



portfolio
Marketing professionals

PR- A Practical Guide for Accountants

Contents

1. The Concept

2. The Mechanics

3. Quick Win Checklist

4. The Template

PR- A Practical Guide for Accountants

1

The Concept

Public Relations (PR) is a simple concept but devilishly tricky to get right. Known to some as the 'Dark Art' of marketing, as it is so shrouded in myth, PR is a very useful tactic to master.

Let's start by getting our expectations in check; reading this report will not make you a PR genius, but it will set you off in the right direction with a few tricks in your knapsack.

The goal of PR is to place news in the editorial of online, offline and broadcast media, for free. The alternative is paying for an advert. There is nothing wrong with paying for advertising, but it is expensive, especially when you wish to advertise across several titles and media. The beauty of PR is that one (free) press release has the potential to be placed in countless forms with one hit.

The second major benefit is psychological. Local media is implicitly trusted. Niche, trade and industrial publications are respected for their subject knowledge. National newspapers inspire loyalty in the readership through editorial content and political persuasion. Wherever you place your PR articles, your company name and message will strike more resonantly simply by virtue of having your story blended into the editorial.

To elaborate, marketing in general can be broadly categorised by two methodologies, Inbound Marketing and Outbound Marketing. The latter is traditionally the most prevalent. Telesales, advertising, direct mail, email blasts, door knocking and networking are examples of Outbound Marketing. Ultimately, you go and find the client. Nothing wrong with any of these methods, they have their costs and will put some bums on seats.

Inbound Marketing is a far more cultured beast, requiring thought, industrial knowledge and guile for effect.

To put it simply, with Outbound Marketing, you commit to finding your clients; with Inbound Marketing, you encourage the right clients to find you.

PR is a very powerful tactic within the sphere of Inbound Marketing.

Inbound Marketing has been growing in power and ubiquity. The reasons for this shift are many. Marketing and technological evolution has created a paradox for Outbound Marketing. There are more channels to find your clients than at any point in history. Clients are more visible, more exposed and consequently more jaded, more cynical, more sensitive, seek better protection and erect bigger barriers, making Outbound Marketing more strategic, more expensive and less predictable.

Telephone Preference, Junk Mail, iron secretaries and cold shoulders be the friends of Outbound Marketeters.

Inbound Marketing has only benefited from the problems above as it is a method that earns respect and loyalty first and foremost.

Even better, your leads will knock on your door ready to buy. They already know you, they already like you and they would like to buy in to your brand. This means faster sales cycles, lower costs per sales and a far more sanguine process all round.

For your clients to find you or 'seek you out', you need credibility and visibility in good measure. People need to know who you are, where to find you and, ultimately, like the cut of your jib. Done correctly, a concentrated PR strategy will spotlight your business and showcase your expertise to a defined audience.

70% of firms who said they are well known in the marketing sphere reported their lead generation tactics are working. Only 30% of firms who thought they were not well known reported their lead generation tactics are working. So, if you are looking to generate leads then you stand 133% better chance if you are well known.

Successful PR can help you foster lots of high quality links to your Website, which is critical to great SEO. Even unsuccessful PR will get you at least one link because you can post the Press Release on an Online PR distribution service.

PR- A Practical Guide for Accountants

2

The Mechanics

The majority of your PR will be local, and that is the bias of this report, but the best practices are universal across all media.

The concept is simple. First find the editors of the newspaper, magazine, periodical, blog, TV channel, radio station or website in which you would like your story to appear, then email them your story.

The reality is somewhat different.

To get a PR article placed, it needs to fulfil very stringent criteria, otherwise it will be binned.

Here are some solid gold nuggets to get you moving in the right direction.

- **NEWS** - PR articles cannot be adverts, at least not blatant ones. A good publicist will convert adverts into bona fide news. This is called spin. If you were to send a press release saying that you had the lowest prices and the best services, expect to be black marked. If you were to send a similar press release explaining that the recession has forced businesses in your local area, and in your industry, to reevaluate pricing and customer service levels, you may have a sniff. My old boss used to read my press releases and ask what was 'new' in this 'news'? You can't reinvent the wheel, but place yourself in the readers' shoes and read your release through their eyes. Is your story saying anything remotely interesting? Some news stories are as dry as sandpaper, but they still invariably convey a message that has some kind of impact to the local and/or business community.
- **BE PROFESSIONAL** - Present your article in a factual way. You are presenting news, so keep opinions at bay until your quotes. Pay attention to spelling and grammar and don't ramble. Your article must be professional. Editors are busy and will not suffer fools gladly. Don't use puns as subject headers and don't try to be a 'hard hitting' journalist or a wry satirist. These releases are ill received.
- **QUOTE** - Get in a good, measured quote. This is your time to shine and get your point across. A good quote will likely be placed in its entirety, so make it telling! Don't swear, don't gush and keep your extreme views to yourself. If you want to make an incendiary point, send a letter to the letters page or a suitably niche publication that welcomes such invective (and do this at your peril).
- **SUBJECT HEADER** - This is incredibly important as if it's not up to scratch, your email will not even be opened. Think of your Press Release in the context of a CV, sitting in a huge pile of CVs on a prospective employer's desk. How long do you think that he or she will spend looking at your opus? If your front page doesn't look right, then it will be binned without a second glance. Make your subject header your headline and make your headline a good one.

- **TIMING** - No point sending a press release announcing an event if you send it late. Work out copy deadlines and publication dates with the editorial teams and write accordingly.

- **RESEARCH**

1. Ring the newsdesk and ask for copy deadlines, the relevant person to send the story (a publication / station may have several editors for different sections; education, for example) and policies on sending photos. Some people like JPEGs emailed separately and others like everything package up together. They may well ask you to label JPEGs in a specific format. Don't anger the editor. They are very busy and up to their eyeballs in deadlines. If you wish to speak to them, be clear, concise and relevant. You are unlikely to charm them into printing your story, so the story will have to stand up for itself.

2. Research your story. The more facts you can get in, the more impressive your story will be and the more column inches you will receive. Always quote your references and sources so the editor or journalist can follow up for larger pieces. Present these references in the NOTES FOR EDITORS section (see below).

- **NOTES FOR EDITORS** - Keep the clutter out of a press release to make it read quickly and efficiently. Add a secondary section with expansive notes to help the editor. This section can include biographies, company information, mission statements...as much as you feel is relevant and necessary. Keep this succinct and bullet point are fine.

- **BE ALERT** - Always look for news. Look at your business. Look for interesting client stories. Look for landmark events in terms of business underwritten, years of trading, number of employees etc. Look at the news. What can you comment on? Look at the calendar. What events can you relate to your business? Anything and everything can be twisted into news. If you are unsure, ask an expert, not a newspaper. Charity work is a good PR banker, as well as the benefits of doing some communal good. Remember, newspapers have space to fill within tight deadlines and broadcast media need to fill news slots even on the slowest of slow news day. You never know.

- **INFORMATION** - Add contact information. Include a phone number you can answer and an email address you actually use. Let it be known that you would be available for any interviews or further information. If there are multiple parties involved, quote their details as well, after they have given permission. If your story is a joint story, for example your business may be working alongside the council, a charity, a school or a blue chip company for an initiative, then you **MUST** run the story past their press office first. This is best practice and general good manners. They may dispute a fact or wish to add a quote (which will only benefit the story) and best to get this sorted before it goes to print and causes a rumpus.

- **PICTURES** - Take pictures. If you are hosting a launch party or an open day or a charity event, take lots of pictures, or even better, get somebody else to take pictures with you in them. An editor will like a well written press release that is accompanied by a well taken photograph. There is no harm in getting a decent head and shoulders shot as well. This doesn't have to be formal, just applicable to your working environment. Add to your NOTES FOR EDITORS that images are available upon request. This will give the editorial team some food for thought.

- **DOUBLE UP** - Events are a great way to raise PR. These can be openings, visitors of note, seminars, presentations or business events. You can write a press release saying when and where the event is going to take place (and invite the press) then follow up after the event with different quotes and pictures. One is in the future tense, the other is in the past and you have got two releases for the price of one.

- **PERSISTENCE** - Just because your first few releases fail to get coverage doesn't imply that you won't ever get coverage. There are no guarantees to column inches, but you can improve your chances by going through all of these tips and persisting.

- **BE CREATIVE** - You have invested some time and effort into writing press release, so make the most of them!

1. Use Online PR distribution to get a link back to your website and boost SEO. Look for our free guide to Online Article Writing for further explanation.
2. Convert your Press Releases into blog posts. And vice versa.
3. Send Press Releases to clients and contacts...just in case they missed them.
4. Keep cut outs and include on your Website or display in your reception area.

Do not expect any direct sales from PR, but do expect increased awareness and traffic to your website.

If your website is a mess, then don't begin PR, sort out the website first. You could even create a specific landing page and quote this on your press releases to fully monitor your performance.

Keep reading the local press and relevant publications to your industry and keep your PR radar switched on at all times. There is always a story to be written and most things can be moulded into something newsworthy.

PR- A Practical Guide for Accountants

3

Quick Win Checklist

- **CALENDAR.** Look at the calendar. The World Cup, St Patrick's Day, Christmas, Father's Day, National Book week, Elections...if you can find an angle on these events, seize the day! Do your research and keep to editorial deadlines to ensure that you have a good chance of being published.
- **AWARDS.** If you, your firm, or any of your staff have been shortlisted for, nominated for, or even win an award, however trivial, you should hear a blip on your PR radar. Readers will respect your achievement.
- **EXHIBITIONS.** If you exhibiting at a professional show you should be able to do various PR work with the organisers.
- **EXPERTISE.** The MD or small business manager may speak at a business forum or networking meeting? Perhaps something even grander? This is a great way of showcasing your firm's expertise. Similarly, you may have been advising on a social, council or charity scheme.
- **PRODUCT.** Risky, but a rich seam if you can mine it. If you launch a product or service that is CONTEMPORARY, NEWSWORTHY or of BENEFIT to the business or local or community, then treat it as news. Get a fresh pair of eyes to give it the once over and check for signs of blatant advertising.
- **CHARITY.** The ultimate win win! Organise a firm charity event. Perhaps you or a colleague are sky-diving or running a marathon? You could be part of a charity auction or donating a prize to a charity competition. Whatever you do, be proud of it and let the press know!
- **LANDMARKS.** If you hit a landmark or milestone, shout about it. Could be your 10th year in business or the firm's 150th? You could have taken on your 1000th client or published your 10,000th set of accounts?
- **STAFFING.** If you expand or change the managerial set up or take on notable staff, why not 'introduce' them to the local business community. Have a look through the business section of your local rag and you'll see this for yourself. Legal firms do this particularly well.
- **SUPPLIERS.** Those chaps aren't suppliers, they are strategic partners! If you have installed major software or innovative hardware, press release it. If you contact the PR dept of the major firm, they may well publish the story themselves as a case study. Apple are sensational at this, especially regarding corporate iPhone usage.
- **CORPORATE LINKS.** If you collaborate with a professional firm or the local council, or perhaps you have a connection with an arts body, you have an ideal opportunity to double up and press release your work.
- **SOCIAL CONSCIENCE.** If you have, or are introducing, an ethical scheme of some description, document the details and get press releasing. Perhaps you've introduced a cycle to work scheme or have overhauled your green credentials and installed a recycling scheme.
- **SPONSORSHIP.** Be it the ladies cricket team or endangered dormice, do a little good and get involved with sponsorship and follow up with some cracking PR.

PR- A Practical Guide for Accountants

4

The Template

Have a look at the template overleaf.

This is a basic release and light on details, but it's the real thing to all intents and purposes.

It may seem quite simple, but it has been constructed to appeal to editors and simply convey the news. The Notes to Editors can be rewritten with your own details.

I will explain areas of the construction after the template.

Some of the suggestions are fluid and open to interpretation. Some are set in stone and thou shalt not disobey!

Remember, Portfolio offer a PR mentoring service to talk you through Press Release writing.

Remember, no press release is ever guaranteed coverage, unless you discover the original manuscript of the Bible in your attic or stumble upon the elixir of life. It's all about working through your options, writing and presenting well and doing everything above as often as possible.

Good luck!

For Immediate Release¹

Local firm urges small businesses to challenge their accountancy fees²

[INSERT DATE]

A new [INSERT AREA]³ based firm has urged local businesses to respond to the recession and challenge their accountancy fees.⁴

[INSERT NAME], Manager of [INSERT FIRM]⁵, Accountants in [INSERT AREA]⁶ said, “In the current economic downturn it is imperative that every penny is justified. Businesspeople have been paying their accountancy bills for years without question. It’s time to ask ‘what am I getting for my money?’ ”⁷

The switcher culture is growing and people are far more inclined to change utility suppliers, phone contracts and bank accounts than ever before. Ben believes that accountants are next on the list.⁸

[INSERT NAME] continued, “The Recession will lead to a return to outstanding customer service. Fees need to be justifiable for value for money and it’s not just about being the cheapest; it’s about being the most appropriate.”

[INSERT NAME] has written a report called ‘Are you getting the best deal from your accountant?’ to help businesses challenge their current deal.⁹

Call [INSERT NUMBER] or visit [INSERT WEBSITE] for a free copy.¹⁰

1. Most press releases will be for immediate release. However, you may wish to announce news that is extremely time sensitive. In this case, be specific on date and time of release.
2. Headlines should be punchy, relevant and devoid of puns. You are not headline writing for the Sun. This headline is also your subject header if you email the release. An editor will read on or bin on the strength of this headline.
3. Local local local! Remember this is a local template. If you want to go niche or national, tweak accordingly. Call us for advice.
4. Sum up the content of the release in one paragraph. Economically get in all the key details.
5. Remember to get your business name in. This is a neat way of doing so
6. Add in your SEO key words. The story may well appear online.
7. Get in a good quote. Be clear who is giving the quote and their position.
8. Expand your story.
9. Are you contributing anything? Beware of advertising here. A free report is fine. My advice is always to give away information or a free service as a benefit to the local or business community.
10. Get your key contact details into the release.

Notes For Editors

Mr James Red, Managing Director of Ace Accountants is available for Interview.¹¹

Further images of Mr Red or Ace Accountants premises are available upon request.¹²

The practice was formed in 1978 by Mr Red and Mr Clive Orange. It has now grown to 14 employees and 700 clients and has moved into the High Street¹³

Ace Accountants specialise in X, Y and Z.¹⁴

Its values are A, B and C.¹⁵

Contact

Mr James Red

01234 567 890

James.red@aceaccountants.co.uk¹⁶

- 11.** List who is available for interview. This list must include anybody who has given a quote in the release.
- 12.** Send a picture with the press release. If you have more, let the editor know.
- 13.** A potted history of the business.
- 14.** Why are you an expert? Why should your press release and quotes be valued in the publication?
- 15.** Added detail. You may have a strict Green or Social policy?
- 16.** Make sure the editor can get to you. Give a phone that is answered and an email address that is checked often. If you don't back to an editor sharpish, the story will not be printed, or at least not to its full potential.

portfolio

Marketing professionals

Contact Us

0844 567 4321

www.portfoliomarketing.co.uk