



# Public Relations

*Public opinion is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. —Abraham Lincoln*

**P**ublic relations paves the way for you to build and maintain successful relationships with everyone who has or needs to have a connection with your brand. Whatever business you're in, you're dealing with multiple audiences who have the ability to shape perceptions others have about your brand. Public relations programs help you develop solid relationships with the audiences that matter most to your company, shaping positive perceptions of the brands and the organization.

Some of the most successful brands started with public relations campaigns that built the brands through third-party endorsements, media buzz, and consumer word of mouth long before they began their advertising campaigns. Starbucks. The Body Shop. Amazon.com. eBay. Palm. Google. Prozac. Viagra. Botox. Red Bull. Microsoft. Intel. Beanie Babies. The people behind those brands knew that the power of positive endorsements could create a groundswell of brand support. And it did.

Does it really matter what other people say about your organization? You only need to look at the headlines to see what happens when organ-

This chapter was coauthored with veteran public relations practitioner Barbara Hernandez of Hiebing Marketing Communications.

izations fail to protect their reputations. For instance, what are your employees saying about your company? Are they ambassadors for your brand, or are they rumor-mongers who delight in sharing company secrets with family and friends? Do your vendors represent your brand values, or will their bad behaviors reach out and bite you? Are you dreading a call from *60 Minutes*, or are you looking forward to a feature on your newest innovation?

Stockholders? Competitors? Customers? Prospects? The list is endless; yet each of these audiences has power to shape perceptions (negatively or positively) about your company.

Communication of any kind, particularly when influencing purchasing decisions, cannot be effective unless it is believable. This involves not only the means or vehicle, but also the organizational “voice” behind the communications. Corporate executives are only deceiving themselves if they believe that financial performance alone drives stock price. Today, more than ever, effective communications with all audiences is paramount to achieving business success.

## Public Relations Is All About Credibility

Do you believe everything you read in the newspaper or hear on television? Most people do not. In fact, many people believe that advertising messages imply the opposite of what the advertiser intended.

Credibility is about believability, trust, and confidence. Credibility has long been a presumed component of communications. Honesty and integrity used to be the cornerstones for successful companies. But credibility cannot be taken for granted; in fact, it must now be earned, built, and maintained through honesty and integrity.

Without credibility, you might as well save your breath, your money, and your time.

With credibility you can shift attitudes and opinions and obtain the kind of behavior you want to achieve your desired results—whether that’s raising funds, getting volunteers, or trying to raise awareness of your activities.

So, what’s the best way to do public relations effectively? It depends entirely on what you’re trying to achieve: you must choose the correct

tool to do the job and make sure the correct message hits the right target at the right time. It's really about being in the right place at the right time.

This chapter will cover some of the basic public relations elements that every marketer should become familiar with, including:

- Working with the media to tell your story
- Creating effective press materials
- Developing memorable events to maximize publicity opportunities
- Getting started with crisis communications

## **Working with the Media to Tell Your Story**

Media relations is about knowing how to get, and hold, the media's attention.

If handled wisely, media interviews can be valuable opportunities to articulate your brand essence. A media interview and the ensuing story can help you reach a large number of people using a channel that is more credible and far less expensive than paid advertising.

First, you need an objective and a good story to tell. Then you need to find the best way to tell the story. Sometimes figuring out the best way to tell a story is the hardest part, because you need to stand out from a crowd of people who also want to tell stories.

There's an old saying in the media business—"If it bleeds, it leads." If you have "hard news," it's a pretty easy sell. If you have breaking news in a category, you just need to designate the right outlet (print or broadcast) to tell the story.

If you have only "soft news," it's more difficult to interest the media in your story. Media people get stacks of press releases and other information each day from companies and service organizations that believe they have a great story—or at least want the media people to believe so.

Usually the only way to interest media people in telling those stories is by developing relationships with the editorial representatives of your target media. Develop a list of those media people who can help you tell your stories. Go to the meetings they attend and greet them socially. Go meet with them when you don't have a story to sell, to provide them with background on your organization or your resources. Send them periodically information that may help them do their jobs better or at least more

easily—a story in a publication, an interesting fact sheet, or a hot tip on a related topic.

Stay informed and current on the topics they're covering. If they know you're following their work, they're more likely to consider you as a possible resource. And when they call, there are a few tips that will help you get the most from your time with them.

## Preparation for Meeting with the Media

What are reporters looking for?

A great story! And a great sound byte. To become a good media spokesperson, you must understand the media's perspective and be able to give them what they need. If you can do this, you have a better chance of establishing a good relationship. Media people appreciate anyone who is able to provide accurate information in advance of deadlines. And they're most likely to call upon you repeatedly for interviews once you've established a connection.

**Impact.** You must tell a story that appeals to a sizable or important segment of the media's total audience. Don't hesitate to help the reporter understand the mass appeal—and state the same facts during the interview. For example, if one in three consumers could save hundreds of thousands of dollars every year, then say so.

**Accuracy.** Be as specific and succinct as possible. Stick to the facts and make sure you always get them straight. The media look to you, as a spokesperson, for a factual interpretation of an issue. Keep your personal opinions to yourself.

**Promptness.** Reporters work on deadlines that are sometimes only minutes away. When a reporter calls, ask about the deadline. Either honor it or tell the reporter up front that you cannot, so he or she can go elsewhere. Knowing the deadline is also helpful when you need five to 10 minutes to collect your thoughts and review your notes so you can comfortably answer the reporter's questions. It's OK to request permission to call back. Just agree on a time frame—and then make sure you call back within that time frame.

**Important points.** Just because a reporter doesn't ask the right questions doesn't mean you've lost the opportunity to share key information.

Reporters are busy, they may be covering multiple beats, or they may be unfamiliar with the types of questions to ask. Be prepared to transition from the reporter's questions to provide responses and/or statements that convey your key messages.

### **Interview Strategies—in Person or on the Phone**

Keep the following guidelines in mind during interviews, whether for a newspaper, magazine, radio station, or television channel.

**Make your points early.** The beginning of an answer gets the most attention, so put your strongest point first. If you start with a long preamble, you may be interrupted before you reach your important point.

**Be concise.** Summarize the essence of your message. Use simple, hard-hitting phrases that paint a picture for the readers, viewers, or listeners and leave them wanting to know more. You'll also be creating a natural opportunity to share more information pertinent to the topic.

**Watch your language.** Avoid jargon, professional buzzwords, and abbreviations. Although the interviewer may know what you mean, such terms often do not create a clear mental image for the readers, viewers, or listeners. They will tune out if the language is too technical. By using simple, colorful words, you can make your message clear.

**Be positive.** If asked a negative question, do not repeat the negative language in your response. Instead, begin your answer by rephrasing the question in a positive manner and then make your point. For example, if the reporter asks, "Don't you agree that people who begin retirement planning after age 50 will never be able to retire?" you might begin, "Planning can begin at any age ..."

**Simplify statistics and put large numbers into context.** Statistics are hard enough to understand, so make your numbers people-friendly. Large numbers can be difficult for many people to visualize, so put them into a context. Consider making a statement that paints a visual image. For example, rather than simply mentioning that 500 tons of paper is wasted during tax season, you might say that the 500 tons of paper wasted during a typical tax season would fill Yankee Stadium 10 times over.

**Stay "on the record."** There is no such thing as "off the record." The minute the reporter walks through the door or calls you on the telephone, he or she

is already gathering information and impressions that may well be used in the story. Rule of thumb: don't say anything you don't want to see on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*.

**Location, location.** When working with a television reporter, remember that the camera sees everything. You may be making a visual “first impression,” so if you're choosing the location, make sure it's appropriate.

**Don't guess. Always tell the truth.** If you don't know the answer, say so. Then promise to get the information as soon as possible—and keep your agreement. Media people may push for information that doesn't exist. Stick with the information and facts that you have.

If a line of questioning leads into “confidential” territory, simply say, “That is confidential information that I am not at liberty to share.” It is also better to state that information is confidential than to simply say “no comment,” as the reporter and the readers, viewers, or listeners are inclined to believe you are hiding something.

You don't have to tell all you know about an issue, but never lie to media people.

Don't speculate a situation or what others have said or might say. Encourage the reporter to check with the people in question—but take the opportunity to say what you know or transition to your key messages. The reporter may push you for information or speculation; stay focused and on message. And don't bring up any topics that you don't want to discuss or you don't to become the story.

**Be professional.** Be polite and helpful. Don't lose your temper

### NOTHING IS “OFF THE RECORD”

Don't say anything you don't want to see on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*.



There is no such thing as “off the record” or “off camera” or “off mike” when there are reporters around. Everything you say or do is on the record. Everything.

### DON'T GUESS

Don't guess or speculate with a reporter. It's OK to admit you don't know the answer to a question. It's



OK to offer to find out the answer and get back to the reporter later. Make a wrong guess and you risk appearing on the record as either an idiot or a liar.

### MEDIA INTERVIEW TIPS

- Wear professional attire.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Focus on your key points.
- Summarize your key points at the end of the interview.
- Thank the interviewer.
- Follow up with the interviewer to see if you can help with anything else.

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or give smart-aleck responses. And avoid sarcasm. If you don't understand the reporter's questions, politely ask him or her to repeat it or rephrase it.

**Silence is OK.** If there's a lull in the interview, don't yield to the urge to fill it or offer an off-the-cuff comment. The reporter may simply be finish-

ing writing your comment or hoping you'll jump in with an additional comment. Once you've answered a question, wait patiently for the reporter to ask another.

## Creating Effective Press Materials

Two critical public relations tools are the *press release* and the *press advisory*. Each serves a different purpose and will have different impact on the intended media targets.

A *press release* is a written message designed to alert the media to a good story or to serve as the basis for a story. Sometimes media people use the press release verbatim; other times they take the release and use pieces of it for another story that might be in development.

Releases are written in an inverse pyramid style of straight news reporting (who, what, where, when, and why). The most important information should always be in the first paragraph. Historic and contextual information should follow. Few releases should be more than two pages in length. Creative use of language and relevant context are also important to break through the clutter of dozens or hundreds of releases that are put in front of editors each and every day.

Most press releases are sent out immediately following a news event, especially if it's hard news. For soft news, there is often some flexibility, but you should send it as close to the news event as possible.

A *press advisory* is similar to a press release, but it is to advise the media of an upcoming event that may be of interest to readers, viewers, or listeners. Press advisories are often sent to the media prior to press

conferences, trade shows, or consumer events that will help the media tell a more compelling story with multiple resources.

Advisories are typically one page in length. They contain critical information about an upcoming event, including why the media outlet (and its readers, viewers, or listeners) would be interested in information presented at the event. It's important to include specific times, location, and contact information for the day of the event (often cell phone numbers). Many advisories include directions to ensure the media people have all the information they need at their fingertips. It's also a good idea to list the names of the individuals who will be sharing information, including titles and company names.

The best time to send an advisory is two to three days before an event. It's wise to follow up the day before or morning of an event to ensure top-of-mind awareness for busy news directors.

## Developing Memorable Events to Maximize Publicity Opportunities

Events offer many opportunities to gain visibility with the people that you're trying to influence. As the media channels become ever more fragmented, events are becoming more popular as highly targeted tools

### HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

1. Organize your information.
2. Obtain quotes from key spokespersons.
3. Type your release double-spaced.
4. Place contact information on the upper left of the sheet. Include:  
Name, title  
Telephone number, e-mail address
5. Include the release day (e.g., "For Immediate Release" or "EMBARGO — Not for publication or broadcast before 1 p.m., local time, on July 24, 2009").
6. Write "Press release" or "News release" on the top of the page.
7. Write a grabber headline.
8. Include the dateline to begin the release (e.g., Madison, Wis. — July 15, 2009)
9. Write the body of the release.
10. End the release with "####."



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### HOW TO WRITE A PRESS ADVISORY



1. Organize your information.
2. Format appropriately. Advisories are usually single-spaced, with key information in bold or highlighted, and rarely longer than one page.
3. Place contact information on the upper left of the sheet. Include:  
Name, title  
Telephone number, e-mail address
4. Incorporate pertinent information, including:  
Type of event to take place  
Individuals available for the media to talk with  
Photo opportunities  
Specific time of the event  
Address, including directions and parking information
5. Write "Media Advisory" on the top of the page.
6. Write a grabber headline.
7. End the advisory with "###."

### WHEN TO ISSUE A PRESS RELEASE

To send a release or not to send a release, that is the question. And here are the answers.

Yes, send a release ...

- Personnel announcements (hires, promotions, etc.)
- Prestigious awards
- Events where your organization will have a key presence
- Breaking news
- Crisis situations
- Financial information
- Public health and safety issues
- New product/service information
- Obituary of prominent corporate official
- New business opening, building dedication
- New technology
- Industry-specific information (for trade media only)

No, don't bother with a release ...

- Internal announcements that don't impact external audiences
- Product news that is more than a few months old



to make a brand statement with impact. Carefully orchestrated events can also be used to garner media attention.

As in all marketing, it's important to establish a primary goal for the

event. It's also important to select events that are consistent with your positioning and brand values.

The word “event” means that something important is happening and there will be something for the media people to cover. Whether it's an unveiling of a new exhibit at a museum, the dedication of a new building, or an international dignitary in town for a speech, it's important to assess the likelihood that the media people (and ultimately their audiences) will be interested in the subject.

Events that are most likely to gain the attention of the media, in addition to your other key audiences, include:

- Product launches that incorporate audience or celebrity participation
- Competitive testing, especially if it's in a unique product category
- Opportunities for target audiences to learn about topics or issues
- Events tied to local or national charities or causes
- News conferences that provide interesting imagery and stories
- Groundbreaking or dedication ceremonies
- Sporting events, especially with ties to charities
- Community improvement projects
- Seminars and roundtables

The list of events that connect with your target audiences is endless, but those that provide opportunities for additional publicity require some additional attention to detail.

## Getting Started with Crisis Communications

Jay D. Rayburn said, “There are only two kinds of organizations: those who have had crises and those who will.” Responsible businesses understand that their actions and communications, both within the organization and among external audiences, within the first hours and days of a crisis are critical. Most companies facing crises are judged not by the crisis itself, but by their response to it.

The great majority of crises involving organizations occur as a result of their day-to-day operations. This means that it is often possible to prepare managers and leaders to take very specific actions to deal with crises.

The other serious crises are the result of such events as natural disas-

### EIGHT TIPS FOR MEMORABLE EVENTS

Here are eight tips for getting the most publicity bang for your event buck.

1. Establish realistic objectives against a budget.
2. Plan your event to complement other marketing tools (signature, point-of-sale displays, banners, fact sheets, backdrops, etc.).
3. Identify best time of year, week, and day to ensure best attendance by your target audiences. Timing is critical.
4. Use Internet social marketing tools to create buzz and excitement for the event.
5. Select the best spokesperson(s) to share the message with the target audience(s).
6. Prepare contingency plans against all possible issues, including weather or cancellation.
7. Build in evaluation criteria. How will the event be measured? Media coverage? Leads? Attendance?
8. Seek media, business, or charitable partnerships to help you publicize the event.



### SMART



### MANAGING

### GUIDELINES FOR SPOKESPEOPLE IN A CRISIS

In a crisis situation, it is critical to follow all the rules for working with the media that appeared earlier in this chapter. Here are a few additional guidelines to keep in mind if you are responding to a crisis.

1. Tell the truth.
2. Share some facts immediately, even if the news is bad.
3. Act quickly. The first 60 minutes are considered the golden hour—one that may define the entire response.
4. Avoid guessing or making estimates.
5. Express regret if there are injuries to report.
6. Always think before you respond.
7. Stick to approved messages.
8. Provide the media people with what they need to know. Don't bombard them with too many statistics.
9. Use public information officers to assist you in immediate response for health and safety issues.
10. Prepare answers to most likely questions well in advance of an incident.

ters or criminal activity, like product tampering or school shootings. These are highly charged emotional events. Think Katrina or September 11th. These types of events are generally the most difficult to manage and

most damaging to an organization's reputation. Practically speaking, a true crisis is a people-stopper, product-stopper, show-stopper, or reputation-definer; or some combination of all four; and it produces victims (people, animals, living systems).

Communication is at the core of a good crisis management plan. In fact, communication in the early phases of any crisis will go a long way toward protecting the organization's reputation as the situation progresses into recovery.

Figure 12-1 offers a few examples of how to categorize the various crises that can impact your reputation. Planning ahead can go a long way toward minimizing the impact they have on you and your organization.

	Local events that could draw attention to your organization	Operating crises	Non-operating crises	Operating/non-operating combination events	Web-based attacks
Activist action/threats	X		X		X
Arrests of senior executives	X	X			
Customer complaints	X	X	X		
Drug activity	X				
Employee violence/job actions	X	X	X	X	
E-mail/cyber attacks				X	
Product tampering	X	X	X	X	X
Major accident/disaster	X	X	X	X	X
Computer failure/security breach	X	X	X	X	X
Criminal litigation	X		X		
Facility closings/layoffs	X	X	X	X	X
Financial disclosures	X			X	
Data theft/misuse					X
Terrorism	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 12-1. Crisis category examples

## Manager's Checklist for Chapter 12

- ✓ Public relations is everything you say and do.
- ✓ Without credibility, your brand has no voice. Your reputation is in your hands.
- ✓ Public relations efforts must incorporate a dynamic purpose.
- ✓ The media can help you tell your story. What's new? What's different? What's relevant to the ultimate target?
- ✓ Use effective tools like press releases and press advisories to help the media tell a dynamic story.
- ✓ Events can be great opportunities to engage, inspire, and motivate your target groups into action, all while telling a compelling and creative story the media people want to cover.
- ✓ Crises happen every day. Be prepared.