



Good PR is key to good press

Get the most out of media coverage by staying on message and maintaining relationships, writes **Valerie O'Reilly**

It can be both an exciting and challenging time garnering media attention for your company – budgets may be tight, relationships with journalists may not be strong and explaining a new concept may be difficult. Good press, though, can be one of the biggest drivers for SME's looking to grow their business, and as a result, a pretty important component for success.

As founder of Unicorn PR & Communications, I've worked with hundreds of companies, and have developed a taste for what works and what doesn't.

Know what's newsworthy

Before you begin pitching your company, think about what is truly newsworthy, especially to the publications you're targeting. If it is unique and worthy of coverage, figure out the right angle with which to approach a journalist.

A few common ideas include the launch of a new, unique company; the launch of a new product, feature or offering; the release of a compelling study or interesting data; the company's response to a topical issue; news of a new high profile partnership; or a jobs announcement.

Once you figure out what qualifies as newsworthy, begin crafting your message by first understanding all of the details about what you're pitching.

Have a concise message

Before sending out any pitches, take time to craft your message. Be able to explain your company in one sentence so that anyone who is in the industry or not, can understand its purpose. Cut down on industry jargon so that people understand your pitch.

After you've crafted your pitch, stick to it for everything you pitch – unless you find ways to improve it over time. You will also need to create a message for the news you're hoping to get covered. Journalists get hundreds of emails every day – it's possible that the journalist you're pitching to will only read the first few sentences of your email.

Once you've crafted your message, making sure that it is clear and concise, be certain it answers these questions for the journalist: "Why is this newsworthy? Why will my audience care?"

Understand a journalist's coverage area

Determine which demographic, and therefore, which publication would be interested in your news. Then research which journalists at that publication cover the vertical in which your company or its news would fall. It is well worth researching and making a list of the top five to ten journalists in your industry that you'd like to build relationships with and then move forward, focusing on those journalists every time you have a story to convey.

Read up on the journalists' articles and get a clear understanding of what each of them covers. When you pitch them, showcase that you follow their work and feel that your company fits in with their coverage. However, be sure to differentiate your company from ones that the journalist has already covered.

Customise your pitches

People generally don't like to be part of group emails, and journalists are no exception. When you want a particular person to cover your story, take the time to customise your pitch to be relevant to his or her area and audience. They will notice that you've made the effort to write a thoughtful email and will be more likely to respond.

Avoid simple mistakes

There are a few ways to ensure your story does not get covered. However, they can all be avoided if you use common sense. When I designed my "Secrets to PR" course, my media contacts highlighted these common mistakes made by people attempting PR.

The number one faux pas is getting the journalist's name incorrect. This shows utter incompetence on your part.

Never send a 'new' story to a journalist when it was covered before by a competing publication.

Ensure there is a spokesperson available on the day you send out the press release and days afterwards.

Deliver on your promises – if you advise a journalist that the chief executive will be available for a call at 3pm, ensure he/she is. If not, the journalist is stuck for an interview, and your firm and you are deemed unreliable.

Never complain about a journalist to their superior because your story wasn't included. It is not personal and there is normally a valid reason for it. This is a sure way of getting blacklisted!

Have useful assets available

When you pitch in, make sure you have all assets that a journalist might request ready, such as a company description, images of the product, headshot of the spokesperson, or a case study relevant to the story.

In some cases it may make sense to include these in the initial pitch, but most of the time just mention that you can send over photos and more details if the writer is interested in learning more.

Consider timing with exclusives and embargoes

Timing is essential when pitching news. You want to give the writer enough time to report, but you don't want to pitch the idea too soon that the writer forgets about it by the time your company launches or officially announces the news.

Depending on the publication, most prefer to receive news one week in advance of the official announcement. Where pos-

