

What the Heck is PR? And Why Should I Care?

Christina Hergott, ER Marketing

What is PR?

No really, what the heck is PR? Is it publicity? Is it donating loads of money to charity and getting on TV? Is it a real thing or just some made-up marketing concept? What does it even stand for?

Truth is, landing on the definition of PR, or Public Relations, is not an easy task. Industry leaders themselves have a hard time agreeing on exactly what it is and often argue over the semantics. However, for the sake of simplicity and understanding, let's refer to PR as:

Developing a mutually beneficial relationship with the press, so they carry positive stories about your organization to the public, resulting in change and accomplishing organizational goals

Peter Shankman helps drive the point home with this humorous (and slightly inappropriate) anecdote comparing PR to advertising (which we all understand):

- *Advertising*: I walk into a bar and tell the first hot girl I see how amazing I am in bed. The hot girl doesn't go home with me.
- *PR*: I walk into a bar and a friend of the hot girl sees me and tells her friend how great I am in bed. The hot girl goes home with me.

We already have an advertising and marketing program in place... what can PR do for me?

Although PR is a part of marketing, it goes beyond what traditional advertising and marketing can do. What makes it scary is that you can't control the message PR broadcasts to the world. What if I send a story to the press and they spin it to make us look like the bad guys? Well, that's kinda the point – we can't control how the media and other influencers use our message, we can only influence how these messages are presented and do our best to ensure our company supports a positive mission.

So if we can't control what it is, why should we make an effort to get it? Brian Solis and Deirdre Breakenridge help us understand the importance of PR (ideas taken from *Putting the Public Back in Public Relations*):

- *It provides one of the most credible forms of marketing: third-party endorsements.* People pay to avoid seeing ads, but they'll also pay quite a bit for credible, quality news coverage. PR works to move the dial from out-of-touch advertiser to trustworthy, and buzz-worthy, company.
- *Leads to effective communication, which builds trust and strong relationships with media, bloggers, analysts, influencers, and customers.* PR opens the channel and encourages conversation about you and your brands – an important aspect of keeping your most important audience happy.
- *Influences and changes opinion, increases exposure, and builds a positive image and reputation.* People do business with organizations they like and believe in and PR shows them why you are worthy of their dollars, time, or vote.
- *Creates presence, enhances brand loyalty, and extends brand resonance.* PR takes your advertising and marketing plan and builds on it. It creates a story beyond what you can broadcast and makes an argument for you.
- *Elicits response and action.* PR delivers what every executive expects – action. The key to driving business and building organizations.

You've painted a pretty picture, but I'm not sold that we need PR for my organization.

Nice try, but you're not getting away that easy. It's not that PR is for everyone; it's just that it's for almost everyone.

Are you a new brand trying to get your story out there? Are you an established company trying to breathe life back into an antiquated brand? Are you launching a new product? Starting a new initiative? Heading a new direction? Looking for new customers? Working to increase market share? Focusing on growing profit?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then PR is for you.

PR tells a story, it gets your message into the hands of the right people – your customers – and encourages action. It reminds them why they like doing business with you and shows them why they should support you in the future. It keeps YOU relevant and fresh, and keeps your customers coming back for more.

OK, OK, I get it. So say I wanted to dabble in the world of PR, what's next?

1. Like any other function of an organization, PR starts with a strategy and goals. What are you trying to accomplish? Are you looking to get coverage and mentions or increase your customer satisfaction? Create a list of measurable and attainable goals.
2. Next, you'll need to create a list of media contacts and other influencers that you'll start working with. Build a relationship and work together to secure coverage and provide content to your audience.
3. You'll also need to figure out exactly what you're going to do. Create a calendar with consistent touchpoints – this could include things like press releases, speaking arrangements and social media engagement.
4. Now that you have a strategy, goals and a plan – it's time to get started! Reach out to your contacts and work on establishing a good working relationship. When coverage is received, be sure to thank those that were part of your coverage and capture the coverage to report back to your organization.

PR takes commitment and consistency, but if you're committed to your plan, your organization will reap the benefits of positive PR.

Want a hand?

We're here to help! We are [ER Marketing](#) – a full-service marketing firm located in Kansas City's Rivermarket. We can help you craft your story, get it into the hands of the right people and get people excited about what you're doing – all while achieving organizational goals. Good luck and we're here if you need us!