



Public Relations

Learning guide

Public relations

Introduction

This learning guide was written by Toby Roe, Ashridge PR Manager and Julian Goldsmith, MD of ARC Business. It is one of a series produced by the Learning Resource Centre. Each guide sets out to give you a quick summary of the main theories on a particular topic backed up by a practical commentary based on Ashridge's long experience of consulting on teaching management issues. We hope that it whets your appetite for more information. The guide points you in the direction of other sources such as key books, articles and videos.

The very term 'public relations' is much misunderstood and confused – somewhat ironic given at the heart of it, PR is about clear and concise communication!

The UK's Institute of Public Relations (IPR) (<http://www.ipr.org.uk>) defines PR in reputation terms: ie 'Public relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.'

The IPR continues... 'Public relations takes many forms in different organisations and comes under many titles, including public information, investor relations, public affairs, corporate communications, marketing or customer relations. To add to all the confusion, not all of these titles always relate accurately to public relations, but all of them cover at least part of what public relations is.

'At its best, public relations not only tells an organisation's story to its publics, it also helps to shape the organisation and the way it works. Through research,

feedback communication and evaluation, the practitioner needs to find out the concerns and expectations of a company's publics and explain them to its management.'

This PR Learning Guide is intended to give a brief overview to develop this explanation and cover the many and diverse tips and techniques which PR practitioners use – at both a strategic and tactical level.

Where to start

If you have less than an hour, read the main sections of this PR Learning Guide which seems relevant to and of interest to you. If you have 2-3 hours, and want to broaden your understanding of the subject, read the chapters which interest you most of *Winning Reputations (How To be Your Own Spin Doctor)* by Chris Genasi and look at the IPR's website <http://www.ipr.org.uk>.

If you are planning to meet a journalist and want some media interview tips go to *Appendix 2 – Media Training Notes*.

Resources

Videos/CD-Roms

BP: The brand image interviews with Roy Croft and David Foxon (1996), Babson College, 40 mins.

Phil Dover, a professor at Babson College, Massachusetts, talks in the first interview to Roy Croft, International Advertising Manager for BP. He asks about the global campaign 'BP on the Move': how it came into being, the role of market research and their choice of advertising agency. In the second interview Dover interviews David Foxon, Managing Director of W B Doner & Company, about his feelings when invited to pitch for the BP account.

Branded Heinz: Has Beanz? (1997), BBC Worldwide, 40 mins.

This BBC TV programme examines how a classic brand like Heinz can respond to competition and not become has beanz! The film discusses how Heinz has been hit by the supermarket price wars and forced into producing cut price beans which undercut their own brand. The traditional brand image of the family is thought to have gone stale and the video looks at how the company tries to revitalise the brand image.

Effective marketing (1992), Open College, 30 mins.

Featuring Simon Gulliford, this video illustrates that effective marketing is a key to growth, or even survival, for any organisation. It looks at the marketing challenges facing three organisations: Loch Fyne Oysters Ltd, J & S Davies, and Arthur Bell Distillers. The video provides an insight into how these organisations approach the marketing mix, market research, product positioning, advertising and promotion.

Handling the media (1996), Design and Fullard Multi-Media.

This multimedia course comprises four modules. Module One is an introduction to the course. Module Two provides an in-depth look at the press, electronic media, radio, television, interactivity, PR and Press Offices. Module Three concentrates on interview techniques for radio, television and the press. Module Four contains a quiz and looks at the golden rules for handling the media.

Marketing on the web (2000), TV Choice, 30 mins.

Companies are pouring money into Internet marketing. But do people really want to buy online? This film explains how two UK firms are using the web to market themselves and their products: Madaboutwine, a wine retailer, sells its wares exclusively through the web and bookseller WH Smith. The film covers website pros and cons, the key role of interactivity and user-friendly design which can mean the difference between success and failure. When the fuss about e-commerce settles down, what are the hard commercial benefits companies are looking for from the Internet?

Journal articles

Anonymous (2003), *PR: Examining The Evidence – How Do You Measure The Effectiveness Of PR?*, Information Integrity, p22.

Blackhurst, Chris (2000), *How The City Was Spun*, Management Today (MT), February, p48-65.

Cooley, Tracy (1999), *Interactive Communication: PR on the Web*, PR Quarterly, Summer, p41-42.

Lambelle, Richard (1999), *Egg's Story* (UK Launch of Egg, From a PR Standpoint), Campaign, April.

Garrett, Alexander (2001), *How To Get The Best From The Press*, Business Voice, November, p56-61.

Henard, David H. (2002), *Negative Publicity: What Companies Need to Know about Public Reactions*, PR Quarterly, Winter, p8-12.

Levy, Ronald N. (2002), *Value-Added Public Relations*, PR Quarterly, Winter, p34-35.

Marken, G.A. (2001), *Corporate Communications, It's All About Delivering Value*, PR Quarterly, Spring, p39-40.

Marshall, Sharon (1997), *A Wordy Cause?* Marketing Business, November.

Pelham, Fran (2000), *The Triple Crown of PR: Pitch Letter News Release, Feature Article*, PR Quarterly, Spring, p38-43.

Thellusson, James (2003), *Measuring PR's Value*, Admap, February, p16-17.

Vincent, Lynn (1999), *Marketing vs. Public Relations*, Bank Marketing Ass., November, p19-21.

Information files

There are information files containing a number of newspaper and journal articles on the following areas:

- Advertising.
- Direct marketing.
- Market research.
- Marketing mix.
- Public relations.

Books

** Books marked with asterisks are available for sale from the LRC bookshop. Mail order service available. Tel: +44 (0)1442 841159. Fax: +44 (0)1442 841211. Email: celia.tucker@ashridge.org.uk.

Davidson, Hugh (2002), *The Committed Enterprise*, Butterworth Heinemann. Ashridge shelf reference: JMF (DAV)

The author takes a 'hard' approach to the 'soft' topic of vision and value management, explaining and demonstrating how the effective embedding of vision and values can forge uncompromising commitment and transform organisations. Seven Best Practices are identified which lead to measurable results with which to justify and demonstrate the importance of this aspect of organisational leadership. These are based on analysis of his interviews with leaders of 125 high calibre enterprises in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Dickinson, Sarah (1998), *Effective Presentation*, Orion Business Books. Ashridge shelf reference: CF (DIC)

This guide book presents essential tools and guidance needed to prepare and deliver polished and effective presentations at work. The book will help the user to; plan and deliver presentations in a variety of situations, overcome nerves and anxiety and command audience attention, use visual aids, microphones and notes with flair, tackle questions and unexpected interruptions with clarity and conviction and give life to your presentation.

Dunn, Jim (1999), *Public Relations Techniques that Work*, Thorogood. Ashridge shelf reference: JV (DUN)

From the role of the PR officer to fees and costs and the effective use of PR in radio and television, this step-by-step guide details the rules and steps to be taken in order to develop successful media relations. Helpful case studies add extra practitioner value to this excellent guide. Contents include: the nature of PR; the role and function of a PRO; costing PR; how to deal with the media;

setting up and operating the PR office; preparing feature articles; PR photography; press conferences, media events and interviews; being effective on radio or television; PR on a small budget; new product launches; and crisis PR.

Jenkins, Frank (2000), *Public Relations for your Business*, Management Books.
Ashridge shelf reference: JV (JEF)

This classic guide has been fully updated to include coverage of the Internet and e-commerce. In addition to complete instruction on all the conventional aspects of PR the book now includes sections on electronic PR (E-PR) and world-wide-web exploitation. Areas covered include: corporate identity, getting media coverage, public relations on the internet, dealing with reporters and interviewers, sponsorship, corporate advertising, and good customer relations.

Genasi, Chris (2002), *Winning Reputations*, Palgrave.
Ashridge shelf reference: JV (GEN)

With easy-to-follow models, checklists and templates, this book is aimed at the general business manager as well as the PR professional, who is concerned about improving the reputation of a brand, an organisation, or themselves. Using case studies from around the world, this book looks at all aspects of reputation protection and promotion, including reputation strategy development, reputation measurement, crisis and issues management, managing reputation on the net, media relations and internal communication.

Green, Peter Sheldon (1994), *Winning PR Tactics*, Pitman Publishing.
Ashridge shelf reference: JV (GRE)

Winning PR Tactics explains the best and most successful PR techniques. It is particularly useful for influencing potential customers to buy from you again and again. The book demonstrates: the PR toolkit - proven tactics that really work; media relations - how to get the results you want; how to achieve the most from PR professionals. It also provides ideas, hooks and gimmicks successfully used by professionals.

Haywood, Roger (2002), *Manage your Reputation*, Kogan Page.
Ashridge shelf reference: JV (HAY)

Reputation has a major impact on business performance. Management's remuneration, directors' fees, ethical issues, environmental accountability, employee relations, investor relations, customer care and fiduciary responsibility, all are now under the media spotlight. All organisations, whether in the public or private sector, must not only behave impeccably but also manage their public relations with intelligence and integrity if they are to safeguard their reputation. Here is clear, actionable guidance on how to plan and implement effective public relations programs. Full of real-life case studies and candid comment from top executives around the world, you'll find hands-on, practical advice on how to: avoid PR disasters, set PR objectives, win favourable media coverage, control costs, measure results, and recruit the right public relations people.

Kotler, Philip (2001), *Kotler on Marketing*, Free Press.
Ashridge shelf reference: JU (KOT)**

This book offers an essential guide to marketing for managers, freshly written and based on his phenomenally successful lectures on marketing for the new millennium. Through his insights you will quickly update your skills and knowledge of the new challenges and opportunities posed by hyper-competition, globalisation, and the Internet. Here you will discover the latest thinking, concisely captured in readable prose on hot new fields as database marketing, relationship marketing, global marketing and marketing on the Internet. In addition the text provides a wealth of cutting-edge strategies and tactics that can be applied immediately to such 21st Century challenges as reducing the enormous cost of customer acquisition and keeping customers loyal.

Maister, David H. (2003), *Managing the Professional Service Firm*, Free Press.
Ashridge shelf reference: KW (MAI)

Drawing on more than ten years of research and consulting, David Maister explores issues ranging from marketing and business development to

multinational strategies, human resources policies to profit improvement, strategic planning to effective leadership. While these issues can be complex. Maister simplifies them by recognising that 'every professional service firm in the world, regardless of size, specific profession, or country of operation, has the same mission statement: outstanding service to clients, satisfying careers for its people, and financial success for its owners.'

Morley, Michael (1998), *How to Manage your Global Reputation*, Macmillan Business.

Ashridge shelf reference: **JV (MOR)**

In this comprehensive book on global public relations the author shows how PR actually works, why it makes a vital contribution to the dissemination of useful information, and how it guards corporate reputation. The author takes the reader from strategy reviews through audits and issue identification to program development all the way to evolution. In addition to the text is an extensive collection of case histories drawn from a wide range of industries.

Penn, Bill (2004), *Be your own PR expert*, Thomson Learning.

Ashridge shelf reference: **JV (PEN)**

Packed with advice and information for the person who wants either to manage his own PR or work with an agency in a constructive way, this book also acts as an introductory book for the marketing executive or manager who has to take on the role of company PRO. It shows that good PR is really very simple, need not cost a fortune, and is an excellent way to promote your business, service, product or message.

Sobel, Andrew (2003), *Making Rain: The Secrets of Building Lifelong Client Loyalty*, John Wiley & Sons.

Ashridge shelf reference: **JUT (SOB)**

A follow-up to Sobel's co-authored, *Clients for Life*, this book argues that winning repeat business is about focusing on building relationships with clients and leveraging the resources at hand. The author regards relationship building not as a necessary chore but as a foundation for advancing all truly useful advice.

He argues that clients are loyal to professionals who add value, build personal trust, and go the extra mile.

Websites

<http://www.ipr.org.uk>

The website of Europe's largest public relations institute.

<http://www.corporate-financial.com>

The Institute of Public Relations' corporate and financial group is one of the specialist vocational groups within the IPR.

<http://www.prca.org.uk>

The PRCA provides a forum for government and other public bodies and associations to PR consultants and represents the views of its members to the Department of Trade and Industry and other bodies.

<http://www.echoresearch.com>

The Echo Group brings together market research, media analysis and communications planning to enable clients to monitor their reputation.

Overview

Just how important is public relations? According to the UK Institute of Public Relations (IPR), in a recent poll, Britain's industry leaders were asked about the most important factors they take into account when making judgments on companies. They rated the importance of factors relating to reputation top. With a crucial responsibility for both the organisation's identity and its reputation, today's public relations function can be the key agent of change. This can include a critical role in achieving real competitive advantage by:

- Reducing barriers to competition.
- Opening new markets.
- Attracting the best recruits and/or business partners.
- Enhancing access to funding and investors.
- Creating a premium value for products and services.
- Protecting business in times of crisis.

All organisations - big or small, local or international, private or public... benefit from good, well planned, well-executed public relations. This PR Learning Guide is intended to help all readers think about how they – as individuals – and as representatives of a variety of organisations, can improve their organisation's reputation – both now and in the future.

Vital importance of reputation

As Chris Genasi says in *Winning Reputations*, 'While having a strong reputation is a choice, increasingly it is not an option if you want to stay ahead of your competitors. Just about every organisation in the commercial, state and voluntary sectors has woken up to this need and as result we are in the middle of a reputation revolution... Today's companies, governments, organisations and individuals no longer think about their public as a single entity. Instead of 'the public', people talk about 'publics' or stakeholders. These are overlapping groups of people, each requiring a slightly different, tailored approach if we want to seek their opinion, influence or win them over.'

Fig. 1. Attributes and drivers of reputation



Source: Professor Charles Fombrun of the New York University, Stern Business School.

Genasi also points out that... 'Reputation abhors a vacuum and if you do not manage your reputation, others will. This is a key insight that so many in business and public life fail to see. Instead they assume that keeping their head down will prevent it getting chopped off. In fact keeping your head down simply means that you end up walking into things and not seeing others running away with your treasures.'

So if reputation – creating and sustaining it – is at the heart of a good public relations positioning, what does PR look like in reality – what is involved, how can it be achieved? And what is its role within Marketing and Marketing Communications campaigns and Corporate Communications?

PR as a subset of corporate communications

Many major organisations have heads (or Directors) of Corporate Communications. Is this the same as a head of PR? In reality, whilst some practitioners scope the PR remit pretty widely, a corporate communications role is generally much broader, with responsibility for a range of disciplines which

often overlap with the PR role. In simple terms, corporate communications is an ensemble of all the ways to reach different stakeholders of that organisation – be they the City, employees, staff or customers...

Fig. 2. Reaching stakeholders



Reaching stakeholders via corporate communications

City/investors - Financial PR /Investor Relations including City Analyst Briefings

Regulators/Government - Parliamentary Affairs/lobbying -
UK/Brussels/Washington...

Employees - Internal Communications programmes, change management...

Customers (B2B/B2C) - Marketing communications and Product/Service PR

Local Community - Community Affairs/Charitable sponsorship programmes...

Consumers - Promotions, sponsorship...

Environment - Green policy programmes...

PR and the value of third-party endorsement

The basis of PR is the value to the reputation of a product, service, individual or organisation if a third party (more often than not a journalist writing in a publication or appearing within the broadcast media), says something positive, rather than the person/organisation/product/service itself proclaiming it.

Otherwise, to paraphrase Mandy Rice-Davis (of the Profumo sex scandal fame), '... you would say that wouldn't you!'

Or, as Philip Kotler notes in *Kotler On Marketing*, 'While advertising is what you pay for, public relations is what you pray for. A favourable magazine story about a new software product is worth much more than tens of thousands of dollars spent in advertising.'

The bottomline is that successful public relations can repay its investment of time and cost many times over. Alternatively, bad public relations, leading to negative coverage and bad opinions being held, can be hugely detrimental to business and take an age to repair – if ever. As is colloquially said within the PR business, '... good reputations take a lifetime to create and five minutes to lose!'

No such thing as bad PR – or is there?

A popular saying goes along the lines: 'There's no such thing as bad PR!' Many organisation and individual reputations which lie in tatters may beg to differ. The issue is what constitutes good and bad PR – as either can just as easily be over-estimated as under-estimated. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, whilst *not* being talked about is the only thing worse than being talked about, in reality, there are times when an organisation's anonymity or lack of presence regarding an issue may be decidedly preferable.

However, it is generally a mistake to do or say nothing on the basis that one day it might back-fire – '... you have to be in it, to win it' is undoubtedly true. Thus there is very definitely 'bad PR', but the often relatively few times this occurs (for most organisations and/or individuals), should not stop pursuing the prizes of 'good PR'.

PR misconceptions

As we have seen above, the term PR is often used synonymously with 'reputation management', 'corporate communications', 'media relations' and even using the letters of P and R to signify 'press relations', the latter being a tightly defined version of PR and signifying PR's roots in newspapers and publications. The early PR practitioners were often former press journalists helping clients or the companies they worked for by getting them editorial 'column inches' – then

(and to an extent still) generally the misconceived measure of success: ie coverage and opinions formed are generally about quality rather than quantity.

Other potentially misconceived measures of success – still used in some quarters today – are advertising equivalent costs: ie if the space concerning the product/service/ organisation in question was computed to its actual space equivalent, what would that be? Whilst this has some limited application, the reality is that the strength of good PR is the power of what is said and conveyed by a third party, 'neutral' source - and thus not dependent upon length/size of coverage.

A positive one line endorsement of a company's new business strategy or an acknowledgement of a mega merger's rationale – as contained within the Financial Times highly influential Lex Column for instance, can be more powerful than pages of coverage in less well established media which do not reach a targeted City audience for instance.

Main categories/types of PR

Whilst the basic principles of PR - as applied to Media Relations (and thus seeking to influence editorial coverage) have much in common when applied across the commercial and not-for-profit sectors, there are some important, different points of emphasis – namely:

Financial/City PR – relates specifically to the communication of price-sensitive information and thus has a code of conduct which must be followed. Normally it is the Financial Director or Chief Financial Officer of a quoted company who is the contact point for the in-house PR Officer and/or consultant who is responsible for releasing such financial information (ie preliminary, interim and full results...) to the Stock Market and/or information regarding major corporate deals etc. See *Through The Thicket*, a booklet produced by the IPR Corporate+Financial Group and accessible via <http://www.corporate-financial.com>, for a good, initial overview.

Corporate PR – this broadly promotes a business as a whole and deals with non-financial information about that company. The term can be applied to not-for-

profit organisations where it might refer to a charity's overall positioning and stories about its overall success, in contrast to a specific view on a certain issue or the state of affairs in a specific country for instance. More generally, corporate PR is found within major commercial businesses.

Consumer PR – this is broadly the PR activities of an organisation which is selling a mass market product or service to the public. Consumer PR programmes will thus cover food and drink through to toys and music systems – clearly the range is enormous. Consumer PR programmes typically use the popular tabloid (ie UK's Daily Mail...) press, women's and men's magazines, as well as the broadcast media. Promotional offers, competitions etc are all prominent here.

There are a multitude of industry-specific PR 'labels', whereby sometimes there are in-house people and consultants with specific qualifications (*Healthcare PR* being a case in point where some medical qualification can, in some cases, be a requirement).

Travel PR – in many ways a sub set of consumer PR with a specialist experience and skill set, not least awareness of the legal limitations as to how a holiday can be described and the potential reimbursement to customers of failed travel companies via ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents) etc.

On-line PR – this is a relatively new term and relates to how information (in the form of a news release or other communication) is distributed to media contacts as well as targeted to end-users of that communication. ie via e-mail communication or e-newsletters... A useful book on this whole area is *Getting @ttention* by Susan Kohl.

Legal PR, Professional Services PR (in addition to legal, covering management consulting firms, accountants/auditors, engineering and architectural practices...)

Property PR, Retail/Leisure PR... there is a fairly endless list.

B2B/B2C

Perhaps the most fundamental differences exist between business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C). Again, whilst many basic principles and techniques are used in common, the 'culture' and 'philosophy' of approaches are generally very different in terms of what is to be achieved; the desired outcome and how this to be reached.

At its simplest, B2C typically reaches out to thousands if not millions of existing/potential users and has a proposition that something should be tried, sampled, consumed... often that a branded consumer good or service should be swapped for another competing one etc. Often in B2B, not least in professional services, the PR objective is one of reassurance that using the services of a specific law firm or consulting firm is indeed the right one to keep using – ie the objective is not one of a call to action – if anything it is a call to inaction that the current status quo of professional adviser is indeed the right one.

The way that such professional services firms then achieve positive media coverage is via offering expert opinion or the publishing of management reports looking at major trends within specific industries etc. However, other B2B companies can have a specific product or service to sell. This is often a smaller target market and often there is a more limited number of specific trade-related publications to approach, but in turn, they reach a high proportion of that industry.

In-house or consultancy?

Just as there are some main categories or types of PR, so the main distinction between PR practitioners is in-house or consultancy. Whilst the two terms are fairly clear, ironically perhaps, many in-house PR teams are now structured along consultancy-type lines. Often in-house people look after specific parts of the business; they may need to complete timesheets to show where their time is spent and justify their overhead cost by showing value-for-money against in-house cost alternatives.

Whilst the case can be made for which one is preferable for the organisation and journalists (with whom they seek to work and develop close relationships), the general view is that in-house people have a superior knowledge of the organisation's business and issues (but sometimes get diverted by 'politics' and bureaucracy/administration and lack the creativity of approach gained from working on several clients and their respective industries).

On the other hand, whilst consultants may have a breadth of experience, they can let themselves down in terms of ready knowledge and access to senior management. Clients often lament that the 'grey hairs' that pitch and win the business are then readily replaced by juniors on the account, from whom the lament of '... I'll have to get back to you on that', or '...please wait till I get that client's file out' leads to exasperated journalists.

In terms of how PR consultancies best manage themselves, then the book *Managing The Professional Services Firm* by David H. Maister is a known 'classic' in terms of wider services industry firms such as PR ones. *Making Rain* by Andrew Sobel is another relevant and thoughtful book.

PR industry size

In terms of the numbers of people employed in the UK PR industry – both in-house and consultancy – this has mushroomed over the last decade. The Institute of Public Relations, the largest professional body for PR practitioners in Europe has seen membership grow from just over 3000 members in 1990 to over 7000 in 2002.

Good PR is not good 'spin'

A popular myth or misconception is that good PR is about good 'spin' and its practitioners, 'spin doctors' are the sometimes heroes and heroines of communication. In reality 'spin' has a negative association nowadays – suggesting that someone has misconstrued the facts and got-one-over their target audience.

Regrettably, notable Government departments and spokespeople have trumpeted this approach and often brought the wider PR industry into disrepute with it. 'Spin doctoring' is different from putting a positive spin-on-things in terms of highlighting the positives of a story – but the term as such does not feature in this PR Guide.

PR's international context

PR – as practised by both in-house people and external consultants has been something of a boom industry not just in North America and Europe, but pretty well globally. However, it would be wrong to think that the practice of PR is readily transferable on a county by country basis. One of the key determinants impacting the structure and practice of PR is the difference in the business environments and the nature and structure of the media per country.

This is a big topic but suffice to say the UK is known to have some of the more questioning and cynical journalists, whilst the US media tend to be more respectful - even dotting on its business leaders. Take for instance the championing of subsequently disgraced US telco and utility companies. On a more day-to-day basis, the same management or business book that can get broad, very positive acclaim when reviewed in the US, can get decidedly cool – if not sceptical – reviews in the UK. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde again, if not divided by a common language, we are often divided by different critical acclaim!

Also, the US media will typically cross reference factual information and get a sub-editor (the person who checks what has been written and often needs to reduce the length of the piece to fit in with space availability) to check the accuracy of a quote to be used. The seeming American love of litigation may have a lot to do with this. In the UK, '... publish and be damned' still seems to predominate.

Whilst many popular PR techniques (press releases, journalist meetings, etc) – see *main media relations techniques* section below, are much the same the world over, US PR practitioners were notably early movers in adopting the Internet as a pro-active PR tool.

Reach of PR's 'invisible' hand

It is hard to quantifiably say to what extent PR has an influence on what we read, watch, listen to and generally experience, but it is felt that some 75% plus of media content has in some way been instigated, promoted or influenced by a PR person – whether working in-house or as an external consultant. This is everything from financial results reporting in national and international media through trade and specialist publications to consumer publications and local free sheets, TV documentaries and radio news bulletins.

The notion of independently based, investigative reporters is seldom the case – if indeed it ever was. The reality is that there is a limited number of journalists, there is a near infinite amount of events, activities and developments happening at any one time. Thus the media is reliant on having a regular flow of ideas and information – in varying degrees of presentation – be they from PR people or news wires/feeds (ie bought-in news services such as Reuters which themselves get input from PR people!).

Whilst journalists maintain their own integrity as a highly prized asset (in terms of which stories/approaches to pursue – or not), in reality many times more stories tend to be presented to them (which is their prerogative to decline), rather than their being unearthed initially.

PR's 'invisible hand' is also ubiquitous in terms of just about every walk of life using it:

- Big and small businesses – quoted and private.
- The Public Sector in promoting Government information initiatives.
- Charities, voluntary bodies and other not-for-profit organisations.
- Professional services businesses – lawyers to accountants.
- Film, entertainment and leisure businesses.
- Political parties, regulators.
- Educational establishments

... the list is endless. But from trying to get some coverage for the local Scout jumble sale in the local newspaper, or promoting the strategy of a mega billion

dollar transatlantic merger, common to all is the desire to make the case in a clear and compelling manner such that a third party gives space (in the case of a journalist) to the story and talks about it in a positive way.

PR - strategy or tactics?

The reality is that PR is both – and often at the same time. It plays a vital role in helping an organisation set its strategic communication objectives and what is often termed ‘market positioning’. At the same time PR is the everyday embodiment of that strategy – which can mean very practical activities like monitoring press coverage and distributing it, sending letters for publication, planning a product launch.

In a post Enron/Worldcom business world, important to many organisations is that their PR strategy clearly underpins the reputation of the organisation. At one level this is undertaking some or more pro bono work. At another level it is the PR function leading a discussion and actualisation of an organisation’s ‘vision and values’. As Prof Hugh Davidson explains in *The Committed Enterprise*, ‘Vision pictures a future destination, and the route is charted through strategies. Values define the principles guiding the organisation on its future path. Both determine how people behave and make decisions every day.’

When the PR function is elevated to this strategic role then it is easy to see why PR achieves a new-found prominence within any organisation. However, when the PR function fails to contribute at this level – or is simply not invited-to-the-table – then PR is often demoted to the very tactical level of everyday media relations – and its role stops and starts with dealing with journalists’ enquiries, arranging trade show presences, co-ordinating an unspectacular internal newsletter etc.

Main media relations techniques

Accepting that PR is about reputation management, the reality is that reputation is formed in 101 ways, of which what is written or broadcast about an individual or organisation is just one of these. The reality is, this one constituent part helps determine reputation in a very far-reaching and profound way. How one

establishes and conducts one's media relations approach and programme is largely within one's own grasp and therefore one of the 'levers' which senior management can 'pull' to try and produce a desired outcome.

But what are the tools-of-the-trade to achieve this?

PR strategy and plan – often this is the front part of a PR Strategy and Action Plan. As its name suggests, this sets out the strategic objectives and strategic direction which the PR plan then covers in greater detail. If the PR strategy is the destination, the PR Plan is the 'route map' to get there.

Press release – or news release – is in many ways the starting point of all PR programmes. The press release is where the in-house PR Officer or PR consultant looks to write a clear, concise and interesting narrative which provides a newsworthy announcement of some new product, service, breakthrough discovery, event or whatever. A good press release has the whole story summarised within the opening paragraph, whereby the following couple of pages is then an elaboration of this with short, punchy quotes from a spokesperson of the organisation putting out the release.

If the announcement involves a secondary party, then a spokesperson for that organisation is also often quoted. A good press release has a good, eye-catching heading which is intended to gain the journalist's interest. In reality very seldom is the press release heading used in the main text (or headline) but it is part of the 'game' in trying to jump off the printed page or from the computer screen if sent by e-mail. The reality is that journalists receive very many unsolicited press releases and of those received – let alone looked at (however briefly) very few get used.

So how can a press release stand out? There are many variables for the notoriety of the organisation it is from; the reputation of the individual sender (whose name appears in the e-mail inbox of the journalist), through to the newsworthiness of the story itself; the extent to which it matches the interests of the journalist receiving it and/or whether they happened to be planning a piece about the topic in question – or something closely related. Seldom does a

journalist phone the release's sender and ask for further information or seek an interview with the person quoted etc.

For the above reasons of the journalist being inundated with press releases, usually it is necessary to put in a follow-up call to the journalist to try and prompt their interest. This is where journalists and PR people rather fall out and to which there does not seem a perfect full proof answer. The journalist's sentiment is '... if you sent it; I've got it and if I want more info you've given me your contact details on the release ... so why bother me!'

The PR practitioner's view is '... I know you're snowed under with other press releases and approaches and know that if I can talk to you and get you interested in it, I stand a better chance of success!' The happy-middle is somewhere around finding a reason for calling the journalist with some usefully further information – thereby positioning yourself as calling to 'give' something additional, rather than solely hassle.

Targeting and press release distribution – building a press list is another pretty fundamental part of a media relations programme. It is important to keep this up-to-date in terms of known journalist contacts. It is better to send the release directly to the journalist who may be interested in doing something with it, rather than simply to the editor or news editor who will then likely redirect it to the specific person concerned. It is also important to know which journalists like press releases e-mailed and which still prefer post or fax (for non time critical releases). In building a good press distribution list (whereby all or some of the list may get an announcement depending on the potential breadth of interest), it is important not to forget freelancers who cover the area – as often (especially in boom times) they are used a lot by all manner of publications.

Press pack – once this was literally a stiff paper folder containing a printed press release, along with a couple of pages the Company Fact Sheet For Journalists, plus some black and white pictures of the product/service being shown in application – maybe a picture of the person being quoted etc. These days the 'press pack' is typically virtual in terms of e-mail and 'pdf' attachments of charts and pictures etc. One point of difference between the US and UK for instance is

that the US has a preference for many back-up items (ie long biographical notes) within a press pack, such that eight or nine 'enclosures' is not that rare. In the UK, brevity is preferred with a press release (maximum three pages of A4) is typical, maybe with one other back-up attachment.

Q&As – a series of Questions and Answers should be constructed ahead of a press release being sent out. The Q&As are for internal consumption only but represent an important part aspect of preparation as these help the PR practitioners – and company spokesperson involved – think through the kinds of questions they may get – and what they would answer. Within such a document (having anything from a sheet or two of Q&As up to very many pages for something more complex), then a good idea is to have up to three main summary points that you want to rehearse and make pro-actively – especially if not asked about this and you are keen to elaborate on this. *See below Appendix 2 - Media Training Notes.*

Power of a picture – Often a good, 'creative' picture can help persuade a journalist to look further into a story because the picture is compelling. Alternatively the picture could be used along with a 'photo-caption' only – ie there is a very minimal story literally attached to the picture itself. In reality the main newspapers have cut-back dramatically on their own use (and the expenses involved) of their own photographers – thus they expect good, imaginative, high quality pictures to be sent to them. There are countless good freelance photographers about, but then one needs the time and ability to contact newspaper and magazine picture desks. Thus many people use the services of companies such as NewsCast which takes the pictures and looks to 'sell them in' to the picture editors. Such companies also help client organisations have virtual photo libraries whereby journalists and picture editors can access on-line a range of pictures made available by the company itself.

Video news releases – just as newspapers have cut-back on photographers, so have TV news programmes cut-back on camera crews. Therefore so as to help visually illustrate a story for a TV news programme, the producer will often use a VNR as sent to them. For example, when illustrating a rate change to mortgage

holders, or a piece on house price increases/decreases, it is no coincidence that the 'For Sale' signs of certain estate agencies will feature.

Whilst the production costs of producing TV-quality VNRs can be quite high, their successful use to a mass news audience can represent a very good return. However, it is worth remembering that once the company branded (however modestly) 'footage' within the VNR has been given to a TV station, there is NO control or prior knowledge as to how it can then be used. So if the TV news reader is talking about people finding it hard to sell their homes, the estate agent may not be best pleased that their brand is adorning the TV screens at this particular moment!

Building journalist relationships – regardless of what type of PR one is involved with, a common factor is that it is easier to 'pitch' stories and ideas to journalists you have already spoken to or met. Indeed, having made a 'contact' of a journalist and some rapport having been achieved, they are more likely to have some interest in press releases etc that are forwarded thereafter.

Power of survey findings – whilst B2C PR and some aspects of B2B PR have tangible products to promote, in areas such as the fast-expanding services sector, often one is promoting 'know how' and 'expert comment'. To bolster this up, many professional services and financial services firms produce industry reports and conduct surveys within their target markets so as to produce something newsworthy with which to engage the media, as well as to use in other marketing communications and business development ways.

'Owning' an issue – an important part of an organisation's PR strategy is to be identified with key areas or issues so that journalists know that they are a ready, authoritative source of information on that topic. This is as relevant for a management consulting firm as a consumer goods producer. In either case by the nature of the information they disseminate, their investment in materials such as the above mentioned survey findings, all goes to give that organisation a sense of being the leading, authoritative source.

Use of exclusives – if an organisation has a very strong story, then typically the press release will be sent to all the relevant media at the same time, not least ensuring fairness of even-handed dealing. However, if the story is not strong, sometimes a useful technique is to give this as an ‘exclusive’ to a good contact journalist, making clear it is going to them ahead of any other journalist in the hope/anticipation that they can give it a reasonable amount of space etc. However, ‘exclusives’ need to be thought through and handled carefully as some journalists and newspapers have a less than favourable view of exclusives when it precludes them – and they will doubtless remember this the next time something is sent to them.

Crisis PR - this is a large and complex area. The nature and definition of a ‘crisis’ can differ dramatically between companies and industries – or even within the same industry. British Midland famously handled the crisis of one of its planes crashing with resulting fatalities. The way in which its chairman was on the scene of the incident quickly, giving an honest and open reaction won applause and the company went from strength to strength. Few could have anticipated the furor when British Airways (BA) famously redesigned its tail fins, leading to a crisis of confidence in the company and what its identity stood for.

Crisis planning (and how to respond) is especially relevant for consumer goods, food/drinks manufacturers, transport and drug companies, albeit an auditor can face its own crisis when a client goes spectacularly bust and the previous audit did not pick up alleged wrong-doings etc! Crisis planning is a major part of the role of in-house PR people within such companies. In the case of an airline, contingency plans will be so detailed as to have allocated rooms, with pre-agreed layouts and phone lines for people with different responsibilities. At the other end of the range of preparedness, it is advisable that a management team has ready access to colleagues' home numbers and mobiles as crises like travel accidents seldom happen neatly within office hours!

Likewise there are PR consultants who specialise in this very area, in many cases involving teams of people with various other skills, from medical to legal.

Coverage evaluation – whether in-house or consultant, the PR practitioner is always being asked to prove the value of their efforts. At one level this can be a

simple evaluation of press cuttings (marking against a pre-determined set of criteria which one looks for in the piece. At another level, it is tracking the improved (or not) favourability that a specific journalist or media outlet gives to an organisation, person, product or service. Or more broadly there are tracking services which look to measure the reputation of the organisation more broadly. Thus as well as journalists, it would seek to cover the perception of a number of people who are important to that organisations – regulators, parliamentarians, City as well as industry analysts, consumer groups...

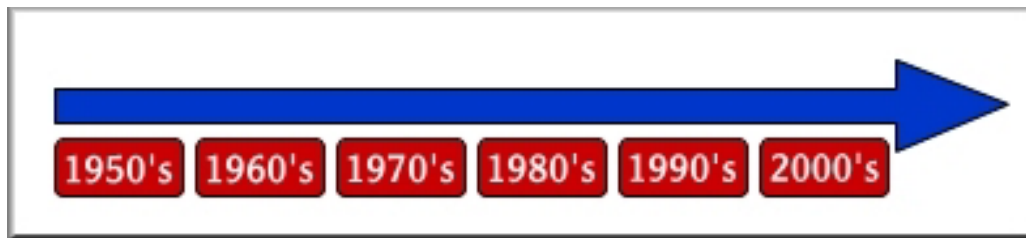
Sometimes the in-house person instigates such measures – albeit there is a sense of 'marking one's own homework'. Alternatively there are many third party research and media evaluation companies who provide this service. Companies such as Echo Research are well placed to advise on what different approaches make sense within available budgets.

Decades of PR's influence

Just as any manner of organisations and individuals can – and do - use PR, a quick look at the progress of the PR business within the last 50 years or so shows how the adoption of PR has been around for differing lengths of time – thus it is not surprising that it is more developed in some areas than others. If it is the case that PR is anything but a definitive science, then the below is equally subjective but does give a sense of PR's very own time continuum, as per the UK's experience. In broad terms, that the US is ahead and many parts of Eastern and Southern Europe is 'behind but catching-up', is predominantly true.

Given that PR has sometimes been described as the world's second oldest 'profession' – indeed with certain things in common with the oldest – PR can be traced back very many decades in one way or another. Certainly the first and second World Wars used 'PR' in the form of public information thinly disguised as propaganda. Following World War II when rationing was still in force, the accent was on the production of basic products and services and consumer choice was almost unheard of. With greater relative prosperity this soon changed, especially in the 1960s.

Fig. 3. The development of public relations



- 50s - Consumer PR and very basic financial (City) PR around company announcements...
- 60s - Used (but not called PR!) by Government departments (from immunisations to dangers of drinking/driving...), travel/holidays...
- 70s - Charities; 'industrial PR'; Healthcare PR (often largest single briefs/budgets for individual over the counter drugs) ... PR seen as integral and increasingly significant proportion of whole marketing spend.
- 80s - Spread to sports; schools/universities/business schools; financial services, professions (via legislative changes for lawyers for example), broader B2B application; mid 80s M&A boom enhanced role of City PR; Crisis PR; Green/Environmental PR; political PR and its role within local & General Elections; the British Royal Family – notably within the Diana era - dipped its collective toe in the PR 'pool' with mixed results
- 90s - IT/telco/dotcom/e-commerce boom; new era of mega pharma/healthcare programmes; City PR boomed with increase in Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) plus aggressive take-over culture ; increased role of internal comms/change management; PR around pro bono work as part of good citizenship; promotion of Intellectual Capital as services sector ever-grows...
- 00s - post Enron/WorldCom... increased promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility and greater transparency within business; in the build-up and post the Iraqi coalition invasion, various PR techniques were used (and over used) such that a backlash to honest communication was called for. As one politician noted: '... honesty is the new spin!'; increased role of public sector as major employer/budgets from health/teenage pregnancy, smoking,

teacher/nurse recruitment... as major issues; role of national economic/regulatory persuasion, eg potential Euro adoption in UK.

Looking to the future, writing at a time of continuing tough economic conditions, an increasing trend for PR seen – in many quarters – as Business Development Support – means the accent is on PR having a greater bottom-line justification to earn its keep than in an expansive, boom economy when Marketing and PR expenditure is easier to find!

APPENDIX 1 - De-coding PR Jargon

Below is a list of commonly used terms and their definitions – as used within the PR world, courtesy of the IPR.

Community relations: Corporate social outreach programmes designed to build relations and foster understanding of the role of the business to neighbours in the local community.

Corporate communications: Public relations for a corporation integrated as part of the company's strategic objectives.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Borne from the belief that trade brings obligations, CSR makes companies responsible for their use of resources, both environmentally and socially. The role of public relations in CSR strategies is to communicate effectively to build corporate accountability and transparency.

Crisis management: Having a plan in place that can be effectively actioned when something goes wrong for an organisation.

E-PR/online PR: Communicating over the web and using new technology to effectively communicate with stakeholders.

Environmental communications: PR sector specialising in communication on sustainable use of resources, environmental impact of business and corporate social responsibility.

Evaluation: Measuring the impact of a public relations campaign. This process is typically linked with planning and research (see <http://www.ipr.org.uk/evaluation>).

Fundraising/sponsorship: Looking for partners to provide financial support or support 'in kind' for an event or activity where both parties will benefit.

In-house magazines/newsletter: A tool to communicate with employees about news, issues and developments of interest to them about the organisation they work for.

Internal communications: Organisational use of process communication to help achieve corporate objectives. Includes employee and shareholder communications.

Media/presentation training: Training to help when dealing with the various media (including television and radio), with journalists and when making a pitch to prospective clients.

Media monitoring: Monitoring a company's coverage in the press, on TV and radio and on the Internet.

Pitch: A presentation of a recommended public relations programme, generally carefully researched and costed, which can take up to four weeks to prepare and for which some consultancies reserve the right to charge a fee if not subsequently appointed.

Press office: A press office handles all media enquiries and puts out all company messages to the media on behalf of their organisation.

Print/production: The process of producing printed material such as brochures, posters and leaflets.

Public Affairs/Lobbying: Those aspects of public relations communications involving relations with governmental or statutory bodies or their semi-official organisations through sophisticated use of political intelligence and pressure.

APPENDIX 2 - Media training notes

How the media thinks/works

(Courtesy of <http://www.arcbusiness.biz>)

'Typical' journalist profile

- Almost always averagely (at best fairly well) paid - especially in relation to the power and influence they can have.
- Broadly – and somewhat ironically - journalists are left-of-centre working for far right wing media owners! Spot the potential tension.
- Historically, most journalists start their career with regional/trade publications and work up – there are exceptions, who enter nationals as graduate trainees or who move over from City/industry but typically this is financially hard.
- Big publishing houses sometimes move journalists around between titles, so can initially have little industry/market knowledge, nor contacts.
- A good story can be their 'break' into, or progress within a national – this is your opportunity to help them and become their 'friend'. At worst you provide them with the kind of 'exclusive' you don't want!
- Invest time in young, inexperienced journalists and the investment can pay off over the medium to long term.
- For every journalist who turns up in a suit, the majority will look 'casual' to say the least. Don't let appearance or age fool you to the fact that there is often a bright, perceptive mature mind within a younger body.
- Feel free to disagree with a journalist but do not get into a heated argument – remember that the media always has the proverbial 'last word' – and in print or on air too!
- If and when you build a good, close relationship with a more experienced, senior journalist, 'tap' them for information – communication is a two-way 'street' – besides the kind of people you want to do business with are probably the very people they know/interview/write for.

- Journalists are typically having to work harder as headcount restrictions and a 7X24 all day culture put greater strains on their working lives - receiving 200+ e-mails daily is not unusual.
- Journalists who cite coming from a paper/publication may actually be a freelance (contracted to produce a specific one-off piece, or used semi-regularly) or be a 'stringer' or 'super-stringer' – contracted to one or two publications and used in countries where the paper cannot cost-justify a full time journalist. There is nothing wrong with this type of freelance/'stringer' but be aware – your quotes or the piece itself might have broader coverage than you think.

'Rules' of engagement

- **Don't trust off-the-record** – it does not really exist – the information you give can be used and the journalist can claim someone else gave it – or they knew this from before you gave it. Only after several meetings/conversations when a good mutual trust has been developed should you consider giving more sensitive information than when you first met. The simple rule is:

IF YOU DON'T WANT IT APPEARING, DON'T SAY IT

- **Be aware of pre-recorded TV/radio interviews** - as you have no control over the introduction nor follow-on to your own recorded piece; nor who else has been interviewed and may be agreeing/disagreeing with you. NB, politicians normally only agree to live interviews for these very reasons. Do your 'homework' on what can be found out about the programme and/or interviewer in broad terms.
- **Not every question needs to be answered** – the term *'I'm sorry but this is commercially sensitive'* normally works, but should not be used too often. With broadcast media you need to find a balance between repeatedly avoiding questions with this kind of statement and coming over as uncooperative and losing the viewer's/listener's sympathy.
- **Be ready to give something else** – if you cannot answer a question – whether commercially sensitive or you simply don't know – be ready to

offer something else. 'What I can tell you is...' or '...let's put that in perspective first, did you know that...'

- **Power of selective statistics** - be ready to use a few simple statistics to back-up points. Too many and you sound like a boffin - use none and almost by definition you are always sounding rather vague. Where possible use analogy to give these numbers a context, eg enough people have come to XXXX? to fill-up the Wimbledon Tennis Championships' Centre Court twice over...
- **Don't slag off the competition/colleagues** – this sounds unprofessional and can be very counter-productive. For that matter, don't be negative about a colleague – even if you can't stand them!

Useful tips and techniques

- **Retakes** - if you are being recorded in advance of broadcast and you are not happy with your answer; stop speaking and ask for a retake. Done too often will irritate but feel confident to take control.
- **First question** - ahead of a broadcast (TV/radio) interview you will be asked to say something for 'level' (ie how soft/loud your voice is). Use this opportunity to ask what the first question will be. Don't be fobbed-off – your interviewer should want you to make a good start anyway.
- **Alternatives** - when you cannot or do not want to answer a question, try and offer something else – especially in a live interview. *'I cannot answer that, but what I can tell you is...'* This normally works and can hopefully move the conversation onto the topic you want.
- **Don't bluff** – this will come back to 'haunt' you. In a broadcast environment, use the above technique to deflect the question. In a face-to-face or telephone interview, say when you don't know something and commit to coming back with info or getting someone else to call with it – and make sure this happens!
- **'Bridging' expressions** – these are a way to either 'buy' you a little time or to say something ahead of answering the questions, eg *'That's a good question that I'm often asked...'* (buys time to think of an answer); *'Let me first put this in context, ...'* This gives a chance to deflect the direct nature of the question.

- **Deadlines** - be sensitive to a journalist's deadline – a delay of 20 minutes in returning a call can make a lot of difference.
- **Silence** – once you've answered – shut up! Journalists sometimes use the trap of silence to let people keep talking and eventually disclose something they regret.
- **Clear and concise** - always be clear regarding what you want to get over – ideally no more than *three main points* typically – and have these written-down and to hand if that is a useful prompt.
- **Repeat/summarise** – feel confident to repeat your three main points and – if you feel comfortable to do so – say as much.
- **Appearance** - in many ways talking to the media is like a sales pitch. Think positively; body language is important; looking smart/professional (even if this means casual) is important – the majority of the impression created will be *how* you say something as much as *what* you say!
- **Think audience** – what are the journalist's readers interested in? Make the journalist's job easier regarding terms readers will understand...ie what readers of specialist media want versus general business ones.
- **Plain English** – when abroad or speaking with foreign media, remember to keep vocabulary simple; use short sentences... Journalists speaking to you in English may be hearing what you say in their second or even third language.
- **Under/over estimating knowledge** – business journalists in foreign countries can often have very wide remits, ie an overseas based *Financial Times* journalist can easily have to cover all business, social-economic, political and related issues across a variety of industries...

The unexpected media call

- **Suggested approach** – rather than 'winging it', respond with '*Hi, sorry but I am currently talking with someone; what's it you want to talk about in brief and I will call back in 20 mins – is that okay?*'.
- **Preparation** – think of what you want to get over (try writing points on a pad to keep in front of you if that appeals...) BUT also think through

skeletons-in-the-cupboard questions and again, write down key responses.

- **Control** - this gives preparation time; opportunity to think of main points you want to make. When you ring back you are then in control and can 'take the game to them'.

Characteristics of good/poor interviewees

- As part of your own preparation, think of people you've seen interviewed on TV/radio, or read and think what makes them good/bad/indifferent.
- Which are clear and come over sympathetically? Which seem vague or even confused and do not encourage trust? Which are plain shifty and untrustworthy?
- Looking at past UK politicians, Margaret Thatcher (regardless of what you thought of her) was easy to quote accurately. She repeated her main points; used simple, short statements and the ensuing copy was largely accurate. Depending upon your views, in the broadcast media she lacked warmth and sincerity however
- Neil Kinnock, by contrast, used colourful, emotive and passionate language – long, 'poetic' sentences, but it was hard to report him accurately. On TV/radio the sincerity would come through, but it was often hard to report him accurately.
- Think of today's UK politicians and how they are presented via the media. Broadly speaking, their rapport with the media could be seen as: Blair (skilful but how sincere)... The way they approach the media; then how the media reproduce and edit it, reflects how we perceive them. Whilst politicians are often almost caricatures of good spokespeople, they do demonstrate the good and bad of communication quite well.
- How you represent the company (accurately and imaginatively) will determine how the media see the company; how they report it and then how the audiences you wish to reach will perceive the company.

Three 'S's of a good interview

Sincere

- Self-obvious but the majority of misquotes come from unclear, long input from the interviewee – so keep it short, genuine and most of all sincere!
- Make it obvious when you move onto another point – feel free to summarise (very briefly) what you have just said.
- Don't inadvertently agree to poor summaries (made by the journalist) of what you're saying – if you disagree, say so – be confident to contradict.
- Journalists often find it hard to tell the genuinely exciting/important from the bland. In general terms, British people are normally undramatic – thus important points tend to 'wash over'. Use emphasis to make it clear that you're just about to – and then have - made an important point.
- To make an important point clear, use your voice via change of tempo (ie slow down), repeat the point; use a pause; sit forward in your chair at that moment; move a little closer to the journalist (physically).
- Stress important points by saying that is exactly what they are. *'Probably the most important thing I have to say on this issue is...'* Repeat something for impact; use dramatic pause... Think of yourself underscoring an important passage of emboldened text with a magic-marker. You too want this important point about xxxx to jump off the page!

'Sexy'

- **Use anecdotes; similes, visual expressions** – anything that makes the usual everyday text 'come alive'... eg In any one day half the marketing departments in the country are scratching their heads as to what their customers really want ...
- **Avoid management speak and jargon** ... eg agreement, not alignment! Using these with journalists can be excluding unless you make clear what a special expression actually means.

- **Offer good examples** – don't wait to be asked! Eg example of a guy who kept waiting to be asked about latest award his company had just won – except it never came up!!!
- **Sexing-it up** – don't overplay this 'card' but journalists are human – so a little bit of colour and 'spice' can go a long way!

Snappy

- Don't show-off with big words. Think of military briefings – unambiguous, short sentences so as to minimise the potential for confusion.
- Despite whatever pre-meeting information may have been given to the journalist, if they have received loads of information, don't expect them to decipher what is really interesting or relevant to them - this will not happen!
- Decide on the key points you want to make – and make them concisely as well as clearly.

Skeletons in the 'corporate cupboard'

As well as preparing for what we *do* want to talk about; it is equally important to be prepared to talk about what we *don't* want to. As well as specific client or company issues/events, in professional services companies for example, the wider issue of simply naming clients and what can be divulged about the work undertaken for them can be a real problem.

The following are some potentially sensitive/awkward issues:

- Why is a 40 year old company like XXXX? not doing better?
- Why is the US operation struggling when it has such a vast local market to attack?
- How is the relationship with your parent company going? Are you making the earn-out targets they first set?
- What levels of investment are required to turn-around XXXXX? in the Asia market?

- How truly international is your management team?
- Do you have sufficient marketing budget to build a global XXXXX? brand?
- How easily copied are XXXXX? services? What trademark protection do you have?
- What are the product's/service's USPs (Unique Service Propositions)?
- Who are your main competitors and why?
- Why should your targeted markets (ie Australia...) trust a foreign company such as XXXXX?
- If a couple of key people are the main assets of the company, how well do you have such people 'locked-in' or their knowledge 'backed-up' on-line?
- How many clients that you have worked for ultimately fail and point the finger-of-blame at you?
- Have you had any disputes over ownership of an idea?
- ...

Pro-active points

- Have a framework of *three key points* in your mental attaché case. Tick-off in your mind as you go. These will change between type of media (ie broad management; marketing; industry-specific...) The key is to have some main points in mind already that can be 'adapted' rather than suddenly 'invented'.
- Take up to two/three charts/diagrams/illustrations which show the point you are making but be clear whether the journalist can keep them.
- Take a couple of readily-available 'hard copies' of case studies, not least as it is a prompt for on-record client names.
- Consider taking a co-authored book or white paper even.

Having focused heavily on getting all three main points into the interview, back them up as required by other secondary points/messages.

Conclusion

There is no substitute for PREPARATION in terms of simply thinking through:

- The main points you want to make.
- Which clients/case studies/book references... illustrate the concepts I will be talking about.
- Potentially tricky questions.

Be sincere, sexy and snappy and think about what the readers/listeners/viewers of the publication/programme will be interested in.

Be positive in what you say and how you say it. Your enthusiasm for XXXXX? will be infectious. Last of all, enjoy the experience and always be aware that once rapport has been established, the press are a good source of who is doing what – chances are they just interviewed them!

Development activities

The following development activities are exercises intended to help you think about the subject of Public Relations. Pick the ones that are most relevant and have a go.

In thinking about PR and your own organisation, try and answer some of the questions below. Share your thoughts with colleagues, especially those already involved in PR/marketing activities. Effective PR requires careful, considered planning, before any initiatives are started – but then a readiness to react swiftly, as needed.

1. What key messages relay what you want to say about your organisation?

What you want to say is the natural place to start. As with all marketing activities, you need to think carefully about how you want to portray your organisation. How do you want journalists - and ultimately their readers/listeners/viewers - to view you and your organisation?

Defining the message is an integral part of a company's overall communication effort, so your dealings with the media need to be consistent with other activities such as advertising, direct marketing and/or content on your website. It is potentially destructive if your advertising paints a completely different picture to your media relations campaign; or what you are saying internally is out of step with what you are saying to external stakeholders. Consistency of message is key.

2. Who are you trying to reach?

There are thousands of journalists out there working at a huge range of newspapers, magazines, journals, websites, TV and radio stations. Who should you be speaking to?

Ultimately, you are trying to reach your key audiences such as customers, suppliers, and industry opinion formers. What are the publications that are widely read in your industry? Who are the writers on the national newspapers that write on topics relevant to you? Get used to the structure of the publications,

who writes in them and the types of topics that get covered. The better you know the media the more successful you will be in getting positive coverage.

3. How are you going to communicate with the media?

There are a variety of ways of getting your message across to the media and it is important that the right activity is used depending on the occasion and the media channel.

The press release remains normally the best way to communicate news in a succinct way, but there are numerous other written materials that can be utilised in different circumstances including case studies, articles and pre-prepared quotes.

In getting to know journalists, it is important to find out how they like to work and receive information from you. Tailor the materials and method of delivery to the journalist. If they like email, don't fax it to them. If their weekly deadline is 12pm Thursday, call them on a Monday or Tuesday, not at 11.30am, Thursday!

If you are going to speak to a journalist, be clear about the message you want to relay and have facts and figures close to hand – be prepared! (*See Appendix 2*).

4. What could go wrong?

Always be prepared for the unexpected. When thinking about PR, don't just think about the potential positive results; also pay attention to the possible pitfalls.

Journalists are largely free to write as to how they see the situation, so there is absolutely no guarantee that a story will appear as you so confidently thought when in the planning meeting!

Good, well planned PR reduces the chances of bad stories. Consider the negative angles a journalist could pick up on and prepare properly for them. Make sure your key messages are clear and consistent.

Get to know journalists, understand their agenda and ultimately work with them, not against them!

5. Consider resources?

Who in your organisation is going to be the central point of contact for PR? Who are the spokespeople going to be? Is the PR programme going to be carried out by an in-house team or are you going to look for a PR consultancy or freelancer to work with? How is PR going to interact with other marketing disciplines? Is the intention to carry out the PR programme just in the UK or in other countries?

Don't underestimate the resources that a structured PR programme, particularly media relations can take up. The media is not 9-5, five days week – a crisis or big story that needs dealing with can arise at any time.

Every company and organisation in the world has its own PR to contend with, whether they like it or not. The choice is whether you let others dictate how you are perceived or take control of your organisation's reputation in the media and ultimately, with audiences such as your customers.

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