



57 Getting free PR

What is PR?

PR (short for Public Relations) is what you do to promote your business directly with the general public. You can do this through channels such as publishing articles on and off line, getting TV and Radio interviews, publishing press releases, giving talks, participating in charity events, getting involved with sponsorship and more. PR is about adding something to people's lives and in return you get good publicity.

There are many ways in which you can develop your own PR machine and in doing so get a lot of FREE positive publicity for your business.

There are publications, broadcast media, newsletters, newswires and websites within your marketplace that are always hungry for information and ideas.

Getting free PR is much easier than you think.

Why is PR important?

PR is a vital piece of the marketing mix and especially powerful as it provides a natural third party endorsement for you personally and your products and services. It is your opportunity to position yourself as the industry expert, and get your name in the public eye. There are so many good opportunities out there that becoming good at getting PR can save you a lot in advertising spend.

Your challenge

You will need to be selective. It could be very easy to spend all your time at it. The best PR for you will be that which targets your potential customers and gives you the chance to promote your business alongside it. You will need to build strong relationships with the editors and journalists of all publications and media channels relevant to your industry and marketplace. You will need to sell your ideas just as you would your products and services to a customer. Editors and journalists are interested in their readers and what they might find interesting and of value. Your challenge will be to present your ideas in a way that will appeal to their interests, not yours. PR is non-commercial. It is a softer way of communicating the great value you have to offer.

How to be successful at getting free PR

Articles

The first thing that you can do is find out what the editors of all the industry press and websites are looking for.

They all produce regular feature lists and article writing guidance notes that explain exactly what you need to write in order to fulfil their criteria. It is then just a matter of adhering to their deadlines and sending in your articles. It always helps to have built up a relationship with the editor beforehand, so have a conversation about the article and angle you are planning, if possible. Offering an article series is a good way to build a continuous relationship with both editors and readers. An article series will really give you the chance to build a strong profile over time.

Suggesting an idea that is not in a feature plan is also a good approach. Find out what is a hot topic at the moment and then check out the publication article archives to see what has already been written on the subject to date. You then need to come up with a unique angle or something that will inspire readers.

Many magazines are interested in information that is backed up by some solid research data. If you are interested in generating some PR about a subject that you want the market to pay attention to, running a research survey and then offering the results as an article of interest is a very good way of achieving your goal.

TV

It is also possible to get opportunities to promote yourself on TV. Producers are always looking for new angles and ideas to boost audiences. Breakfast shows, national quizzes, central or local news, specialist shows and interviews could all be interested in your input and ideas. If you can provide something creative that would be of interest to the general public, and you can position yourself as the expert, then you would have a very good chance of getting an opportunity.

Think about the programmes on television recently where they have used an expert coach, consultant, trainer, or psychologist. The *National Quiz* shows, *Life Laundry*, *Fame Academy*, *Ten Years Younger*, a host of reality shows, *The Apprentice*, breakfast TV and more. Making contact with programme researchers will enable you to get inside information about the various shows which are being planned and, potentially, where the opportunities might be for you to help.

Radio

Radio interviews or call-in shows can provide another good PR opportunity. Contact the producers and find out what they have planned and if they are looking to interview any experts. You could suggest a call-in programme where listeners call in with questions that you answer live on air. Have a listen to some of the different radio stations and some of their live shows. This exercise might stimulate some ideas.

People care about what's important to them – things that will improve their life, improve their business, make money, save money, entertain them, fulfil them and protect them. Public relations will work for you as long as you keep your focus on what will benefit people's lives or businesses the most.

Attract the press yourself

If you are creative you can think about a high profile stunt or competition you could run in your local market area that would attract some press attention.

CREATE YOUR OWN PR MACHINE – SPECIAL RESPONSE CHECKLIST

- ▶ Consider your PR goals – what do you want to achieve?
- ▶ Consider the resources you have to manage your PR. Who can research the opportunities? Who can write articles? Who can take responsibility for placing them?
- ▶ What are the publications that your target audience read?
- ▶ What are the websites that they use?
- ▶ Where do they go to find out about potential suppliers in your marketplace?
- ▶ Where would you like to see your articles published?
- ▶ Consider what you could write about that would offer value to your target audience.
- ▶ How could you title or angle your articles to gain the attention of your target audience? 'How to' titles or lists of tips are popular ways to get readers' attention with the promise of value.
- ▶ How could you package the articles in a series?
- ▶ How could you position yourself as the expert? Make sure that you promote yourself well as the author of the article or participant in the PR exercise. Mention your position, organisation, qualifications (if relevant) and say something that refers to your expertise in the subject that you are referring to.
- ▶ How could you capitalise on any PR opportunity you get?
- ▶ Have you got any good ideas for an effective PR stunt?

How to use this information

To make this work, you will need to take some time out to plan properly and investigate your PR campaign. You will also need to measure and monitor your return on investment: this will be the value you place on your own time. To do this well takes as much focus and thought as any other element of your business marketing plan. Once you have got the PR machine running and are happily generating a good return you will be glad that you took action.

Think PR and become more famous for what you do