



Introduction to PR Series

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Introduction

What is Public relations?

Ask 10 different people to define public relations and you will end up with 10 different definitions. Most people assume it to be “something to do with the media”, or “working with people” or “problem solving and dealing with bad news”. It can involve all of these areas but true PR management encompasses many different aspects and issues that all come back to communication.

In 1976, Rex Harlow looked at 472 definitions of public relations and came up with:

“Public Relations is a distinct management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and response to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principle tools.” (Harlow, quoted in Wilcox *et al.* 2003: 7)

Useful, contains many key concepts but describes what PR does rather than what it is.

One of the modern and more simple definitions is:

“Public Relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.” (IPR)

One of the important concepts is that you have control over these issues with planned and sustained activity, rather than being reactive to events happening to you.

Types of PR activity

A rough guide to the main activities in Public Relations

PR Activity	Explanation	Examples
Internal communications	Communicating with employees	In-house newsletter, suggestion boxes.
Corporate PR	Communicating on behalf of whole organisation, not goods or services	Annual reports, conferences, ethical statements, visual identity, images.
Media relations	Communicating with journalists, specialists, editors from local, national, international and trade media, including magazines, newspapers, radio, TV and web-based communication.	Press releases, photo-calls, video news releases, off-the-record briefings, press events.
Business to business	Communicating with other organisations, e.g. suppliers, retailers.	Exhibitions, trade events, newsletters.
Public affairs	Communicating with opinion formers, e.g. local/national politicians, monitoring political environment.	Presentations, briefings, private meetings, public speeches.
Community relations/corporate social responsibility	Communication with local community, elected representatives, head teachers etc.	Exhibitions, presentations, letters, meetings, sports activities and other sponsorship.
Investor relations	Communicating with financial organisations/individuals	Newsletters, briefings, events.
Strategic Communications	ID and analysis of situations, problem and solutions to further organisational goals.	Researching, planning and executing a campaign to improve ethical reputation of organisation.
Issues management	Monitoring political, social, economic and technological environment.	

Crisis Management	Communicating clear messages in fast-changing situation and emergency.	Dealing with media after major rail crash on behalf of police, hospital or local authority.
Copywriting	Writing for different audiences to high standard of literacy.	Press releases, newsletters, web pages, annual reports.
Publications management	Overseeing print/media processes, often using new technology.	Leaflets, internal magazines, websites.
Events management, exhibitions	Organisation of complex events, exhibitions.	Annual conference, press launch, trade shows.

Four Public Relations Models

Grunig and Hunt

James Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984) suggested a useful way of looking at PR based on historical models.

Press Agency/publicity model.

This is probably the model that most people associate with PR. A press agent or publicist seeks to secure coverage for a client and truth is not an absolute requirement. This type of PR is common in showbusiness and the example given on the Grunig and Hunt model was that of P. T. Barnum, and American circus owner in the 1850's. Barnum secured massive coverage for his "Greatest Show on Earth" with all sorts of stunts such as the marriage of a dwarf to a model. He coined the phrase "that there's no such thing as bad publicity".

Many of his techniques such as giving away tickets to journalists and donating part of first night receipts to charity are still used today.

A modern day UK equivalent to Barnum would be Max Clifford. He has as much of a role in keeping clients out of the news as he has in getting them headlines. One of his most memorable coups was the Sun headline "Freddie Starr ate my hamster".

Another example would be the activity surrounding David and Victoria Beckham, which is orchestrated by a number of PR agencies and maintains a carefully planned image. Celebrity PR is increasingly influenced by news content and magazines like OK and Hello.

Public Information Model

This kind of communication provides information to people and accuracy is essential. This model does not seek to influence or change attitudes and is usually one-way communication.

The early example of this model was a business journalist called Ivy Leadbetter Lee at the turn of the twentieth century. Lee felt that business secrecy was against the public interest and poor policy and set up an agency along these lines. Early advice to a rail company to tell the truth about an accident led to better customer loyalty and trust and an increase in business. Le also had a long-standing relationship with the Rockefeller family, publicising their charitable work and countering accusations of greedy capitalism. His reputation was destroyed when he tried to advise the Nazi Government how to improve German-American relationships.

Current examples of this model are local and national government public information initiatives and transparency of information campaigns by large business. Much of the advance in this area has come from the ease with which information can be made available over the internet.

Two-way asymmetric PR

This model introduces the concept of feedback or two-way communication. It is called asymmetric however, as the intended result is a change in the audience attitude rather than a change in the organisation's practices. It can be described as persuasive communication and an example would be a health campaign.

An early practitioner of the art of asymmetric PR was Edward L. Bernays, an advisor to the US government at the time of the First World War. The wartime propaganda encouraged the American people to purchase war bonds, save food, invest in Liberty Bonds and join up.

Today, propaganda is seen as "unhealthy". On the other hand, examples of positive and persuasive communication could be public health campaigns such as reducing smoking or obesity.

Two-way symmetric PR

This model is sometimes described as the ideal of public relations. The ideal is an equality of communication sadly not often found in real life. The concept is that each party is prepared to alter their behaviour in order to accommodate the needs of the other.

There are few if any historical examples of two-way symmetric PR, the best example of the communication model probably being between a happily married couple celebrating their golden wedding anniversary!

The model is more of a taught concept but hopefully certain cultural changes are forcing part adoption. A couple of recent examples might be the reaction of supermarkets to public concerns over genetically modified crops, and the recent moves by Tesco to pay more for milk to producers. Another leader in the field is the Co-operative movement with the Fair Trade range of products.

Questions for discussion.

1. How would you fit the following examples into Grunig and Hunt's models:
 - a. Campaign to reduce teenage pregnancy
 - b. Launch of a new car
 - c. Leaflet giving details of new bank charges
 - d. Invitation to discuss plans for a new supermarket
2. Grunig and Hunt say that two-way symmetric communication is the ideal model. Do you think this is possible? Is persuasion a dirty word?
3. Why do you think that Public Relations is so difficult to define? What is your definition of it in your circumstances?
4. The launch of a Hollywood children's movie might involve: billboard posters; images on packets of crisps, sweets and lunchboxes; the organisation of a premier in the West End of London; guest appearances by stars on children's TV shows and articles about the use of special effects in film or general media. Which of these are PR? What are the others?
5. How does the history of PR help explain the reputation of the industry today? What do you think would improve the standing of PR in society.

Writing a Press Release

There are special requirements when writing a press release for hopeful publication in a magazine, newspaper or trade journal. If the basic rules are not followed, then the effort will end up in the bin. As the objective is to get the information published, it make sense to try to follow the rules.

When you send out a press release, you want it to be published. Remember that the media organisation that you are sending it to probably gets hundreds a day, all vying with each other for attention. If the release is wrongly targeted or lacks news value then it is worse than useless. A press release for a new type of shelving or for a new breakfast cereal will get little response from a national newspaper or the TV station.

Targeting and news value are critical factors. So is timing. Popular nations will look for a "human" storyline with the accent on people and not things. Broadsheets need intellectual items and specialist papers the subjects that they normally cover.

Never telephone editors to ask if they are going to use your story, worse still is asking why they didn't. Your piece of paper is one of hundreds on the desk and they will be in touch fast if they want to use yours. Here are the main points to watch.

Headings

The release should be clearly identifiable as a communication for publication or broadcast, and should carry a heading such as Press Release, Press Information etc. Such headings should be in capitals or upper and lower case of not less than 18pt so as to stand out from the mass of other material on sub-editors' desks.

Essential Information

Put the full name and address of the issuing organisation, with telephone, fax numbers and e-mail/website addresses (if there is one) in a prominent position. Type the date of issue. Give a contact name for more information, together with his or her contact numbers etc. Always include an out-of -hours number since many journalists are still working well outside of normal office hours.

Titles

The title of the release should be typed in bold capitals but not underlined. It should say in as few words as possible what the release is about, and should not if possible, run to more than one line. Don't write a too-clever-by-half headline or facetious heading because it won't work.

Some examples of ideal titles:

BLUNKETT CUTS RED TAPE
WALKERS CRISPS KICK OFF SCOTTISH SPORTING HEROES PROMOTION
NEW PREMISES HERALD A NEW IMAGE FOR BPIF
VIRGIN PLUGS INTO THE ENERGY MARKET
CONSUMER REALITY EXPOSES FINANCIAL SERVICES MYTHS

Content

Be brief and factual and keep sentences short. Two sentences per paragraph will usually be enough (and often one will do).

The opening paragraph should contain the essence of the story and display the news. Here you must answer the who/when/where questions in the same way that a reporter is required to do. For example, if a company chairman has made a statement, give his name and position, the date (if you say today, put the date in brackets after so that there can be no mistake), where the statement was made, and, if at a hotel, name it. A trick here is to put the last two details in a second paragraph saying that Mr So and So was speaking on (date) and (where) to save cluttering up the first paragraph with detail that might get in the way of the story.

Following paragraphs should expand on the story and try not to let details run onto a second page. The sub-editors job is much easier if you give the main point, fill in with detail and end with the least important point. Your release can then be edited down with far less trouble. If you wish to make a comment, put it in as a quote from someone in the organisation. Just stick to facts and let them stand on their own. If there is technical data or the wording of a speech, supply them as an attachment.

Layout and Style

The copy must be typed double-spaced (although this is not essential for on-line releases. The reason for this is to allow the sub-editor to make changes easily.

Put at least a couple of lines between the heading and the first paragraph and extra space between paragraphs.

Do not underline any of the copy. This is the universal mark for printers to set copy in italics. Do not set any of the type in italics. If the title of a film or book is given within the text, put it in single quotes.

Type on one side of white A4 sheet, and if there is a continuation sheet, type more at the foot of the page. Do not break a paragraph at the end of a page.

Leave a decent margin at each side for notes and do not justify text.

Use double quotes for direct quotations (the actual words spoken); this is standard newspaper style.

At the close of the copy, type END or ENDS in capitals.

If there are special notes for editors put these under a side heading 'Note to Editor'. If possible, give a word count as this makes it easy for the sub-editor to work out how much space the release will take up.

Embargoes

Journalists dislike embargoes and you should avoid them if possible. If you use them, make the reason clear and simple. E.g. an award ceremony with the release issued early to allow time for research.

Issuing the release

Timing is fairly critical. If you are mailing, make sure that the postage time is carefully worked out. It is better to fax or use a messenger. E-mail is popular but most journalists have to sift hundreds a day. A telephone call to say something is on the way may work, if so continue to do it, if not then don't bother. At the end of the day, there is little to beat hard copy on paper.

Is it news?

There is no point in sending out something that is not news. It is a waste of everyone's time. You will only annoy the journalist if you do, and any hard work in establishing relationships will be undone.

Study Newspaper Style

Look at newspapers to see how journalists write, whether broadsheet or tabloid, extremes of style determine the way in which different newspapers approach different stories. Write to catch the eye of the reader in the same way that the journalist does. One thing is certain: a new story or one that has not been published has got news value, and if it is exclusive, it has an even better chance of making it to publication.

No puffs please.

Blatant advertising messages stand no chance and ruin your reputation with an editor. 'Puffs' as they are known, should be paid up adverts. A new product or service however can be a press release to specialist press in your industry sector.

Releases to specialist press

If you write a release containing technical information, be careful not to go over the head of the reader. Few technical journalists are experts and if you provide copy that is too highbrow or difficult, it will simply not get published. Provide copy that needs little or no editing and you will be far more successful in achieving the aim of publication.

Only good stories will reach news desks

Most releases go by e-mail to newspapers and broadcasting outlets these days. This means that copy tasters are faced with thousands of stories every day. Only the newsworthy ones that have a human or perhaps financial angle will be passed to the news desk.

Freelance journalists prefer hard copy as they work from home and prefer not to clog up the inbox.

Remember: if the story is a good one, it will have a chance, and on a slow news day, it has an even better one.

Public Relations – The Basics

Introduction

PR or public relations means getting people to talk and think about your business in a positive way. It can be a vital weapon in your business' armoury.

It's a way to get **good publicity** without advertising. And if there's ever a problem facing your business it helps you deal with it effectively.

You can use PR to attract and impress people such as customers, suppliers, distributors, banks and other lenders, potential employees and possible business partners.

And PR isn't just for big companies using national newspapers or television. Even the smallest business can use **publicity opportunities** to catch the eye of its local audience.

This guide will help you generate positive media coverage and identify the media you should target. It will also tell you how you can go about writing a press release and give you tips for dealing with bad publicity.

Subjects covered in this guide

- Introduction
- Identifying your target media
- How to get media coverage
- Building contacts with the media
- Dealing with bad publicity
- Should I use a PR agency?
- Writing an effective press release
- Get coverage for your press release
- Sample press release for a local newspaper
- Non-media PR

Identifying your target media

The first step to getting media coverage for your business is to decide on your **target outlets**. Ask yourself who will be interested in your story:

- your local paid-for newspaper
- your local free paper
- your local council newspaper
- the free county magazine
- local radio and television
- trade, technical and professional magazines covering your type of business or expertise
- national newspapers
- consumer and lifestyle magazines
- national radio and television - but usually your local station will feed your story to the network if it's good enough

Get details of publications in **directories** such as BRAD, Willings Press Guide or Hollis Press & Public Relations Annual - have a look in your local reference library.

How to get media coverage

You could send out press releases on the same story to a number of outlets. But you'll need to tailor each release to the audience.

For example, a small engineering company wins a big Italian order with a new manufacturing technique which it uses under licence.

The press release for the trade and **technical press** highlights the success of the technique and the company's use of innovation. The press release for the **local paper** is about increased employment and the prestige for the town in beating foreign competition.

There are many natural PR opportunities:

- a new product launch
- new premises
- new members of staff
- an important new order
- involvement with a charity
- significant anniversaries, eg your 1,000th customer
- business partnerships

And you can create publicity opportunities:

- submit articles for publication
- commission a survey on serious or fun issues and send the results to the press
- suggest a newspaper competition with your product as the prize
- give expert opinions and volunteer quotes
- send letters to the editor on business topics using your business address

Building contacts with the media

News editors decide on the news stories written by their reporters. Contact the news editor with a story, particularly if you don't know any of the reporters.

The features editor decides on the longer analytical or background articles. The press release is one of the key points of contact with news and features editors.

Introduce yourself to editors of local papers and trade magazines - perhaps at a reception or an organisation's annual dinner.

Put journalists on your mailing list for background information they may find interesting, such as your business' newsletter.

Note that journalists work to tight deadlines - find out the deadline and supply your story well in advance. If a journalist is trying to get hold of you - respond quickly before their deadline.

Journalists' news agendas are different from yours. Provide what's interesting to them and their audience, not to you. But they're always looking to fill space. Putting facts down in writing - including quotes from you - helps before a conversation with them. **Emails** are good for cutting and pasting.

Dealing with bad publicity

Disgruntled employees and customers, crises and accidents can all generate negative news stories.

Make sure employees know who to refer journalists' enquiries to and ensure that only employees who are authorised to do so respond to enquiries.

If a journalist contacts you, check their deadline, carefully construct a written statement, and respond in time. It doesn't look good if you refuse to comment.

Show you've done everything you reasonably could to correct any problems.

If there's a tricky **follow-up question**, take time to put your case forward and restate it by written communication if possible.

It's not a good idea to go off the record when there's bad news. **Answer truthfully** the questions put to you. But it's not your job to volunteer every detail.

Be aware that any response you give may carry legal implications. In the worst case scenarios it might be worth seeking legal advice before making any response or making statements for the media through your legal representatives.

Should I use a PR agency?

There are no hard-and-fast rules for when small companies should call in outside PR help. Take into account:

- How **confident** and successful you are at managing your PR and dealing with journalists
- Whether you're involved in a crucial **product launch** or sales expansion that might be helped by using an agency for, say, six months
- Whether you face a potentially controversial or sensitive issue, or are involved in an industry that's in the media spotlight
- How much time it's taking
- how much it's costing you

Consider using a PR agency if your annual PR budget is greater than £10,000-£15,000. For smaller one-off projects, you can employ **freelance PR agents**. Day rates can range from £300 upwards.

Choose an agency with relevant experience and contacts. Getting publicity in national newspapers, television and radio is extremely difficult without a suitable agency.

Provide a **clear briefing** on what you're trying to achieve. Explain what makes your company and products different.

Plan how the PR agency will work with your other promotional activities. Be wary of agencies that see PR as the answer to everything, with no thought of alternatives such as advertising.

Is it worth it?

Always get quotes on how much you'll be paying and what you'll get for your money.

- How much will it cost to write a press release?
- Who'll be doing follow-ups and answering queries arising from the release - you or the agency? Are you getting 24-hour cover or just an event- or press release-based service?
- Like your business, PR agencies will have fixed costs to cover. Decide how much actual PR output you're getting for your money.
- Assess how interested the agency is in your business, and whether it understands it.

Make sure you establish clear objectives from the outset and communicate these to the agency. At the end of the campaign you can compare your results against these original objectives to assess whether you have obtained good value for your outlay.

Writing an effective press release

What's important to you may not grab the news organisation. They may be less interested in the product than the fact that it brings environmental benefits, for instance.

News is typically:

- controversial, new or surprising
- amusing or funny
- directly important to the audience
- confidential or secret - until now
- linked with famous people or places
- linked with conflict, romance or mystery

Here's what you do

Write "Press release" on company-headed paper. Then write the date. Put a **headline** on the left - six or seven words in bold type. The headline will be active, understandable, convey the main point of the story and make people want to read on.

The first paragraph, the introduction, expands on the headline. It concentrates on what has happened or will happen, who is involved and where. It conveys the whole story in a nutshell and its interest and relevance to the readership. It would still be understandable if the rest of the press release was deleted.

Tailor the introduction to the publication - a trade journal is attracted by what a new product can do for its business audience, a local paper is interested in local jobs, prestige or human interest.

Subsequent paragraphs give the **how** and **why** - the explanation and development of the terse first paragraph or two - and the **when**.

A quote from you is essential.

Keep everything tight and clear, with short sentences. Don't make it sound like an ad. Write the release like a newspaper report. Refer to your business in the **third person** - "it" not "we".

Write "end" and then name yourself as a contact, with phone and email details. A "note to editors" can give background or more detailed information.

If the editor is working to a tight deadline, or your news story has just broken, it will be quicker to get the editor's email address and send it directly.

Get coverage for your press release

Once you've written your press release, your aim is to get it covered by your **target media organisations**.

Find out their **copy deadlines**. Send the release to the editor, news and features editors and possibly the reporter who might write the piece.

Check if they'd like an email version. Newspapers and magazines might just cut and paste most of a well-written release.

Check the release has been received and if further information is needed.

Photographs can boost your chances of getting your story covered. Try to include at least a head-and-shoulders shot of the person quoted in the press release. Or get an agency to take a picture of the person at its premises. If you're lucky, a publication might send along a photographer.

See the page in this guide containing a **sample press release for a local newspaper**.

Sample press release for a local newspaper – what do you think?

Anytown Construction Ltd
20 Grove Road, Anytown TZ10 5ZT

Tel 01234 567890
email pr@anytown.co.uk
Fax 01234 098765

Press release 01/01/05

Anytown firm builds business on email

Anytown Construction is using a new email and telephone system to tackle the problem of contacting your builder whilst a job is in progress.

Anytown Construction is handing out a special email address to all new and prospective customers. They can use it to query progress and the date and time of work, and send in comments, suggestions and requests for changes in the work being carried out.

And for those people who don't have email at home or work, Anytown Construction has set up a phone and voicemail service to take messages and requests.

"Customers have a right to know exactly what's going on. They need a quick answer and they need to get it from the boss," said Anytown Construction managing director Andy Peters.

The service is aimed at both private and commercial clients.

"Builders have often been blamed, sometimes unfairly, for bad communications. That was often because they were out and about on various sites and you couldn't expect the employees working on your project to know all the answers.

"But you haven't got the same excuses with modern technology. Mobile phones and email have transformed the picture. I can now be contacted anywhere and give an instant answer," Peters added.

The new service has meant extra investment by Anytown Construction - and a new member of staff to manage the service. Lisa Wright, 24, who lives in Anytown, has joined the company to take on the new role of customer service manager.

"Customer satisfaction is our priority and I'm confident this service will more than pay for itself," said Peters.

And the benefits of technology to the building trade don't stop with email. Peters is now working on an Anytown Construction website which will have everything from pictures of completed projects to advice on planning your loft conversion or new offices.

end

Contact: Andy Peters at [tel number, land and mobile - email address].

Notes to Editors:

1. Photographs of Andy Peters and Lisa Wright enclosed.
2. This press release can be sent to you by email.
3. Anytown Construction Ltd is a family firm founded in 1964. It is involved in housing and commercial building in the county. Its most recent large project was the Lansdowne Community Hall in Derwent Drive, Anytown.

Re-write this and improve it.

Non-media PR

Don't see your PR as just something that's directly targeted at the media. You can **influence and impress** people - including the media - in many ways, not just by getting a mention in a news story.

Try out some of these ideas for raising awareness of your business in your locality or your industry sector using non-media and activity-based PR. For example, you could try:

- Giving talks on business and other subjects to organisations, schools and colleges
- Joining an organisation and becoming a figurehead, so that its publicity brings you publicity
- Sponsoring events such as a school fête or exhibition
- Sponsoring a local sports team
- Organising competitions, initiatives and surveys, possibly in cooperation with a news organisation
- Meeting and talking to opinion-formers, journalists and other business people and leaders, just being seen around
- Sending letters to the editor on local or industry issues - but don't become a constant whinger
- Helping with, or donating products to, charity
- Teaming up with suppliers or customers to work on attracting joint publicity