Add Public Relations to your marketing mix

You have news to share – information that would benefit your company. You have some idea of the people you want to reach with your news and views. Now the problem becomes: how to reach them in the most effective way? One solution is to integrate public relations into your marketing efforts.

Public relations (PR) can cost-effectively and credibly raise awareness of your company, but there is often confusion surrounding PR and how it works.

**PR does not mean “press release”**

PR stands for Public Relations, and PR is more than just writing press releases. It is a multifaceted marketing discipline that covers a number of interrelated activities concerned with communicating specific messages to specific target audiences. When contemplating PR, consider which of the following activities are most appropriate to your business:

1. Media Relations – working with news media to carry your message to the public
2. Investor Relations – communicating to those who invest in your company
3. Industry Relations – involvement with your target industry associations
4. Public Awareness – sponsorship of targeted events and activities
5. Community Relations – involvement in charitable and community related activities

Each of these can effectively generate interest in your company. The common key to success with any of these activities is to clearly understand and communicate who your company is and what you have to offer.

**Remember the basics:**

- Define your products and services with the customer in mind
- Communicate what value you offer the customer
- Communicate your points of differentiation
- Develop marketplace credibility
- Target your message

Generating publicity is not as complex as you might think. Most of the success of public relations centers on knowing what to do and when. Implementing these initiatives can dramatically increase awareness of your business.

PR is often confused with advertising, merchandising, promotion, or any of a dozen other buzz words in the marketing communications vocabulary. Public relations is about doing something newsworthy that you want to communicate, and then telling your audience what you have done. That means that writing an effective press release is a very important part of PR.
How to write a winning press release

A press release, also known as a news release, is simply a written statement distributed to the media. It can announce a range of news items: scheduled events, personnel promotions, awards, new products and services, sales accomplishments, etc. It can also be used in generating a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release. It is a fundamental tool of PR work that demands careful attention and planning.

The purpose of a press release is to give journalists information that is useful, accurate and interesting. A good press release should answer all of the “W” questions (who, what, where, when and why) about your organization or upcoming event. Be aware that local media may pick up your press release and run it in their publications verbatim or, more commonly, they will use your press release as a springboard for a larger feature story. In either case, try to write your story as you would like to have it reported. To do this you must write your story with the media in mind. In other words, write like a journalist.

Editors and reporters are constantly looking for new story topics, yet they’re always “on deadline” and can be overwhelmed by the constant flow of irrelevant press releases that fill their email inbox. Your challenge is to cut through the “noise” and present your story idea in a way that will clearly be of interest to the publication’s readers.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when writing a press release:

1. **Headlines need to encapsulate the story**
   The headline and subheadline are the most valuable real estate in your press release. They tell the reader what your story is about and often are all a reporter or editor will read when determining if your news is of interest to them. A powerful press release will have a strong, clear headline with a factual subhead to provide supporting information. Be sure to avoid superlatives and overly flattering adjectives in your choice of words. If it sounds like marketing fluff to the editorial staff (whose job it is to report facts), your press release will never get past the trash can. Think in terms of “what’s important here?” and “why should anyone care?”

   If you have captured attention with your headlines, the first paragraph needs to follow through with the basic information a reporter needs to understand your story. Call out the business challenge that your customers face. When writing your story, put the most important facts first, followed by decreasingly important details as the text of the release unfolds. Your press release will be shortened by an editor. Make it easy for the editor by making sure each of your paragraphs is factual, and follow a logical sequence from the most critical elements to the smaller details.

3. **Keep it simple**
   Use clear, simple language and avoid industry jargon, acronyms and empty, over-used phrases. Think of your press release as a tool to deliver only critical information. Reporters asked to wade through slang and puffed-up phrasing will quickly grow skeptical and may discard your press release before they read the full story.
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4. Keep it professional
To ensure that your writing, grammar, punctuation, and press release format comply with editorial standards, use standard editorial style guides, such as the Associated Press Stylebook.

5. Bring your story to life
Use quotes to insert real-life examples, opinions, and reactions that will emphasize your key points. To add to your story’s credibility, point out a solid return on investment for your customer. When possible, add a testimonial from your client. In lieu of a client testimonial, a comment from your CEO can illustrate your company’s commitment to delivering problem-solving solutions.

Once you’ve drafted your release, ask yourself the following questions. If your answers are affirmative, then you’ve cleared the first hurdle to getting your news in print.

• Is the most important news clearly stated in the first paragraph?
• Is the release packed with facts and free of hype and jargon?
• Is contact information included in case the reporter has a question?
• Did someone proof the release to catch spelling mistakes and grammatical errors?
• Is the type style and format easy to read and appropriate to the delivery mechanism (email, fax, Business Wire posting, etc.)?

Remember:
• Keep it concise
• Make each word count
• Avoid jargon
• Stick to the facts and avoid fluff
• Proof read your work properly – check your spelling and grammar

Tips:
Keep the following points in mind when writing your press release.

Is your news “newsworthy?”
The purpose of a press release is to inform the world of your news item. Do not use your press release to try and make a sale. A good press release answers all of the “W” questions (who, what, where, when and why), providing the media with useful information about your organization, product, service or event. If your press release reads like an advertisement, rewrite it.

Start strong
Your headline and first paragraph should tell the story. The rest of your press release should provide the detail. You have a matter of seconds to grab your readers’ attention. Do not blow it with a weak opening.

Not everything is news
Your excitement about something does not necessarily mean that you have a newsworthy story. Think about your audience. Will someone else find your story interesting? Answer the question, “Why should anyone care?” and make sure your announcement has some news values such as timeliness, uniqueness or something truly unusual. Avoid clichés such as “customers save money” or “great customer service.” Focus on the aspects of your news item that truly set you apart from everyone else.

Does your press release illustrate?
Use real life examples about how your company or organization solved a problem. Identify the problem and identify why your solution is the right solution. Give examples of how your service or product fulfills needs or satisfies desires. What benefits can be expected? Use real life examples to powerfully communicate the benefits of using your product or service.
Christie marketing primer

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**Pick an angle**
Try to make your press release timely. Tie your news to current events or social issues if possible. Make sure that your story has a good news hook.

**Use active, not passive, voice**
Verbs in the active voice bring your press release to life. Rather than writing “entered into a partnership” use “partnered” instead. Do not be afraid to use strong verbs as well. For example, “The committee exhibited severe hostility over the incident.” reads better if changed to “The committee was enraged over the incident.” Writing in this manner, helps guarantee that your press release will be read.

**Economics of words**
Use only enough words to tell your story. Avoid using unnecessary adjectives, flowery language, or redundant expressions such as “added bonus” or “first time ever”. If you can tell your story with fewer words, do it. Wordiness distracts from your story. Keep it concise. Make each word count.

**Images**
An image is worth a thousand words. Keep in mind that a good press release is even better when a great photo accompanies it. Whenever possible, include a high resolution photo (with caption) that illustrates the essence of the news release.

**Develop a good media list**
One of the most important areas of public relations is the development of a solid list of media contacts. Including all possible contact information makes it easy and efficient to send your announcements. There are media lists for publications (newspapers and magazines) as well as broadcast available on the Internet. You need to determine the type of audiences you want to reach, and the geographic makeup of that audience, in the selection of the media. Various media lists will provide you with the name of the media outlet, the address, main phone number, main fax number, a main email address and in some cases, the editor’s or news director’s name.

**Database software**
Once the information is obtained, it is time to begin developing the database. Several computer software packages can help make this job easier. The following is a list of the major categories that should be included in a good media database:

- Name of media outlet – i.e. newspaper, magazine, radio station, etc.
- Name of contact – i.e. first, last and a nickname
- Title/Position – i.e. editor, assignment editor, arts writer
- Address – mailing and street
- Phone numbers – main, newsrooms and direct
- Fax number – main and direct
- Email – direct, not just "news@mediaoutlet.com"
- Web site – url address
- Deadline – last date and time for submission
- Publication or airing date

**NOTE:** Because the media get hundreds of requests for coverage on a weekly if not daily basis, some newsrooms are not allowed to give out direct contact information such as direct phone numbers and email addresses. They are usually allowed to connect you to the reporter you need to contact and then it is at the reporter’s discretion to provide you with that information.
Who to contact

To determine which reporters you will want to contact is dependant on the type of announcement you are making, but here are examples to get you started. As you become more familiar with the media outlet, you will discover specific reporters who you should contact on a regular basis:

At daily newspapers:
- Section editors – i.e. metro, business, arts, etc.
- Technology editors
- Photo editors
- Editorial editors/writers – if you have an issue to discuss/address

At weekly newspapers:
- Editors – most weekly newspapers are small publications with very small staffs; sending information to the editor of these types of publications should be sufficient

At magazines:
- News editors
- Technology editors
- Business editors
- Calendar editors/reporters

At television stations:
- News directors – especially to invite to VIP events
- Assignment editors – if you don’t know who to contact, this should be your first choice
- Specific reporters and photojournalists
- Online content editors – another resource for you is to have your information posted on the station’s web site

At radio stations:
- News Directors
- Specific reporters – usually only available or necessary on stations that are formatted for news
- Talk show producers and/or hosts

Conclusion

As part of your overall Public Relations strategy, a smartly worded press release, distributed to the right people and managed effectively, can get your product announced, reviewed, and, ultimately, promoted before a countless number potential customers.

Working with Christie

From time to time, there will be projects that you are working on that involves Christie products and solutions which might be of interest to the media. Christie has a well established public relations program and can help you target news about your projects to its media contacts. If you have a newsworthy story, please contact Dorina Belu in Christie’s corporate marketing at 519-749-3323 or email dorina.belu@christiedigital.com.

You may also login to the Christie partner portal located at www.christiedigital.com and reference the installation/event information forms.

Suggested reading and resources

Associated Press
www.associatedpress.com

Business Wire
www.businesswire.com

Eric Eggertson, Common Sense PR
www.commonsensepr.com

Owen Lystrop, Int0PR
http://intopr.prblogs.org/


Lenard Saffir, PR on a Budget (Kaplan Publishing, 2007)