

# Elements of a PR Plan



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## Overview

We often get asked what makes a successful public relations program? What does it cost? Does my organization really need it? How long do I need to do it? Can't I do it myself? Why do my competitors always get in the papers? Why does the media get my story wrong?

To answer some of these questions we have put together this booklet as a starting point for a discussion on how to develop a public relations plan.

Unless you are a celebrity good public relations just doesn't happen on its own. It takes a lot of skill, and consistent hard work, over a period of time. It's part art, part science and when practiced correctly the results can be very rewarding.

The bottom line, public relations—versus other marketing communication tools — delivers the most bang for your buck.

# Why Public Relations is Important

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## **Media coverage increases credibility**

Paid advertising increases name recognition; media relations increases credibility. When people read a story about the excellence of your organization in a newspaper or see a story praising your company on television, they are much more likely to have a favorable opinion of your organization.

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## **Media coverage helps you attract "quality" prospects**

Because public relations increases credibility, it helps you attract those who want the best. When people have heard of you and have a favorable impression of you, it is easier to attract and hold their attention while you tell your story.

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## **Media coverage makes you a player**

Coverage in important publications or on TV can make your organization look much larger than it is.

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## **Public relations helps you avoid price competition**

If people believe that you are the best, they will understand why it is worth paying your price.

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## **A public relations program stretches your marketing budget**

Because the media does not charge for news coverage, the relative cost of a good program is a lot less than for paid media or a direct mail campaign.

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## **Best way to launch a brand**

Public relations is also considered by many as the best way to launch a brand or new product. When something is new the media often will write about it because of its news value.

### **Plan**

Create a plan with goals and objectives. Define the target audiences and the target messages. Plan how your media relations program will fit with your other marketing communications programs. Establish in advance how you want to measure the success of your program.

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### **Press kits (print & electronic)**

A press package is the foundation of any media relations program. It consists of a series of stories, usually placed in a two-sided folder with pockets, that organizes information in a way that is easy for the news media to use. Typically it will include a description of the organization, key facts and figures, biographies of the principals, a history, and two or three stories on current trends and issues. It functions as instant background material when a story arises. Press packages also usually include photography.

With the growing importance of the Internet, the opportunity to deliver a press kit instantly gives every company or organization one more good reason to have a press section on their Web site. When a reporter calls and wants a document, photograph, map or chart, he or she can turn to your Web site and obtain the information in a form that can be used accurately and with a minimum of additional work.

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### **Develop Media Lists**

The shotgun approach (sending your news to every outlet/broadcaster/publication in the country) is not the most effective way to reach your target audience. Taking time to do a little research can produce greater results for your efforts. Know whom you want to reach and know the format and medium that the media prefer. Delivering your story in the right format to the right media is more likely to ensure successful coverage.

News wires are also valuable in getting your message out to a wide audience. These services deliver your story to newsrooms worldwide and can be targeted based on parameters you set. Have a story that deals with a labor issue in California? Target the workplace reporters/editors in California publications.

## **Announcements**

Brief press releases should be issued on such topics as promotions or hiring of new executives, openings of new buildings and the addition of new products. These typically result in one- to two-paragraph stories in publications, and keep your name in front of the target audience.

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## **Major Announcements**

These could be a new research development, a major new product or a major new change in business direction. These typically result in 500- to 800-word stories in print publications and often merit radio and television coverage. Occasionally, a press conference or press briefing may be appropriate in conjunction with major announcements.

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## **“Trend” Press Releases**

These are usually the most valuable to the news media, and will help you establish a reputation as a source. These are about developing trends in your industry and contain information that would otherwise be difficult for the media to obtain. The following are examples of trend releases: What are the "hottest" spots in the Bay Area real estate market? Are more Americans traveling to Russia now and why? Are physicians gaining more clout in negotiating with insurance companies? Are major medical groups paying more or less attention to holistic/alternative medical therapies?

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## **Feature Story Releases**

Although a feature story must be newsworthy, in the broad sense of the word, it is also timeless. It can run in today's paper or tomorrow's or next week's. Feature stories are often called "evergreen" for this reason – it's always fresh and will not fade. Unlike a news story, a feature can have a point of view, an "angle", and is often longer than a hard news story on the same subject.

### **B-roll or Video News Releases**

Background video tapes will help get your story on television. Again, they are most useful when a subject is difficult or inconvenient to film. Examples would be surgery, the inner workings of a computer or restricted areas of an airport.

You may want to do a complete video news release (VNR) when there is an important announcement, or simply have background footage available for various television stations to put together their own stories. Footage must be in professional Betacam format, rather than VHS.

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### **Webcasts**

This is rapidly becoming a major publicity tool as people take advantage of the Web's multimedia capabilities. Webcasts can be live events or archived and available on demand. They are a cost-effective, instantaneous method to communicate with media all over the world, in a compelling, interactive manner that meets journalists' needs. Using Webcasts, you can extend the reach of your PR efforts, reduce your budget for spokespeople, ensure your message is communicated consistently across all audiences, better fit into journalists' schedules, and provide more compelling supporting elements.

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### **Media Training for Spokespersons**

Spokespersons should be immediately available and trained in how to work with the media. The media usually wants to speak to an authority in the field, not the public relations person, for in-depth stories. The role of the public relations person is to facilitate the selection and training of an appropriate and available expert. Media training can range from a brief 15-minute coaching session to two-day, videotaped seminars including practice interviews. The latter costs more than \$1,000 per person, but is vital for persons who are often in the public eye on controversial topics.

### **Becoming a Source**

One of the key strategies of a successful public relations plan should be to become a source when the news media is doing its own story. One achieves this by issuing regular, professionally written press releases to let reporters know you are here and by being available when they call. Calls must be returned within the hour — sooner if possible — seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

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### **Public Service Announcements (PSAs)**

PSAs are among the most common types of publicity for non-profit organizations. Since they are short, broadcasters run a lot of them and they are easier to get than specials, interviews, features, or news coverage. You can say a lot in 20, 30 or 60 seconds and since it is likely to be repeated several times, your message will have multiple impact. The least expensive kind of PSA is "live" copy, where the announcer reads your material live. You may also submit pre-recorded material, if you have a production budget. Live copy to TV stations should include visual material. And there are several different formats to be considered if shooting or producing your own PSA — you'll need to find that out in advance.

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### **"Op-ed" Articles**

"Op-ed" articles, so named because they typically run opposite the editorial page, are an excellent opportunity to comment on issues of the day and to build name recognition as an expert in the field. They run under the by-lines of experts, and give you a chance to state your case in your own words, with minimal editing by a reporter. Once published, they can be effectively used as reprints.

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### **Letters to the Editor**

Many papers try to publish as many Letters to the Editor as possible and they take these letters seriously. Make it short, concise and focused on a single point. This is also an effective venue for addressing a controversial issue, clarifying any misconceptions or inaccurate reporting about your business or product, or introducing a new product. But regardless of the purpose, it should never be more than 3-5 paragraphs.

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### Press Conferences

Press conferences are usually appropriate only for public agencies and nationally known figures. They are rarely used by businesses except after disasters that result in negative publicity such as an oil spill or an airline crash. There are two key reasons to avoid press conferences. One is that there is no time of day that is convenient for all of the news media, given differing deadline pressures. And if a major event conflicts with your press conference, you've lost your audience altogether. The second reason is that good reporters dislike press conferences because they want to get a better story than the competition. If everybody has the same information, it is difficult for a reporter to shine by virtue of doing more research.

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### Media Tours

There are two types of media tours. Incoming – opening your doors to the media – can have positive effects. Tours can be done in person or via satellite and there are numerous organizations that can film, edit, produce and distribute these "tours" for you. Letting the media know you are available to appear or talk on short notice can also be effective. Outgoing tours – taking your message to the media – is also effective, though somewhat more time consuming and expensive. This is best used when doing investor relations, attending a trade show, or making major changes in a multinational or multi-state corporation (e.g., downsizing, management changes, spin-offs).

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### Press Clipping Services

You'll want to know if syndicates and wire services are picking up your story. That's where a subscription to a clipping service can help. These services scan thousands of newspapers, magazines, and Web sites and monitor television talk shows and news programs looking for mention of your company or product. You can also provide them with key words thereby keeping up-to-date on your industry or competition. There are services that still manually clip articles but there are also Web-based services that scan electronic versions of publications and deliver your "clippings" in electronic form. In either case, having these clippings enables you to judge whether your news is reaching your target audience and if your PR plan is effective.

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### **"Riding" a News Story**

When a topic on which you have expertise is in the news, it is important to issue a release immediately that includes a brief comment and the statement that you are available for interviews.

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### **Special Events**

Special events can be held to introduce new products, bring attention to an organization or individual, make an announcement, or spotlight something very visual that cannot be communicated via a press release. However, it is just as important to provide the media with background material – a one-page release, copies of statements made, information that will help them write a good story, product samples, souvenirs, etc. And, as with press conferences, follow-up is crucial. Often the press will not cover an event itself but will use it as a "news peg" for an advance story.

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### **Trade Shows**

Trade shows can be good opportunities to make company announcements – new products, acquisitions, and alliances – because trade journalists are often present. Setting up one-on-one interviews or background meetings can be tricky since other companies are likely doing the same thing. To maximize your trade show presence, use of the Internet and your company Web site can help. By building a virtual presentation, media (and potential clients visiting your booth) can experience a "press conference," view photos or video, get critical background material, obtain third party quotes or request interviews, and be kept up-to-date as information changes throughout the trade show and beyond. Contacting key media in advance and offering time with your executives can be the incentive they need to seek you out and cover your news.

### Speech Writing

Remarks by an organization's top executives can attract positive attention. Keynote addresses at conventions, luncheon talks to service or professional groups, greetings to guests at receptions and dinners are among the possible forums.

There is an art to writing speeches and more goes into the process than doing research on the speech topic. Knowing the person for whom the speech is written is key – the speaking style, the vocabulary, the cadence, and the preferences. Is he/she the type to go off on tangents? If so, you've got to get your key points communicated early on. Does the speaker know the audience well? If so, he/she may want to speak more personally vs. formally. Will there be visual aids and is the speaker comfortable using them? Can the speaker carry off a humorous approach, if appropriate? Who is the audience and is there likely to be any opposition, media present or food being served while speaking? Will the speech be used any other ways – turned into an article/newsletter, posted on a Web site or distributed to media? All of these issues must be considered in addition to the topic.

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### Photography

Although it may not seem obvious, photography is most important when a subject is difficult to photograph and/or not inherently visual. Examples would be a story on how a computer "firewall" works, undersea exploration, trends in insurance coverage, etc. If you can take the time to supply a good photograph in a difficult situation, it greatly increases the chance that the media will use your material. If photographs are not feasible, charts, diagrams or other graphics can be useful. Photographs should be black-and-white glossy prints, color slides or transparencies. Press packages may include black-and-white photos and state that color material also is available via your Web site's press section.

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### Audio Tapes for Radio

Audio tapes are rarely used, but can be important when sound is essential to the story. An obvious situation would be a musical group.

### **Internet Monitoring**

The Web now offers an incredibly wide range of public forums, in addition to the traditional array of print and broadcast sources, for dissemination of news and information. Every organization should have a program to stay in touch regularly with appropriate news groups and Web sites.

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### **Community Meetings**

Often it is important to hold small neighborhood meetings to explain various portions of a program that will directly or indirectly impact a group of citizens. In addition to an ongoing public relations campaign it may be necessary to reach out to head off any negative publicity caused by lack of accurate information. Examples of appropriate use of community meetings include change in flight patterns over neighborhoods adjacent to an airport and major base-reuse project.

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### **Specialized Fact Sheets**

When you have more details and facts and figures than can fit in a one-page press release, you need a Fact Sheet. It can be several pages long and include historical perspectives, anecdotes, and data. It should be well written with short sentences and paragraphs and wide margins. This gives you the best of both: a short press release that quickly gives reporters and editors the essence of your story, and material to do an in-depth article.

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### **Byline or Feature Articles**

Beyond getting exposure for your company or product, byline articles can be used in a number of ways. Writing an article for a newspaper, magazine or online publication has a longer shelf life than that one edition. Reprints can be used in press kits, mailed to clients, available for downloading on your Web site, and given to media to establish expertise in a particular area. The article should be timely and targeted. Usually it is wise to pitch the idea to a publication prior to writing it. If no one is interested in publishing it, there is likely a reason – it could be "old" or redundant, it may not fit the editorial calendar, or it may just not be newsworthy in the editor's mind. Best to find out before making the effort, by pitching the idea, bullet points or a summary.

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### **Quarterly Newsletters**

Another way to keep your strategic messages in front of your target audience is to communicate via a quarterly newsletter. A newsletter is an excellent place to recap the coverage you have received in the media. Not everyone in your target audience will have seen all the coverage your organization has received. When it is reviewed in its entirety the sum becomes greater than its parts. Newsletters can be either mailed or e-mailed to your contact list. It is important to build and maintain your database to achieve maximum effectiveness.

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### **Annual Reports**

Annual reports are usually associated with public companies. They can, however, be used by any organization with enough to say. Annual reports not only report but they are an important place to publish your strategic messages.

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### **Community Calendar Listings**

Community calendar listings are similar to PSAs – generally used by non-profits and community organizations – except they usually promote an event rather than a cause or service. Businesses can sometimes be listed if the event is free or serves the public interest.

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### **PR Campaign Measurements**

One way to create news is to conduct a survey and report the results. Surveys are most helpful when you can use numbers to make a before-and-after comparison. They can be used to gauge the knowledge of your audience on your products or services or to determine the effectiveness of your PR campaign. In any case, they should always be short and specific. These days, surveys are not just limited to telephone or direct mail. Using the Internet to conduct a survey can provide quick feedback at minimal cost.

### **Crisis Management**

Crises are not always necessarily bad. An emergency or controversy may give you the opportunity to reach large numbers of people with your company's perspective. Good or bad, a few things are key in handling crises. Advance preparation can turn a rough situation into a smooth operation with the best possible outcome. Have facts & figures ready, make sure spokespeople are well briefed and trained to deal with media, know the media and how to reach them off-hours so that you can proactively address concerns. "No comment" is often the worst comment implying evasiveness or guilt. Be prepared with a response to media inquiries or, if unable to answer, let the media know when an answer will be available. In other words, be prepared and forthright.

## Contact Information

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