

Building your personal brand, planning for PR success

Are you a thought leader? To build recognition as a leading voice in your industry, public relations is often key.

In this post, I look at five key questions that you'll need to consider when creating your own PR plan.

What do you want to achieve?

It's unlikely you want media exposure for the hell of it. Chances are, you want your business to benefit in some tangible way, such as an increase in sales, or success in a new market. For this reason, your PR activity will most probably be part of a wider sales and marketing plan.

To stand the best chance of success, you need clear targets: a growth target e.g. 50% growth in two years and a PR target e.g. two pieces of relevant coverage per month. Within that period, have interim targets that you review regularly, adjusting your strategy as necessary along the way.

Who do you want to reach?

Your target audience will of course depend on the overall goals you have chosen. It may seem obvious, but it's not unusual to see businesses simply going after any coverage they can get, without thinking about how it contributes to their goals. If your goals mean you need to reach both industry peers and your customer base, your PR strategy could be two-pronged, with a separate but complimentary plan for each.

How are you going to reach them?

Once you know whom you want to reach, you can create a list of target publications. PR pros generally have the advantage of years of experience combined with journalist directory subscriptions to call on, but if you're starting out, you'll probably be using the internet and word of mouth to figure out which publications are key to your audience.

Of course, the work doesn't end there. The next stage is to get to know and understand your target publications and the people who contribute to them. You need to be getting a sense of each publication's style, the kind of stories they tend to run with and those they don't. This means that when you come to approach them for the first time, you can tailor your pitch.

How do you want to be seen?

This isn't just about the sectors you want to be seen as an expert in, or the skills you want to be recognised for, it's also about what kind of expert you want to be.

Some 'thought leaders' prefer to give very cut and dried advice, some like to be controversial, while other work best when presenting their arguments anecdotally. It helps to have a defining style that is as honest as possible, and to keep your stance consistent, although bear in mind that each publication has its own style requirements, so if you're asked to contribute an article, you will need to adhere to these.

How do you start winning coverage?

If you're reading your target publications faithfully, you should be developing a good sense of what interests them. An important distinction, and one worth reading up on, is that between news about your company and an opinion or advice article. The former would generally be pitched as a press release, the latter as an objective article proposal.

In future posts I'll talk about how to assess the value of a story, how to pitch, and how to make sure you deliver something useful. For now, remember that first impressions are vital, and you can never do too much research and planning before making your first approach.

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