

FREE



**GUIDE 2019**

**Writing an  
effective  
brief for your  
PR agency**

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# Writing an effective brief for your PR agency

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## 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

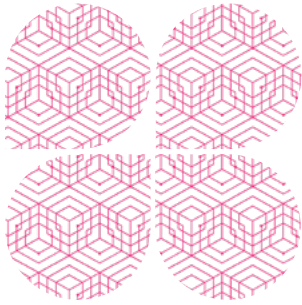
So you've been looking for a new PR agency, and after carrying out due diligence by contacting potential communication's firms, holding introductory meetings and listening to presentations on what each provider can do for you, you've made your decision and appointed your chosen agency.

Once the contract is signed, how can you ensure that you'll receive a valuable service for the money being spent and crucially, that your agency will provide you with the service and communications outcomes that you need?

For anyone working within the built environment it's patently obvious that any service contract must spell out what's expected from both parties, from the service level agreements (SLA) and key performance indicators (KPI) to how often the client and provider will need to meet. The same goes for a media communications relationship, which, just like any other agreement, means that if you're not clear about what you expect from your agency, they'll be unlikely to deliver what you want.

This is why a written brief is the most important bit of information you can provide to your agency, because it is – in the same way as a service contract - the reference document to which both parties can refer.





# Below we offer some tips on how to compose an effective brief for your PR agency.

1

First consider what you want to achieve as a company. The company objectives must always be the starting point, including the marketing plan, and what the company is being measured on; whether it is customer satisfaction, brand awareness, or healthy stock market ratings. Your media relations will need to align with all these areas and the organisation's overall marketing strategy. This means that you need to communicate in the brief what your company stands for; whether it is an organisation which offers a particular service it is very passionate about or a company selling green products that wants to communicate how the wellbeing of the planet is of enormous importance; all this needs to be expressed to your agency.

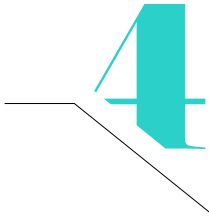
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What kind of coverage fits your requirements? Do you want to be a thought leader in a certain subject or do you just want to generate news about your growing business by communicating client wins and new customers? Do you want to promote a particular product or service or a multitude of offerings? Are you focused on raising the profile of certain individuals within the organisation or is it a combination of all those things? Whatever it is you need to be able to break that down and describe your general requirements.

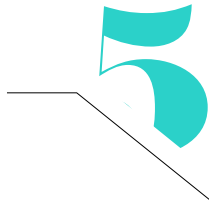
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If you appointed the right media communications firm they will already have a good grasp of the media landscape within your sector, but the brief will still need to clarify your potential audience. For instance, if you sell your products through distributors is it them or the end user you want to reach, or if you're a service provider do you want to reach contractors as well as potential clients. The agency will need to know exactly who you're trying to reach and target the appropriate media, whether it's trade, regional or national media.

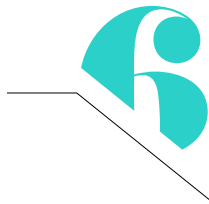




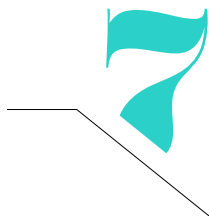
Give the agency an outline of what you think success looks like; whether you're focused on very high quality articles in key publications (for instance the business media); to secure high profile platforms for media opportunities at conferences, to transform your presence on social media, or to produce a set number of product reviews if you're a product based organisation.



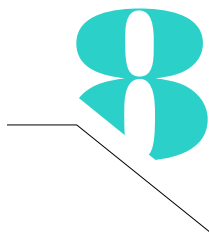
Whether you are briefing an agency for a one-off project or a long term campaign, with everything that you ask your agency to do, you should already know in your mind what you think the outcome should be. For instance, if you're asking them to write a release about 15 different contracts you've won that quarter, how do you think that is going to look? Is it five articles, is it three? You need that upfront agreement every single time on where it's going to go, because if you are not going to get anywhere from a coverage point of view, it isn't worth doing.



Be clear on how you think your PR activity should be measured. Is it articles, tone, key messages, penetration share and voice? Is success to you a customer saying 'I saw an article by you last week and I thought it was an amazing opinion piece.' or 'I saw your MD speaking at one of the conferences,' or do you expect to measure the amount of coverage per month or year by allocating budget to a measurement service such as Kantar?

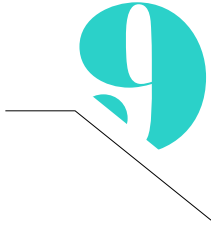


Spell out in the brief how you want your PR company to report back progress to you, shall this be set on a monthly, weekly or three month basis and how much detail will you require? The reporting process shouldn't take so much time that it takes up a large proportion of the monthly fee. Be clear on how reports will be presented internally to the senior management within your organisation; for instance if there is an existing marketing template that you use internally don't be afraid to ask the agency to adapt it as a measurement tool.

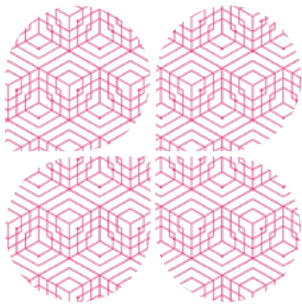


Internal communications within your organisation are vitally important, so while you're briefing an agency – you've also got to think about how you brief your internal audience to help get the best out of the money that you're spending. The main contacts within the agency should all be identified and communicated internally to the in house team and appropriate spokespersons within the client organisation, with the understanding that there are processes in place and this group of people are going to be working on your behalf to get as much coverage as possible. As an in house marketing and communications person, you may find that there are multiple stakeholders within the business requesting you to get things done via your agency which, unless it's part of the brief and is aligned with the overall marketing plan may not be the best use of time. That's why it's really critical that the brief ensures neither the external agency and internal teams are not wasting the agency budget on activities that aren't going to lead to success.





As the term ‘brief’ suggests, the final document doesn’t have to be very long and should be able to fit into a few pages but should include: budgets, including any extras that you’re willing to pay for, such as agency creatives who can offer design or video services: timings, including key delivery dates, payment dates and any important deadlines for campaigns, e.g. an awards entry and who within the client organisation has the authority to sign off the work that the agency produces.



## To summarise

- Always ratify what you think the outcomes should be in terms of coverage with the agency because they know realistically what is likely to fly and what’s not, that after all, is what you pay them for.
- Communicate that back internally to the stakeholders
- Ensure you use your agency’s time wisely – so stipulate the number of meetings they need to attend each month and ensure you encourage the use of technology such as Skype to help keep to this level.
- The same goes for reporting, keep this as tight as possible, if they’re producing in depth reports that are not being read, it’s not worth doing.
- You not only want your agency to provide great media contacts, but to help you actively develop those and introduce you to them at the right times.

## Conclusion

If you don’t provide a clear and focused brief you won’t get the results you want, and crucially for those in marketing and communications - it will be all the harder to prove to the rest of the organisation that the media budget is being spent wisely.

The agency/client relationship is a real partnership, and if you don’t have that partnership approach you’re never going to get the best out of PR, especially when you could end up working with an agency for a number of years and they will take up a significant portion of your time. If the terms of the relationship are not clear from the beginning you won’t feel the need (or be pressurised from senior management) to keep switching agencies every 12 months – which is not good practice.

What you ultimately want from your agency is for them to constantly come up with good ideas and new ways for positive profiling and coverage, even if budgets (as they often are) are restricted. You need that level of innovation – so when it comes to a good brief, make sure you include that so agencies don’t feel constrained by budget. If an idea’s good enough, budget can often be found.

Agencies can work really hard for you in both the good and the dark times, and if you’ve got a crisis you’re going to need their help more than ever, so providing a well thought out brief and offering a collaborative relationship means you’re looking after them as well.





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