

# How to Develop Your Company's Public Relations

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Far too many businesses, particularly small ones, overlook the value of public relations or, sometimes worse, think they can handle the media and the public without any professional guidance. Write a press release, distribute it through some purchased media list or press release distribution service, and *voila*, you're done!

But PR just doesn't work that way, and failing to have a strategic public relations plan in place can, at best, deny you the opportunity for low-cost brand awareness and lead generation or, at worst, make reporters, bloggers, and media editors some of your worst enemies as you fill their email inboxes with irrelevant "junk."

Don't strike the line item of hiring a PR firm or consultant from your budget in an effort to save a few bucks. An experienced PR professional with solid credentials is worth her weight in gold and will represent a return on investment that has the potential to being much bigger than any advertising you could buy.

So whether you want to land on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* because your target market is investment bankers or you want to gain visibility among avid users of backcountry hiking gear and want your brand landing in front of them on social media sites they frequent, a PR professional can help you get in front of your target market *sans* spending any advertising dollars.

But choosing the right PR professional is key. As you evaluate companies or individuals offering PR services, here are 10 key questions you should ask:

**IN WHAT MEDIA OUTLETS, ONLINE FORUMS, OR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS HAVE YOU OBTAINED COVERAGE FOR PREVIOUS OR EXISTING CLIENTS?**



Make sure the PR firm you hire can show proof of previous results, and the relevance of those results will, of course, vary depending on your market. For some industries, it's critical for their CEO to get an interview with a major TV news outlet; for others, it may be getting a feature article in a print or digital trade journal.

## **HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH MY INDUSTRY, AND HOW WILL YOU GET TO KNOW MY MARKET AND MY COMPANY?**

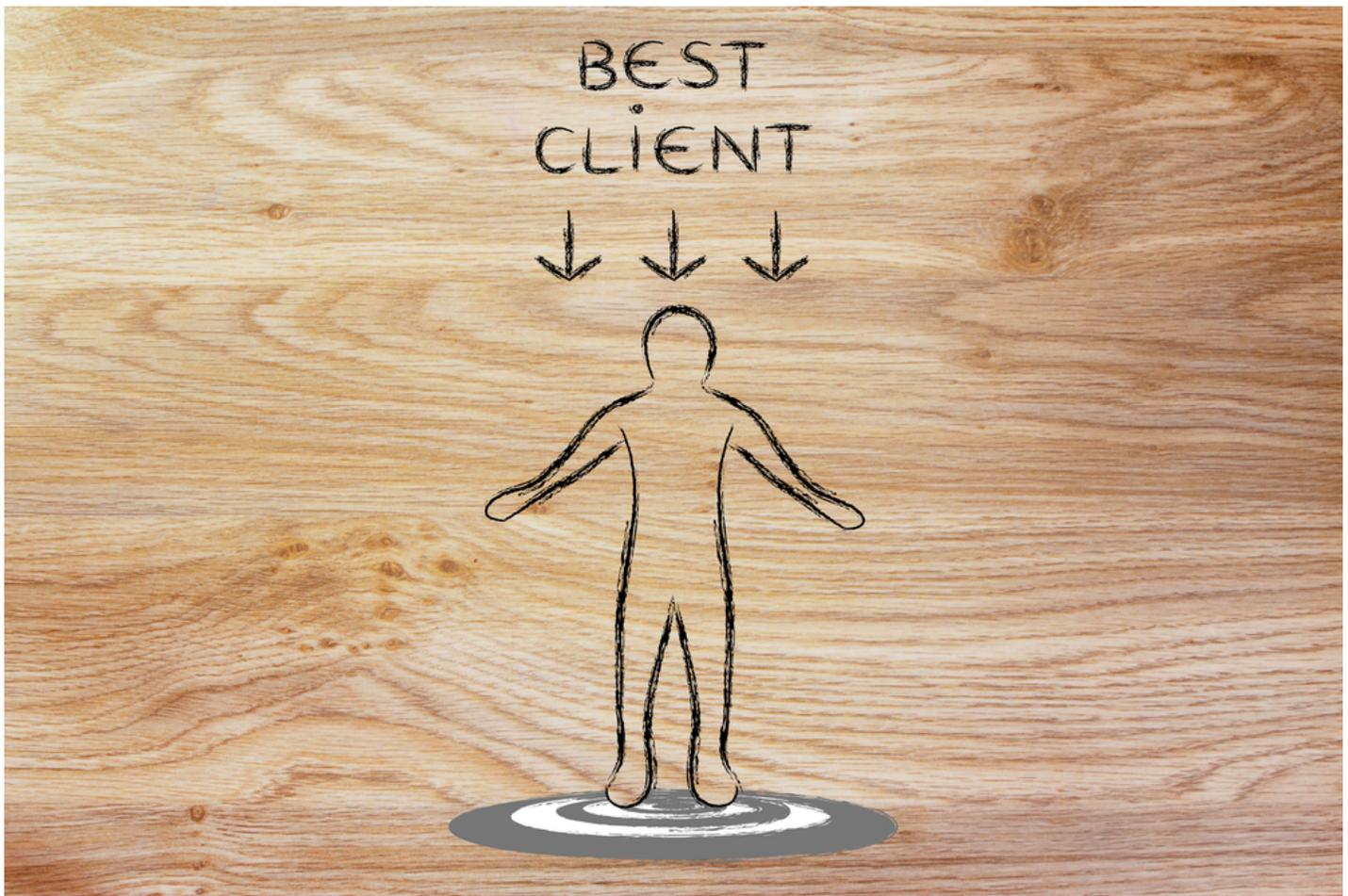
Your prospective PR consultant should ideally have a history of working with clients in markets like yours. A firm that specializes in interior design clients isn't going to be the best if you want to be featured in [Wired](#) magazine, for example. And also be certain the firm you hire is willing to put in the time to get to know your business and the personalities behind it. That's the only way they're going to come up with the kind of storytelling that will get you noticed in the media. Think of your PR firm the way you do your general practitioner, attorney, and therapist—the only way they can really help your business is if they know it deeply!

## **WHO DO YOU THINK MY TARGET MARKET IS?**

Make sure your PR consultant knows who you want to reach and that she has an understanding of your customers' personas—what their interests are, where they spend their time online, what they watch on TV, what kind of purchases they like to make. And also make sure she knows how to *find* this data.

Today's PR firms should have an understanding of data analytics and how to use them to increase the reach of their messaging. Even [Google Analytics](#), which is free, can give you critical information, for example, about what devices your prospects and customers use to access your website and what online media outlets or websites are referring them to you.

## **WHAT FORMS OF MEDIA DO YOU SUGGEST I TARGET, AND HOW WILL YOU TRACK THOSE OUTLETS' IMPACT ON PUBLICITY AND BRAND AWARENESS?**



Your PR consultant's knowledge of your market will also enable her to suggest the best places to target story pitches. You don't want a consultant who superficially reaches out to 200 different media outlets rather than giving deep attention to the three or four most relevant to engaging your target audience. And again, a PR firm making use of analytics tools can determine if a news article or blog post about your company is generating leads.

### **WHAT DOES YOUR MEDIA NETWORK LOOK LIKE, AND HOW WILL YOU APPROACH THAT NETWORK TO TELL MY BUSINESS' STORY?**

The core of PR is relationship building. If the PR consultant you're interviewing doesn't have solid and long-standing professional relationships with key contacts in the media outlets most relevant to your industry, then she's not the one for you.

Likewise, she should also have a good sense of the kinds of stories relevant media outlets want to tell and an ability to frame pitches about your business that match those outlets'

editorial wants and needs. The age of the press release is dead. She should be writing personal emails or making personal phone calls with creative, perfectly angled story ideas for her reporter/writer/blogger contacts.

### **IF THE REPORTER OR WRITER DOESN'T BITE, THEN WHAT?**

This goes back to relationships. A PR pro will follow up gently and politely on the same pitch once. If the reporter doesn't bite, then she backs off and tries a different story angle at a later time. Nothing will ruin your business' relationship with the media faster than if your PR consultant hounds them for coverage.

### **HOW QUICKLY DO YOU TYPICALLY RESPOND TO WRITERS' OR REPORTERS' INQUIRIES?**

This is media outlet dependent, but a pro should make an initial response to press inquiries as quickly as possible, particularly if they're from an online or breaking news outlet where time is of the essence. In those cases, immediate response is critical.

### **WILL YOU PREP ME FOR INTERVIEWS WITH THE MEDIA? HOW?**



Most reporters want to speak directly with company executives for interviews rather than merely talking to your PR contractor. Your consultant should prep you for media interviews by helping you craft a list of key talking points for interviews as well as by running you through questions a reporter will likely ask. make sure your PR consultant is willing to be present for interviews to help steer conversations and assist you with answering tough questions.

### **HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY HANDLE NEGATIVE PRESS OR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS?**

If your PR firm advises you against engaging with the press when there is a crisis or when you've received bad publicity and advises you to respond to inquiries with "no comment," run fast and hard. No response basically relinquishes any control you might be able to exercise over public perception of your business. Honesty and transparency are the best policies, and she should be encouraging you to act accordingly. Strong relationships with

the media (and the public) are founded on *trust*.

## HOW MUCH DO YOU PROMOTE YOUR CLIENTS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA? WHICH PLATFORMS DO YOU USE, AND WHY?

Any PR firm worth its salt today knows the power of social media. In fact, 81 percent of PR professionals recently indicated in an [ING survey](#) that they don't feel they can do their jobs today without social media, which has enabled "word-of-mouth" transfer of information to have a viral and global reach. And few things are as valuable to promoting your brand as its endorsement by family and friends, something which social media can provide on a grand scale.

But not all social media outlets are the same. Your PR firm should encourage you to focus your attention on one or two outlets of the greatest relevance to your target market, so that you have the time to fully engage with your prospects and customers on those outlets. If your target market is middle-aged moms, then you probably want your company active on Facebook; if you're looking to get coverage of your business on [CNN](#) or in [The New York Times](#), then you should have a presence and active engagement on Twitter, where all the journalists hang out.

So you know what questions to ask when interviewing a potential PR consultant. But where do you *find* that consultant? Your first avenue should be through referrals from other executives in your industry or similar industries who are happy with their results. You can also find PR firms through the [Public Relations Society of America](#).

But don't assume a consultant needs to be a PRSA member to be good. The real test of a PR pro is results. Make sure the person you hire has a history of producing them.

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