communicative and PR activities are in danger of being overlooked and eventually disregarded. This is where PR can help establish levels of trust by building the reputation of the business and showcasing the positive qualities of the brand.

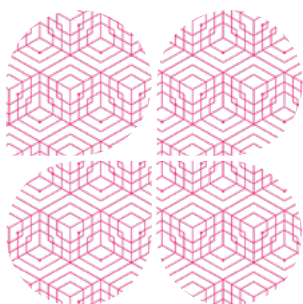




Digital disruption

The business world needs to adapt fast to the impact of digitisation and PR is a flexible tool in exploiting the advantages of digital disruption on the marketing mix, including:

- * **Social media.** Tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter have all become integral to marketing and PR strategy. They are also a very powerful tool in reaching those demographics which typically eschew traditional media. A feature in E-Marketer^[2] cited a study by Synaptic Digital and Kantar Video which found that earned media is much more powerful than paid advertising at raising brand awareness, with a lift of 23 percentage points above control.
- * **Blogs.** Another area where PR is a powerful tool online is in publishing blogs. Figures^[3] show that Millennials are 24% more likely to be influenced by blogs than other media. According to an article in Huffington Post^[4] B2B companies with blogs generate 67% more leads per month on average than non-blogging firms, while companies who blog receive 97% more links to their website^[5].
- * **Platforms.** Compared to other marketing techniques, public relations can transcend marketing platform boundaries, such as print ads or even Twitter. For example, a PR contest doesn't have to be limited to a Facebook promotion – it can be part of a giant social media, digital, or print campaign.
- * **SEO (Search Engine Optimisation).** PR creates credible links from other sites with high Domain Authority scores – a score that predicts how well a website will rank on search engine result pages, e.g. something high ranking like BuzzFeed. Because such credible links are essential for increasing a search ranking, especially in competitive industries, PR can work as a powerful tool that has major impact on an organisation's SEO.

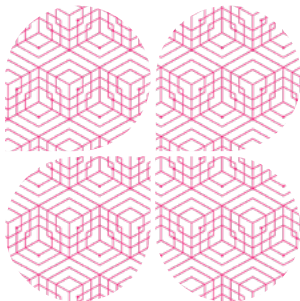


Specialism and expertise

One of the most important benefits of hiring a PR agency is gaining expert help in branding an organisation's services or products because:

- * A highly-qualified PR firm offers a combination of skills, from data analytics to writing talent that help to promote a business.
- * No matter how positive the reputation of an organisation, their good reputation can be shattered overnight for any number of reasons; whether it's an ill-thought-out comment by senior management or some kind of incident, accident or staff dispute. Any of these can result in a storm of negative publicity, which a PR team can manage carefully to avoid it blowing up into a major crisis. A PR firm can also help to formulate crisis communications policy so an organisation is ready to act immediately.
- * Those PR agencies with particular expertise in certain areas, including financial or corporate PR, have a deeper understanding of these areas and can represent an organisation with professionalism and knowledge
- * Those PR facilitators with specialist knowledge of a sector; for example, healthcare, retail or the built environment can not only help to generate editorial content but ensure the organisations it represents target the right media in their sector and keep abreast of PR opportunities such as new trends or legislation to which the business can quickly respond.





Business case recommendations

The business case for appointing an external PR agency should begin with the key objectives, from conveying a positive message of business activities, both internally and externally to supporting marketing and communications campaigns and strategies.

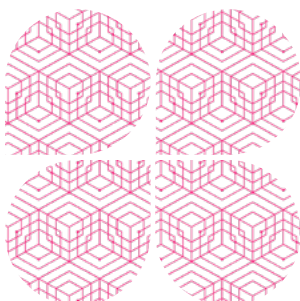
Identify some specific objectives, for example, which measure the organisation on:

- * Customer/staff satisfaction,
- * brand awareness, and
- * healthy stock market ratings.

The size of the PR budget isn't so important as its cost effectiveness. The organisation's objectives won't necessarily be realised by spending a lot of money on a big-name communications agency brand which charges an exorbitant fee, if its' overalls objectives aren't clearly spelt out, including:

- * What the client company stands for; its core values and brand, its mission and objectives.
- * What kind of media coverage is required?
- * Who the business is trying to reach and target the appropriate media, whether it's trade, regional or national media.
- * An outline of what success looks like; from high quality articles in key publications a higher profile on social and traditional media, or to raise sales in a particular market.
- * How the PR activity will be measured; is it articles, tone, key messages, penetration share and voice?
- * The way in which the PR company reports back progress to the client.
- * Forging an agency/client relationship which works as a real partnership.

The business case should reflect that fact that communications agencies can be of enormous benefit to a company in both the good and the dark times, as when there is crisis you're going to need their help more than ever. Forging a collaborative relationship with a communications specialist will enable your organisation to be ready for anything.



Conclusion

Public relations can help to build an organisation's brand and reputation - while positioning it as a voice of authority. It may be deemed by some senior managers as an expense, but, as the explanations above have confirmed, for most organisations it's a necessity, not a luxury. This is because it engages and informs key audiences, builds important relationships and brings vital information back into an organisation for analysis and action. Put simply, PR has real, measurable impact on the achievement of strategic organisational goals.

There are both positive and negative reasons for needing PR, the positive being that you build up your brand name amongst stakeholders, whether they're potential customers or clients or existing customers, your own staff or shareholders. Effective PR communications can also help boost the bottom line by raising the profile of particular brands your organisation provides or simply publicising the beneficial societal impact of the organisation.



PR is also a necessity when an organisation is forced to deal with any kind of crisis. Ensuring a competent PR communications programme is in place is absolutely vital when, often through no fault of their own, a business is embroiled in controversy. This is why PR should be part of the due diligence of any competent CEO's role^[6].

Finally, as the list of benefits we've outlined above in appointing a communications consultancy have highlighted, PR is a flexible discipline which enables organisations to move fast and efficiently, whether embracing the latest means of communications through social media and digitisation, responding quickly to an incident speedily and helping to ensure that any organisation, not what it's size adheres to its greatest asset, its reputation.

Testimonials

Tim Oldman: co-founder, Leesman: PR has played a key role in Leesman's breakneck speed expansion in the UK and in new international markets through the delivery of a sustained and creative PR campaign.

References

- 1 Beardsley, John. Communicating the Value of Public Relations, Public Relations Strategist, Spring 2004.
- 2 www.emarketer.com/Article/How-Earned-Media-Boosts-Branding-Effect-of-Paid-Ads/1008466
- 3 Source: Symphony IRI Group
- 4 www.huffingtonpost.com/danny-wong/the-why-12-distinct-goals_b_5651566.html?utm_hp_ref=business&ir=Business
- 5 www.business2community.com/blogging/10-unbelievable-statistics-sell-boss-business-blogging-0903221#UeBPm1z6OqgBf1om.97
- 6 Grates, Gary F. Six Questions: What Every CEO Should Expect from PR Counsel, Public Relations Strategist





Office 3, Design Quarter
129-130 Edward Street
Brighton BN2 0JL
info@magentaassociates.co.uk
+44 (0) 1273 934295

magentaassociates.co.uk