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Local PR

When it comes to public relations, most companies are used to thinking globally, says Chaz Brooks, Director, Chazbrooks Communications, but they should remember to act locally, as well

Since you're reading the Surrey Advertiser, chances are that you are probably well aware of the enormous influence that the regional press can wield, along with the wide variety of information it brings to local residents every week. And yet, when it comes to promoting your own business, how much emphasis do you really put on your own regional media?

Regardless of whether your company is based in Surrey, Shropshire, or Suffolk, local papers, magazines, radio, and television should all form part of your overall public relations campaign. After all, local PR is an effective way to garner community support for your business, build loyalty with a local customer base, raise profile among regional suppliers and peers, and attract employees who are either based in or looking to relocate to your area.

But let's be clear: what constitutes 'local PR'? Basically, a local campaign will focus on a specific geographic subset of your full target audience, typically comprised of media and other key influencers that are based within an hour of your company's headquarters. Having said that, the definition is flexible, and ultimately it is for each company to decide how local to keep any given campaign. A reputable PR agency would certainly be able to help you set a realistic target audience for a local campaign.

One of the many attractions of local PR is that it may – and almost certainly will – reach contacts in your area that you don't even know about. Key decision makers who work in London might live in Surrey or the Home Counties, for example, and read their local press at the weekend, giving you yet another way of reaching your target audience.

For this reason, you shouldn't assume that local PR only refers to a small, niche audience. For companies based in cities like London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, or Cardiff, a well-managed local PR campaign will extend to some of the highest circulation publications in the UK, albeit it with a local angle/approach. Plus, companies should remember that local PR does not always need to be local to their own company; if a company is based in Devon, but has just signed a prestigious new customer in Manchester, then the story may interest the papers in both of these areas.

The difference between local and national PR, however, is about more than just geography. A local PR campaign needs to be handled differently from a national or trade PR strategy for a number of reasons. For a start, the announcements that you make to your local press do not always have to meet the same criteria as those issued to national (and international) publications, in terms of the scale of the news being released.

For example, a regional award or special employee milestone may not be national news, but still may be of interest to your local community.

For this reason, it is a good idea to include a smattering of local news stories as part of your overall PR strategy, and then use these stories to supplement your national press release schedule. However, you still need to be careful in terms of the quality of news that you are turning out, and when choosing who to send it to. If in doubt, ask a professional. Many PR agencies – ours included – can offer advice on this front, and save you a lot of time and frustration in the process.

It is important to research local publications carefully, so that you can see whether a company like yours is likely to be of interest to them. Still not sure? Then ask them. Smaller regional publications will typically have smaller editorial teams, which can make them more approachable. Arranging an informal meeting with the editor of a local paper or magazine will pay dividends over time, as it will give you the chance to highlight your willingness to help them to achieve their editorial goals.

However, make sure to contact local magazines, newspapers, or TV production companies in good time and with consideration for their deadlines; all of these media outlets like to plan in advance, where possible, and so early notice of a company anniversary or a new product launch is very helpful.

Also, whilst getting to know the press, don't forget your local community, as well, since it forms an important part of the 'public' part of your PR campaign. Local fundraising activities can fuel a wide variety press coverage, and also raise funds for a good cause at the same time. Likewise, sponsorship of local sports teams or other community organisations can help to raise public profile with local residents, and can also help to attract media attention, if publicised correctly

For all of these reasons, local PR should be used to complement a national PR campaign in most cases, but even this is not a hard and fast rule. For some companies – and smaller firms in particular – a regional PR programme may be enough to meet your PR objectives, if the majority of your customers are likely to be based in your local area. If this describes your company, then make sure to highlight awards, new personnel, company anniversaries, and big customer wins to your local media. After all, everyone likes to hear good news about their neighbours: make sure to shout about it!

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About ChazBrooks Communications:

ChazBrooks Communications (www.chazb.com) is a Surrey-based PR and marketing communications agency. Offering a targeted service to companies spread across a wide variety of industries, CBC's innovative, creative and highly personalised approach ensures that its clients' interests are promoted through strategic planning, highly effective PR campaigns, and consistent press coverage within their target media.

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