



The 10 Best Ways to Do PR

Q: What does it take to get good publicity for my company?

A: Just like every other marketing tactic, public relations has undergone significant changes in recent years. No longer can you simply send out a catchy media advisory and expect to get press coverage for your news.

New social and mobile tools have spawned a proliferation of media channels, and the readership, scope, and quality vary widely. Today, everyone is a reporter—influential bloggers, Twitter posters, Pinterest pinners, and so on now serve as the arbiters of newsworthiness. And our 24/7 news cycle has produced such an insatiable appetite for breaking news that it's difficult to sustain the public's interest in any story beyond a day or two.

The scope of public relations has also expanded. Today, PR includes everything from doing damage control to conducting investor relations, from launching a product to fixing a politically incorrect gaffe.

Reporters, editors, writers, bloggers, and other communications conduits—people whom I will call “journalists” for the purposes of this column—remain the best way to tell your story and gain credibility for your brand. And PR efforts tend to be far less costly than media advertising. So you should make publicity a priority; you just need to be emotionally steady and politically savvy, as well as a hard worker, to get results.

For help with writing this column, I turned to my PR mentor, Robin Raskin. Robin has been a writer, editor, magazine publisher, and blogger for more than 30 years, and she's appeared regularly on “CBS Up to the Minute,” MSNBC, Fox TV, and other high-profile outlets, so she knows a thing or two about getting good exposure. She helped me put together these 10 rules for doing PR the right way.

Rule No. 1: Remember journalists are a bit narcissistic. They tend to see the world through their eyes—their deadlines, their breaking stories, and their credibility. Your job is to work with them to help them do their job.

So make your pitches personal and explain why your topic is specifically relevant or helpful to the person you're addressing. Also, make it easy for them to understand your story quickly (use informative headlines and bullet points) and to get more information (provide all the necessary details and include relevant sources).

Rule No. 2: Keep in mind that no two journalists are alike. Each journalist wants his information his way. That means you need to do your research. What sort of topics do they cover? Opinion blogs, product reviews, business stories? TV, radio, print? Supply them with content that's tailored to them.

Rule No. 3: Learn their communications preferences. Do they use Facebook? LinkedIn? Expert source databases? E-mail? Find out how you can send them news in the way that's most timely and natural for them, like a good friend.

Rule No. 4: Be social media savvy. Establish a social media strategy—don't just wing it. Cover as many relevant social media bases as possible (use a service like HootSuite or TweetDeck to manage multiple social media accounts). Regularly listen to and engage with journalists through social media so you will be familiar to them when you do your outreach. Learn to be clever in 140 words or fewer. Use hashtags, post images, shrink URLs.

Rule No. 5: Create assets that can be repurposed. Think about all the different ways to get your story across and create materials that can be used in multiple ways. A press release can be turned into a newsletter; a TV segment often needs to have a live demo or B-roll component; an article might have some stats about the industry that can be turned into an infographic. Think of developing a campaign, not a single press release, and use the elements parsimoniously.

Rule No. 6: Don't write a press release to please your boss (or your investors). Always keep in mind your audience and what's important to them. The best press releases tell a compelling story and keep the main point front and center. They don't list the details of a product or the company's entire history in order to satisfy someone's ego.

Rule No. 7: Know your competition as well as you know your own brand. A good journalist will ask you how you stack up to the competition. In order to be credible, you better know the field.

Rule No. 8: Prepare for and embrace bad press. These days, it's only a matter of time before something negative about your brand shows up in social media, so you want to be prepared to respond gracefully. Draft a crisis communications plan. Although I don't agree with the adage “there's no such thing as bad publicity,” handling an embarrassing situation authentically can generate a lot of good will, and an honest, forthright response is appreciated by all.

Rule No. 9: Don't hound. If a journalist has indicated interest in your story, be patient. There's nothing worse than a PR person who calls every day to see “how you're doing on that story.”

Rule No. 10: Look for nontraditional, experiential PR. Hosting meet-ups, producing conferences, supporting “like” brands, staging flash mob-style events—these kinds of creative, interactive efforts separate you from the crowd clamoring for PR.

I hope these rules show you how to move beyond the old-school, one-way announcement approach to getting publicity. Above all else, remember that the best way to make news is to do things that are newsworthy. 