The Power of Public Relations
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PART ONE: WHAT’S PUBLIC RELATIONS WITHOUT STRATEGY?

A solid public relations plan is one of the most versatile assets available to brands. It can catapult a new company into the public spotlight or bring an established business back from the brink of death. You can use it to improve your image, raise brand awareness, and even drive sales. However, successful PR requires an insightful strategy to be effective. Otherwise, you’re just wasting your time and aggravating members of the media.

Five questions to ask when setting up a public relations strategy:

1. What business goals can I meet with a PR strategy?
2. Who is my target audience(s)?
3. Who can effectively plan, create, and manage my PR?
4. How much can I invest in my brand's PR?
5. Which media channels are optimal for my brand?

A solid PR plan is an ideal way to add credibility to your brand by delivering relevant information through trusted media resources.

Mai-Li Le, Senior Digital Design Strategist
For the most part, PR is all about working with outside channels of communication to distribute your brand’s story to mass audiences. In the old days, that meant sending press releases to newspapers, radio, and TV—but things are changing. Today there are more ways to distribute your message than ever. Here are a few ways to make an impact:

**Make friends with the media**
Having a person on the inside is never a bad idea. It pays to take the time to build relationships with media contacts throughout your area. As a result, media professionals will have more respect for the story ideas that you pitch and trust that you won’t provide bad content. In the end, it will be much easier for your content to find a home.

**Pay attention to your target audience**
Developing a strategy will help you determine the best media outlets to reach the people who are interested in your product, service, or event. Pay attention to who reads, views, or listens to what and make sure your choice of outlet aligns with your research. Otherwise you could succeed in reaching millions of people, they just won’t care about your message in the slightest.

**Find your own way**
In the old days, PR pros relied on established mass media outlets to reach a large number of people. Today, websites, social networks, and other digital avenues allow you to reach just as many (if not more) individuals at the drop of a hat. Be sure to post your stories to platforms that make sense, even if they’re not expected. You never know who will see them, share them, and make them an international sensation.

**PR is not a sales pitch**
There are appropriate opportunities to persuade people with sales speak—public relations is not one of them. The most successful PR efforts rely on facts and storytelling to get the point across. Furthermore, news outlets are much more likely to pick up a story that seems objective than an advertisement dressed up as something worthwhile.
Public relations doesn’t always require paid placement, which can be invaluable for a business. However, a successful strategy will still call for a commitment of time and resources. No fears, though; a business can often save advertising money, while gaining media exposure that holds 3x times the monetary value of traditional paid advertising. What does this mean for you? Freed up resources that can be used to directly generate revenue.

Four ways to drive revenue:

1. **Make your message newsworthy**
   Not every move that your brand makes is worth talking about. Be selective and avoid spamming media contacts and readers with unnecessary pitches.

2. **Be specific**
   Have a clear objective for each and every PR effort. Trying to squeeze too many messages into one attempt will dilute your final pitch and cause confusion.

3. **Integrate communications**
   Don’t silo your PR efforts. Connect your public relations efforts with other outlets to improve the chances of your story being picked up or going viral.

4. **Finish strong**
   Be sure to have a plan in place for people who see your message and take action. Put a dedicated contact or point person in place to take care of any necessary follow-up actions.

Adding a strategic and professional aesthetic to your PR pieces will reinforce your brand’s visual hierarchy.

Paul Dunbar, Design Strategist
Success can mean many different things to many different brands. For some, it’s all about brand awareness or image control while others make revenue their PR priority. Taking some time to evaluate the ways that a strategic public relations plan can make your business more successful is vital.

**Key ingredients to measuring success:**

**Set goals that are relevant and measurable**
Public relations goals may not be as simple or obvious as other marketing channels—that doesn't mean you should ignore them. Set some basic benchmarks such as the number of stories pitched, media contacts made, stories published, and assign monetary values to your published exposure. That way, you can track your efforts and measure your impact on multiple fronts.

**Keep detailed records**
Make sure you keep an organized file of your press clippings categorized by year, campaign, or whatever makes sense to your business. Whether you choose to digitally archive or save your clippings in a physical form, having access to a history of coverage of your brand may help you out in the future.

**Track possible leads**
In the end, PR is about more than telling stories—it should inspire action. Measure your public relations impact by tracking leads that are a result of your efforts. Doing so will help you determine how many leads are converting as a result of your PR efforts. From there, you can get a clear picture of your return on investment.

**Evaluate and reevaluate**
Monitor your PR efforts at regular intervals; doing so will help you make adjustments and capitalize on opportunities as they present themselves. You don’t need to check in daily, but you should take a look on a regular basis.

**Automate your PR efforts**
There are a number of effective PR tools available that can help you save time and money. Some applications allow you to post your press releases to databases while others simplify the search for relevant media contacts. Prioritize your goals and aid their success by choosing tools that fit your brand strategy.
A successful public relations plan requires maintenance and monitoring to remain a viable marketing solution. That means certain tools and resources should be in place from the get-go to ensure that your PR plan doesn’t get left behind or neglected. While every brand will have needs specific to its strategy, there are some pieces that every business can benefit from.

Public relations toolbox must-haves:

**Overall marketing strategy**
Public relations is one small piece of a very large marketing puzzle. First thing’s first—align your PR efforts with the big picture to ensure that all strategies are working in harmony.

**Wordsmiths**
A team of well-versed copywriters and content strategists are necessary for the execution of any and all public relations efforts. Arm them with any information necessary to make the most of your outreach.

**Graphic designers**
A talented team of designers can add to the visual presence of your PR efforts and maintain a consistent professional image across multiple platforms and media.

**A detailed PR plan**
Set up a detailed timeline that outlines when, where, and how your public relations efforts will take place. Because stories often have to be pitched months in advance, make sure it tracks with the editorial calendars of your ideal media outlets.

**Digital tools**
Online tools such as Vocus and Cision will make your PR efforts much more efficient, saving you time and money. Also, keep track of your activities using a digital spreadsheet so you can stay organized.
Connect with MM Brand Agency to develop a strategic PR approach.