

Public relations is a way to build your business image. Even if your business is well established it's always good to look at a fresh approach. Having a plan will help you improve your brand positioning and achieve your goals.



Before setting up the PR Desk Marion was a Marketing Communications Manager with Caterpillar and diesel engine manufacturer Perkins Engines. Her clients include Terex, ABB, The Institution of Agricultural Engineers

The purpose of press relations is to enhance the reputation of an organisation and its products and to influence and inform your target audiences.

- Improving a company's brand image
- Higher and better media profile for the company
- Changing the attitudes of target audiences – such as customers
- Improving relationships with the community
- Increasing market share
- Influencing government policy at a local, national or international level
- Improving communications with investors and their advisers
- Improving industrial relations

The Media

Messages have to be tailored to the wide variety of media available, being clear about the target audience

- Use specialised media for your sector to announce developments and air matters of interest.
- Use academic or technical publications to enhance the reputation of staff and to discover if research is being duplicated elsewhere which could lead to collaboration.
- Use other specialised media to interest distributors
- Use the national press to announce major investments, new products if they are of sufficient interest and company results if quoted on the stock exchange. Research, campaigns, events and crisis management are other areas of interest to the nationals. Major orders will also be of interest but only if worth tens of millions of pounds.
- Regional newspapers will be interested if you can give them a local angle.
- Local newspapers will be interested in the activities of companies in their area because it affects the prosperity of the neighbourhood.

Promoting a Product

Genuinely new and different products of interest to the general reader will usually get the coverage they deserve and many specialised products will receive coverage in specialist periodicals. But not every product is new and exciting. Many are simply another brand's interpretation of an idea.

Existing products which have remained much the same for many years may also need the use of different techniques to obtain coverage.

Advertorials

This editorial space linked to advertising. An advertisement of a certain size will result in an agreed amount of editorial being run. Sometimes the newspaper or magazine editor will provide a journalist to write the editorial but it is more usual for this to be provided by a PR function or consultancy.

Many journalists feel advertorials compromise editorial independence and the publication will also target your customers and suppliers to advertise alongside your advertorial.



What is News?

Companies often underrate or exaggerate the news value of a development, as they cannot regard it objectively.

Modesty can cause people to underestimate the news value of a speech or paper they are presenting. Objectivity is the most important discipline in assessing news value.

Words such as 'biggest' 'smallest' 'best' 'first' or 'longest' should be avoided as should stating a company's product is better than that of a named competitor. Genuine firsts or bests are rare. Even in technical publications the journalists are rarely in a position to be so sure about such claims themselves and so for their own professional credibility they delete them.

News can be:

- A new product
- An important new contract
- Improved results
- Major investments
- A major campaign or project
- Research findings
- An acquisition or a merger
- A major staff success, perhaps fund-raising for a charity

None of the above has equal value. Whether or not the general press will be interested will depend on the importance of a new product or a new contract.

Money speaks volumes to journalists because this is an objective measure of the importance of a new product or a major investment by an employer.

The appeal to the reader is what matters.



PRESS RELEASES AND FEATURES

Press Releases

Only 1 press release in 10 is published by any newspaper and the proportion they are accepted by a broad spectrum of press is lower still.



Three main reasons for failure are:

1. A release may not contain news or if it does it is so insignificant or so specialised that no one is interested except the issuer.
2. Many releases are badly written, include too much technical material and jargon and hide the real story deep in the body of the press release. This is the most common reason for a release failure.
3. Many releases are not targeted accurately and are sent with a scatter gun approach to all contacts on the media list.

A successful press releases follows certain rules such as:

- A single A4 page is the ideal length.
- Unnecessary and pointless phrases such as 'announces' or 'is pleased to announce' should be avoided.
- Email is the best way to distribute a release as this helps the journalist to edit the story.
- Always date the release.
- A short eye-catching headline is needed to catch the attention of a busy news editor.
- The main facts must be included in a short first paragraph. The ideal release should still be able to work if only the first paragraph is printed.
- Quotes such be included, attributed to a named senior individual for impact, if the target press are local the branch manager will be more appropriate.
- Each paragraph should be no more than three sentences with just one or two for the first paragraph.
- Too much detail detracts from the impact – accuracy is paramount.
- A good journalistic style is better than legal niceties.
- Jargon and abbreviations should always be avoided.
- Superlatives such as best and first or excellent should be avoided as well.
- A brief concluding statement about the organisation's activities should be include at the end.

- The release should finish with 'Ends' to avoid confusion.
- A contact name both daytime and out of hours telephone numbers should be included at the foot of the release
- It may be best to provide several versions of the same release to provide for different audiences. Technical publications may appreciate a longer version of the release with a data or spec sheet.
- A good photograph adds to the story. Make sure it is suitably captioned.
- Using an embargo reduces the chance of the story breaking too early but don't use it unless you really have to.

For examples go to <https://iagre.org/PressReleases>

Distribution

The importance of up to date mailing lists cannot be over emphasised.

Features

It is possible to interest journalists in writing an article about an organisation, its work or an interview with a significant member of staff. Newspapers and magazines might also prefer a PR person in-house or an agency to prepare the feature.

The best types of features are those which follow the same rules as the material provided by the publications own editorial team.

Material might include:

- Reviews of company products or innovations for regular features on the market in trade publications.
- Authoritative pieces on developments in the industry or sector ghosted for directors or senior managers.
- Advice pieces which might have the by-line of a senior member of management for general use but which can be offered to local newspapers as localised pieces carrying the name of the manager.
- Review or overview pieces signed by the company's economist and offered to the general and specialised press as an alternative to something by one of their own specialists.

General rules:

- Always have a start, a middle and an end.
- Always write to the length specified by the editor.
- Most readers will decide whether to continue or move on to another item very quickly, so the first paragraph or two will mark the feature as a success or failure.
- Be objective when writing about industry developments.
- Provide portrait photographs of the author or products.
- Identify the author's job title.
- Always make sure the official author is happy with the article and give them the opportunity to make changes.

TALKING TO THE MEDIA



Quote:

This is what the journalist wants, the opportunity to quote someone, providing their article with additional authority and authenticity.

On the record:

Speaking to a journalist remarks are automatically 'on the record' unless prefixed by a qualifying remark.

Off the record:

This means that whatever is about to be said should not be quoted and is for the background information of the journalist only. It is important that the intention to go off the record is made clear before making the remarks and that the journalist agrees to the condition. Don't forget that too much off the record can make an interview useless.

Non-attributable:

There are times when someone might be happy to see something reported but less happy to have their name attributed to the remarks in print. A quote may be attributed to 'industry sources' or a senior official. It may be useful when commenting on a situation affecting an industry sector as a whole, especially if competitors are reluctant to speak. Remarks must be prefixed with this condition and the journalist must agree before you go ahead.

No Comment:

There are still people who believe this is the right way to address a press enquiry. In practice it leaves journalists and readers to draw their own conclusions. Sometimes a comment cannot be made because of legal implications and this must be explained. Customer confidentiality is another example when commenting is difficult.

Deadline:

When a journalist calls with a question it is important to find out their deadline. Even if the information is not available a phone call should be made before the deadline expires the explain this. There is no need to be precise in the explanation – saying your organisation cannot comment on rumours on the stock market, or the finance director has gone away and you don't know when they'll be back might be the material for a front page news story and the end of someone's career.

Scoop:

A genuine scoop is usually an 'exclusive' and it's rare these days. Giving one journalist a scoop can mean you offend rival publications.



PRESS INTERVIEWS



When organising an interview you need to find out what are the topics the journalist wants to talk about and how much time they need.

Press Conferences and Receptions

Press conferences are ideal for events or announcements of major importance. They are not for trivial matters and once anyone has acquired the reputation of calling a press conference without real justification for it, they will find that attendance dwindles. They are not for the vanity of the CEO but for the press.

They have the value of enabling journalists to question senior managers or directors on major announcements or developments and to ensure that everyone has the same consistent replies. Consistency of message is less likely when journalists are spoken to individually.

Conferences are useful for announcing the results of a large publicly quoted company or for a major investment or other initiative. They can pull together the organisation's reaction to a crisis or major accident.

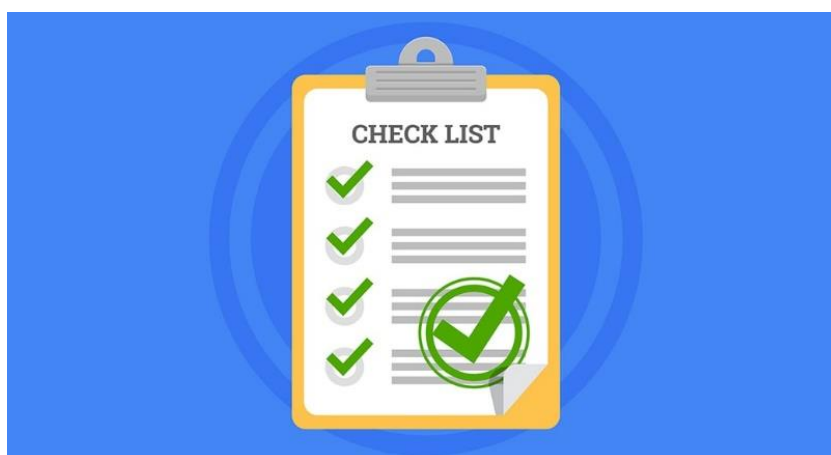
A rehearsal before the conference with people adopting the role of journalists and challenging statements by those who will be fronting the conference is a good idea.

Press receptions are a useful way of meeting journalists informally, especially if any development does not justify a full-blown press conference.

The main points of organising a conference are:

- Only select and invite those likely to be interested
- Let those being invited know the purpose of the event. If many refuse then the event is not worth it
- All guests should sign in to provide a record of those attending
- Hosts should be kept to a minimum and they must be briefed on who is attending and any likely issues or interests
- Speakers should rehearse the day before
- A programme stating starting and finishing time is useful. Lunch time events should end by 2.30
- Journalists unable to attend should have material distributed at the function sent to them
- Place any statements and photographic material from the conference on the organisations web site
- Timing must be convenient for those being invited.

Clashing with another event should be avoided, especially if run by a competitor.



A checklist for effective press relations

- Media contact lists must be up to date
- Stories must be angled for different audiences, whether these are identified by their location, interests, age or sex
- A press conference or briefing should only be called when the story is sufficiently important. Directors or senior managers taking the conference must be briefed and rehearsed
- Draft legislation, the budget and official statistics are examples of opportunities for a company to provide comment. The press will favour those organisations able to provide sound, reasoned comment
- Research or other insights can be offered to the media to maintain the relationship when other stories are few and far between
- Good photographs are important to illustrate stories
- A photograph library of essential items and of people for whom a photograph might be required on demand improves efficiency
- Maintain and keep up to date your web site
- Product or service brochures can be provided to the media if this will help them
- Quotes should be attributed to someone of sufficient authority and interest to the press and they should be available for interview whenever possible
- Further opportunities such as background articles or features, interviews or photographic opportunities should always be considered
- A contact name must be provided on any material sent to the press, including an out-of-hours telephone number
- Clashing with major events or announcements by competitors should be avoided
- A photographer should be commissioned for major events in case the journalists attending are not accompanied by a press photographer
- Action photographs should be used showing products at work. Use people to provide scale and interest

BROADCAST MEDIA – TV INTERVIEWS



Everyone nods in agreement when told that thorough preparation is essential, yet almost every TV and radio disaster is caused by a lack of preparation.

You can and must do a great deal of preparation to avoid being tripped up. Many interviewees who complain of being misrepresented have in fact been guilty of going into the studio with a blind and misguided faith that the questions will enable them to communicate their messages.

Asking the questions

You need to know the following about the programme you are to appear on:

- What is the programme about?
- Why have they asked you for the interview?
- What is their source of information?
- How long will the interview be?
- Is it to be live or recorded? If recorded how much of the interview will actually be used in the final programme?
- Will they be using any film or props?
- Who else is going on the programme such as a competitor or customer
- An idea of the questions would also be helpful. Although a PR department or agency should be able to give you a good idea

You also need to consider:

- The exact form of the questions is usually only decided at the last minute and if the interviewer finds an interesting line of discussion during the programme, it is their job to probe further and forget the original question
- The interviewer should have an idea of the sort of questions they want to ask. Television interviewers are professionals and so are their research teams and they will be already thinking
- The line of questioning will give a guide to how the interview will run. If possible an agreement on the first subject to be covered will help the interview get off to a smooth start
- 'Playing it by ear' will result in a poor performance. At least half an hour of preparation is ideal. If the request is for an immediate response, a few minutes clarifying the message will pay dividends
- The purpose of appearing on television is to deliver a planned message, not what the interviewer wants you to say

Skeleton plan

You may have a vast knowledge of the subject you are going to be interviewed about but the requirement is to condense all this knowledge into a basic message. At best the speaker will get 3 points over and in any case the viewers or listeners won't remember more than 2 or 3 points.

These points should be the basis of everything said during the interview. Whatever the questions, whatever the angle, these points should be stressed.

There should be a maximum of 3 main points each supported by some sub points.

Brevity

On TV there is little time so the punchline must come at the beginning.

Simplicity

The message must be simple.



Repetition

It is better to say the same thing several times (in different ways) than to say several things once. Words and sentences should be short so that everyone knows what is being said.

Familiarity

Another effective way of communicating is to ring a bell in the other person's mind with something with which he or she is already familiar. In talking about a new factory, describing it as 'about the size of 8000 square metres' is difficult to grasp. Put it into everyday terms – 'about the size of two football fields' is more readily understood.

Does a reservoir contain 123,455,200 gallons of water or does it hold three weeks supply for the town? Does a refinery have an unpleasant aroma of sulphur dioxide or does it smell like bad eggs?

Relevance

Finally, go back through everything you intend to say and subject it to the 'so what?' test. It may be very important to you but what about the viewer?

Learn the brief

- Why are you going on the programme
- What is to be said
- How to say it

Practice saying the key messages out loud. There is a big difference between knowing the message and actually saying it. Be clear about the message then prepare responses to certain questions.

What questions are likely to be asked?

A brainstorming session with colleagues will probably give rise to most possible angles. Remember: who? What? Where? How? Why?

If the programme is a positive one the questions will be aimed at extracting the good news. Others, especially investigative programmes, will be looking for the negatives.

Likely questions should be listed so that the interviewee is not thrown by the unexpected during the interview. But remember you are not going to answer the questions you are going to use them to put your points across.

By watching TV analytically you can work out for yourself what makes a good interview. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How did he or she get on the programme?
- Are they doing a good job?
- What are the programme-makers looking for?
- Could I get on that programme?
- How would I set about it?



Check List

1. Decide whether to do it or not
 - a. Who is doing the interview?
 - b. When?
 - c. Where?
 - d. How long will it last?
2. Decide
 - a. Is someone available?
 - b. Is it worth doing?
3. If so ask
 - a. Why are they doing this programme?
 - b. Why choose this company?
 - c. What is the context?
 - d. Will it be live or recorded?
 - e. Any films or props needed?
 - f. Who else will be on the programme?
 - g. What questions will they ask?
4. Prepare – at least an hour
 - a. Plan the message – a maximum of 3 points and make them short supported by some sub-points
 - b. Learn the brief
5. Anticipate the angle and likely questions

Winning the Interview

Preparation

1. Let them do all the fussing
 - a. Show you to your seat
 - b. Fix microphone etc
 - c. Ask them questions
2. Last check on clothing
3. Voice test – same value as in the interview

Appearance and Manner

1. Sit up
2. Look at the interviewer throughout
3. Speak clearly and distinctly
4. Use hands, and do not be afraid of mannerisms but avoid fussy or nervous movements
5. Have notes, but do not read from them
6. Be sincere and enthusiastic throughout

Handling the Interview

Platinum rule

Get the key points of the viewer, regardless of the questions and other distractions.

Golden rules

1. Do not let the interviewer butt in without a fight
2. Refute any incorrect statements
3. Stay off the defensive
4. Do not get side-tracked
5. Be positive

Silver rules

1. Look alert
2. Try to anticipate surprises
3. Let the viewer know about surprises
4. Do not address the interviewer by name
5. If the interviewer rephrases your statements, make sure he or she has got them right
6. Do not use jargon or slang
7. Remember there is only one viewer
8. Avoid too many 'wells.....'
9. Do not fill embarrassing silences. That is the interviewer's job
10. Stay off the 'ums' and 'ers'
11. Do not tail off and 'and so on', 'and so forth'
12. Only hesitate if it is deliberate
13. Know the facts
14. Do not get angry
15. Do not volunteer irrelevant information
16. Watch for the interviewer getting in a harmful last word



RADIO INTERVIEWS



These are similar to television interviews but there are a few important differences.

Preparation

Preparation should be as thorough as for the TV. Stick to two or three key points with three or four subpoints.

Anecdotes are, if anything, more crucial. The television viewer expects to be shown a picture of something all the time, but the radio listener has to paint his or her own mental pictures.

The studio

Radio stations are generally smaller than television ones. Interviewees usually sit at a table with a microphone right in front of them. Surprisingly, a radio studio can be more distracting than a TV one.

The sound proofing is often more noticeable and unlike the TV radio interviewers might be doing other things instead of looking at the interviewee when he or she is talking.

Voice test

Speak at the level you intend to use for the interview.

Manner

Sit forward in the chair, speak clearly and distinctly. It is also much easier to refer to notes for guidance but do not read from them or rustle the paper.

Sincerity, enthusiasm

The listener has not heard your voice before so sound interested, vary the pitch and speed.



Types of Interview

Panel

Groups of experts, or people who disagree with one another, come over well on radio. Doing this form of interview is harder to get attention. Speakers need to speak out at the right moment and be that little bit more forceful.

Down the line

Difficult! In this type of interview the interviewee sits in solitary confinement, totally remote from the interviewer and any other participants. Just pretend you are on the phone.

Telephone

This method gives radio producers an easy way of interviewing all sorts of people at short notice, at any time of the day and in any location.

It is also a popular way of obtaining the view of the general public on phone-in programmes.

Used properly, the telephone can provide a good avenue to get the information across. All that is needed is some preparation beforehand.

At home or at the office you can choose how to sit and which room to use. Don't forget to avoid interruptions and deflect any incoming calls.

Social Media Tips

Social media marketing is becoming indispensable helping businesses build relationships, engage with customers and increase sales.

Being successful with social media comes from building strong and long lasting relationships with customers over time communicating to them the type of content and expertise that they want to share. This approach will help you attract and keep loyal customers.

It's a tool to find new customers and professional contacts.



Facebook

Don't forget to create a Facebook page for your business not another personal profile. Make sure you categorise your page correctly to make the task of finding your business via a Facebook search as easy as possible.

Fill in all of your business essential information including name, address, contact details and website.



Create a well branded Facebook cover photo the ideal size is 851x315 pixels and reinforce your brand identify with the smaller profile photo.

Don't hard sell. This is very important. People aren't generally looking to buy stuff on Facebook. Show them something genuinely interesting.



Encourage conversation by asking people questions.

Keep it brief. Save the long copy for your blog page.

Post photos and videos to your timeline. Research suggests these are the most shared types of content.

Timing is everything. Test different times of day to find out when your followers are most active.

Monitor and respond to comments. Mostly to keep the conversation flowing, but partly to make sure nobody is being abusive to other commenters.

Post directly to Facebook rather than using a social media management platform like Hootsuite. Facebook's algorithms favour content published this way.

Twitter

Twitter is used by millions of businesses and individuals as a way to monitor conversations about their brand, interact with customers, manage customer service issues, promote offers and more.

Your twitter username is important as it makes up part of your Twitter profile url (the address you'll put on all your marketing material to direct them to follow you on Twitter).



Try to keep the username short, simple and memorable.

Shorten links with bit.ly but check they work.

Tweet daily. If you're not consistently posting content your followers will lose interest.

Republish old content. There's no reason not to shout about good things you've done in the past.

Use hashtags to get your posts noticed. But whatever #you #do don't stuff #your #tweets with them. It's annoying.

Schedule tweets for evenings and weekends so you don't miss out on traffic.

You can gain relevant fans if you follow other people in your industry.



Share other people's content. Just keep it relevant and interesting.

When sharing an article, include an interesting quote or stat from the piece rather than just tweeting the title.

Include imagery in your tweets where possible. People are much more likely to share this kind of content.

Don't ignore people who give you positive feedback. Take the time to reply as soon as you can.

Equally, don't ignore the negative feedback. But never reply in an argumentative or defensive way. Keep it polite and professional.

Share 'personal' updates about the business. It makes you seem more human and people respond to that.

Linked In

Linked in is the hub for professionals and businesses to connect, market your brand, expertise and skills to the world. It's a great tool to help build your business and as an individual establish a professional profile.



A Linked In company page is a place for companies to provide more information about themselves, their products and services, job opportunities and to share expert insights.

Research by Linked In has revealed that you only need 100 to 200 followers of a company page to start making an impact and drive engagement.

Be active in relevant groups. Become part of the community by asking questions and replying to questions from others.

Use groups to promote content. But make sure it's actually helpful to the group's members and not just sales spam.

If you write a 'blog' post some of your best content in the LinkedIn publishing platform. If people read and enjoy your content they are likely to follow you. The LinkedIn blog is also a great place to find influencers in your industry.

Interact with influencers by commenting on and sharing their updates or posts.

Tag connections in posts if it is related to them or you think they are likely to share it with their followers.



Optimise your LinkedIn company page for search by including three or four of your main target keywords in the main description section.

Instagram

Similar to Facebook or Twitter, everyone who creates an Instagram account has a profile and a news feed.

When you post a photo or video on Instagram, it will be displayed on your profile. Other users who follow you will see your posts in their own feed. Likewise, you'll see posts from other users whom you choose to follow.



It's like a simplified version of Facebook, with an emphasis on mobile use and visual sharing. Just like other social networks, you can interact with other users on Instagram by following them, being followed by them, commenting, liking, tagging and private messaging. You can even save the photos you see on Instagram.

Instagram is available for free on iOS devices, like the iPhone and iPad, as well as Android devices, like phones and tablets from Google, Samsung, etc.

It can also be accessed on the web from a computer, but users can only upload and share photos or videos from their devices.

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