



For immediate Release
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PR Strategy Tips

When planning your PR strategy, it's important to get your messaging right says Chaz Brooks, Director, Chazbrooks Communications, but you also need to identify your audience carefully.

When planning a PR campaign, a lot of attention is given to messaging, the name used to describe exactly what company information is going to be shared with the public, and how it should be presented. This aspect of a PR campaign is extremely important, as it is the only stage of the PR process where the company maintains complete control over its information. Once in the public domain, your information will be open to all sorts of scrutiny, interpretation, and analysis. However, during this internal planning stage, it is possible to agree on which aspects of the company to publicise, and how exactly to do it.

For most companies, the first step towards bringing these key company messages to a wider audience is usually a press release. Most companies go to great lengths to create and distribute press releases that will give the media the information it needs to write a positive story that will show the company in the best possible light. So far, so good – press releases certainly play an important role in any strategic PR campaign – but to limit company messaging to press releases alone is a big (and common) mistake.

Whilst it is important to get your messaging right, you also need to consider your audience: after all, what good is a strong message without a sender and a receiver? Press releases are geared toward a very specific audience, as they are meant to serve a very specific function: to alert the media to any newsworthy events happening within the company. Obvious examples include new customers, new employees, company anniversaries, awards, and so on. Using press releases in this way creates a win-win situation for the publication that chooses to print the story (as it will be able to provide its readers with relevant news), as well as for the company that has prepared the press release (as it will raise its profile by appearing in the press).

However, your key PR messages should – and need to – extend beyond simple press releases aimed at News Editors, especially as most companies will have opinions, ideas, and other information to contribute, even though these views may not constitute hard news. This type of information (let's call it information, instead of news) can be very valuable to a number of distinct audiences that extend far beyond your target list of newspapers and magazines.

The PR goal in this regard is simple: once you have agreed on your company's key messages, you will want to promote them to the biggest audience possible. Working with the media is a superb way of achieving this goal, as the potential audience can be enormous, but just remember that there are other routes, as well.

People often forget that the 'P' in 'PR' stands for public, and that a strong PR strategy should address all of your publics, including (but not limited to) the press. Your opinions, knowledge and experience count, so make sure that your voice is heard by everyone. But how?

The preparation of case studies that will highlight your unique skills and successes is one way. These customer 'success stories' provide an important way of conveying key company messages, as well as the details of your real-world projects. This combination provides near-instant credibility: who better to endorse your company than a satisfied customer? Plus, by inviting customers into the PR process, you will actually forge stronger relationships with them.

Once produced, case studies can be used to target a number of different audiences, including (but again, not limited to) the press. What about business partners, prospective customers, and even existing customers? It is a mistake to forget that this last group – existing customers – forms another important audience for your messaging, since most companies have realised that it is much more cost-effective to sell additional products and services to existing customers, rather than constantly searching for new ones.

To communicate your key messages to your existing customers, a simple sales letter may be enough. A well-written customer letter can contain much of the same information as a press release or case study (which may or may not be published), and can be delivered directly to the door of the people whom you are targeting.

If you are worried, however, that direct mail may be too "hard sell" for your organisation, then consider changing the format, and using the information to create a press release exclusively for your customers. Something not considered newsworthy by the press may still be of interest to your clients, partners, and prospects, and a press release tailored to meet their particular interests can be a great way of communicating this information. At the same time, why not put the press release up on your web site? That way, even if the information isn't published elsewhere, all of your potential audiences will have easy access to the core messages that you have taken the time to create.

The preparation of feature articles like the ones you see in magazines and newspapers can provide another good vehicle for expressing your views. Articles like these help to build credibility by taking a story that is written by a company spokesperson, and then sharing it with your target audience, either as direct mail, in customer packs, or on your web site.

The power of this tactic lies in producing an authoritative, professionally written, independent articles that are directed at a relevant audience: just remember to keep them informative and unbiased, and not to use them as a blatant sales pitch! Subject to this proviso, many editors will be open to hearing your story ideas, as well. Talk to them; find out how you can work together so that both sides achieve their goals. This way, you will come full circle, and a document that you have produced for internal use may end up being published after all.

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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.

Press Contact:

Andrew Ball, Chazbrooks Communications

Tel: 01483 537890 Fax: 01483 537893

Email: andrewb@chazb.com