



Chapter 4
PR Secrets For The Boss



You Will Learn About

- ★ Using PR To Clinch Big Business Deals
- ★ Can Any Good Come From Community Relations?
- ★ How To **Stretch** Publicity
- ★ Getting PR To Rain On Dry Days
- ★ Thinking Of International PR?
- ★ Tips On Getting Free Publicity For Your Company
- ★ Planning for PR
- ★ Lots Of Opportunities in Photo Opportunities
- ★ Time To Hire A PR Agency?



USING PR TO CLINCH BIG BUSINESS DEALS

*“In the business world, the rearview mirror is
always clearer than the windshield”*

- Warren Buffet

In this piece:

- ★ Win potential clients’ attention even before you knock on their doors
- ★ How PR helps companies to win competitive bids

What if someone in PR said he could give you a clear 30 percent business advantage over your competitors in clinching a big business deal — and this is done even before you meet your potential customer?

Sounds tempting but still not convinced? Well, scores of successful business people use public relations to beat the competition and win big deals.

You and I know that good business deals don’t just happen — they have to be made to happen. To win a deal, you can’t afford to wait until D-Day to show what you’ve got. You must win before you walk into that boardroom with your business plans and presentation kits.

Let your brand precede you

Before you meet your potential client to clinch a big deal, work at letting them hear good things about you — especially through trusted third parties. This means good press reports showcasing some memorable work you have done and what is called “thought leadership” of the industry you’re in. This builds credibility and lets your target know who you are, what you do best and the good things you have done.

Think about it. Before a movie is premiered, advertising and promotions are already bombarding you. The tagline “From the producer of

When you itch to find out about the movie, they have won part of the game. When you step into the hall with popcorn in your hand, they have won the game

.....” will be everywhere. This is done to win YOU, through past work, even before you buy the cinema tickets.

When you itch to find out about the movie, they have won part of the game. When you step into the hall with popcorn in your hand, they have won the game. Their tactics are simple, really. They give you the promise of a good movie even before the movie critics get to see it.

The same goes for that big business deal that you “must win”. When you walk into the meeting room with your reputation preceding you, then you’ve won part of the game already.

Good reputation and track record

Reputation may take a long time to build and only a few seconds to destroy. Maintaining favourable reputation is an ongoing practice and must be free from crisis. Plan a reputation building exercise that is consistent and lasting. Always put forward a few of the best work you have done. Remember “From the producer of.....”.

Credible personalities

Here’s a real life story that took place in the early 90’s. A prominent advertising agency that was about to pitch for the national airline’s account faced a big stumbling block — they had never handled any airlines before! To their rescue, a PR agency was hired (by the ad agency) to work behind the scenes in helping clinch this multi-million dollar account.

The PR agency was smart. It didn’t use the advertising agency itself as the reference point, but instead used its managing director to sell the company. The foreign MD had experience handling the advertising for an international airline outside Malaysia and this critical factor of hands-on experience was pushed to the front.

The trick was not to say this face-to-face, so to speak, with the potential client, but instead, to allow third parties to highlight this trump card, before the MD was slated to pitch in front of the airline’s management.

So within a window of five weeks, a massive PR campaign was mounted to cast the MD as a communications (advertising) expert in the airline industry – through TV talk show appearances and numerous articles in national newspapers. From transportation and airline issues, commentary on key drivers for airline growth and economic spin offs to the country – the MD was constantly the subject of media articles.

This approach of creating early awareness allowed the client to claim number one spot for online trading because its competitors were simply viewed as “copy cats”

The effect was to have a third party – the media – build the credibility of the advertising agency through its MD. When the month was over, the agency won the account!

Publicise areas of expertise

When PR was called in to handle the market entry of the country's first online stock trading portal, we didn't just hold an event to launch the Internet service. That's too simple an approach to take. We realised the creation of pre-launch excitement was more important than the actual launch itself.

Since online trading was still new at that time, we knew we had to educate the public and sell them the promise of the future. Again, the curtains went up for heavy weight media coverage that emphasised education and the promise of what online trading had to offer to stock market investors and more importantly – that the company introducing the online service had the necessary expertise and experience.

The “teaser and education” approach had created for both the public and media a sense of eagerness for the big launch. So, on D-day, it was smooth sailing with record-breaking media attendance and enthusiastic public response. The website was overwhelmed and the office phone lines were jammed with people calling in to subscribe for the service.

This approach allowed the client to claim number one spot for online trading because its competitors were simply viewed as “copy cats”.

The online site was able to pull in twice the number of subscribers it had planned for, showing that winning tomorrow's big account or business deal starts well before you step foot into the client's office.



CAN ANY GOOD COME FROM COMMUNITY RELATIONS?

“Being a good neighbour can pay big dividends”
- PR man

In this piece:

- ★ Detach yourself from the normal community relations gimmicks
- ★ Improve your image while contributing to the community

Being human, every time we write a cheque or open our wallet to pay bills, there’s this feeling of uneasiness in parting with our hard-earned money. No matter how big or small the amount, we tend to have a sense of dislike for the company we send our money to, even though we did use their services.

Translate this to a bigger picture -- people who have to pay bills become so-called enemies of successful corporations. With all the PR work of convincing the public how successful your corporation is, you now need to balance this with community relations. But what is community relations anyway?

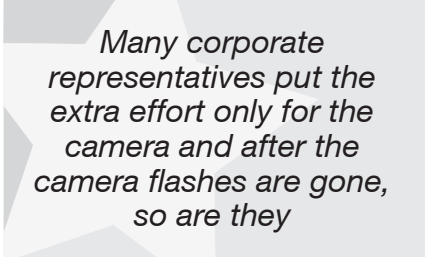
Community relations is all about enhancing your organisation’s participation and position within a community through outreach efforts for the mutual benefit of the organisation and the community. In simple words, it is about giving back to society through a programme that benefits both parties.

Sometime back, the concept of community relations, which of late has been widely renamed as “corporate social responsibility”, was somewhat novel. If corporations contributed in some way to the good of

society, they were certainly praised, but if they didn't, no harm was done. Times have changed and there's been an emergence of a more critical and educated society, which actually knows how much money corporations are making each year.

Social responsibility has become as much of a corporate imperative as good customer service, high-quality management or healthy market share.

How your employees, as well as the community-at-large, perceive your company is just as vital as your company's reputation among your clients.



Many corporate representatives put the extra effort only for the camera and after the camera flashes are gone, so are they

Bad cases of community relations

a) Blown-up cheques

You know, the firing squad type pictures that appear in the papers of two grinning executives holding up a mock cheque at a ceremony, with the donation value written in large print. This represents show-offs at work. It lacks human touch and sincerity. It comes across to people as if you're saying "here's some money". And with a few of those blown-up cheques being paraded everyday in the press, so what's new? Can you tell one blown-up cheque from another? Can the public differentiate your cheque from the rest? Furthermore, if the amount is nothing spectacular, why shout so loud?

b) Championing personal glory

There are times that individuals use their corporations and their community programmes to fill personal agendas. The public isn't stupid and can spot stunts like these miles away. This kind of hijacking will end up jeopardising the programmes, the corporation's reputation and the person doing the hijacking.

c) Acting for the cameras only

We know that photo opportunities are musts for the media who want to capture a visual representation of the whole event. Many corporate representatives put the extra effort only for the camera and after the camera flashes are gone, so are they.

Making community relations a success

a) Be different, get longer recall

Always plan different or unique ways of giving back to the society. Give back what the community wants. Never follow a trend — create one instead. Your community relations programme should be easy for the public to understand. Programmes that are overly complicated and address only certain groups should be avoided, simply because the human mind will not remember things it doesn't understand.

b) The public must really benefit

Just like non-profit organisations, the ultimate goal of community relations is to make a difference in society. Pledging free concert tickets to all members in an elite club will not be a good idea. The benefits should stretch as far as possible to reach as many people as possible. The public should be able to see, feel or experience your programme.

c) Show progress

Once a community relations programme is promised, the corporation has a duty to keep people informed of its progress from time to time. Trust will be based on the realisation of the programme – not just its launch. Many a time we've seen launches of community relations programmes that fail to sustain awareness.

d) Crisis is always the best time

The best time to give to the public is when they need you most. Natural and medical disasters are top of the list. Those disasters will gain immediate and constant attention. About a decade ago a group of superstars sang together to raise money for the under-privileged. It received huge global media coverage and also remains one of the decade's most memorable moments in music and charity. Why was it so successful? Because it created a trend, it showed progress and it was done during a crisis.

e) Proper mechanism

To release funds or aid during a crisis, you will need to put together a proper mechanism. It will be too late to plan when a disaster is already happening. If your corporation is late, another corporation will take your place and steal the limelight.

f) Always evaluate

It's all about public perception. Evaluation should be based on how the public perceives your community relations programmes. You need to gauge the positive and negative impact on your target audience. From the results, your PR consultant will know whether to continue, change or scrap the whole exercise. Fine-tuning can still be made at the early stage.



HOW TO STRETCH PUBLICITY

“I don’t care what they call me as long as they mention my name”

- George Cohan

You get to find out:

- ★ Why you need to stretch your publicity
- ★ How to segmentise publicity
- ★ How not to bore the media with the same old story

How do you keep telling the same stories over and over? How do you keep selling the same subject to the media without having to explain why? Can it actually be done?

Yes! Some PR campaigns need to be stretched over a long period to get the maximum effect – and retention. Unless your story affects, amuses, helps or hurts millions, it’ll be old news before you know it. In fact, it’s only a flash in the pan unless you know how to “recycle” it.

Let’s just say your company is launching a new product and the marketing is expected to stretch up to three months. Can you sustain publicity that long for a single product? The first rule is to divide inside your mind the “campaign” plan into three segments – pre-event, event and post-event. With these segments clearly layered in your mind, it will help you design and pace out the messages you want to send out.

Pre-event

This is where you should lay all the foundations of your products and events – it’s the teaser period. Without doubt the news release is the ultimate tool of “extending” your news to the media, but it should not be a “stand-alone” activity.

As a run-up, try to conduct a media briefing before an event. Understanding a new product, service or a project prior to its launch will make the media more receptive and help to build up audience anticipation.

The takeout is that pre-event PR won't steal the thunder or jump the gun because you are merely creating more awareness and in the process, build anticipation

A number of ways have been devised to create this “excuse” to tell your target audience about products or services that should only be revealed at a certain date with names such as “pre-launch” briefings and “sneak” previews. Talk about being sneaky!

Another one is the Teaser Release, which teases the press with just enough information to hopefully get them to call you. If done properly, this could lead to an interview, which could result in a complete article on your product or service. This adds greatly to the testimonial factor, because the journalist can add another dimension about your products and bring it to new levels.

Another kind of teaser is to release information in stages. Example: A stage production of *The Sound of Music* will be held next month. Just release the backgrounders of only two of the cast at a time in the form of a press release. Do it on a weekly basis and in a month's time you'll have four news releases out on backgrounders alone. You still have news releases on the production team and several other news angles to offer.

You can also try an “Article Release”. Today, more and more press releases read more like a ready-to-use short articles. They tell about your product or service in a broader sense. Do it as long as you don't come across as being overly promotional. Taken to the next level, you can even write an actual article with your information buried in a sentence or two in the middle of it. If done properly, sometimes you even get paid for the article promoting you! How's that for having your cake and eating it too.

The takeout is that pre-event PR won't steal the thunder or jump the gun because you are merely creating more awareness and in the process, build anticipation.

Event

Always have something to announce during an event. Taking a product launch as news alone will not create enough interest for the news desk. Your company should consider announcing the opening of another branch, or pledge a donation based on sale of the new products.

You must bear in mind that a good portion of the information on your new product was already covered during the pre-event PR activities. So naturally, it will be good to have a fresh news angle based on the same product, service or event. Even during an event, multiple story angles can be created by inviting VIPs or celebrities to grace the occasion.

By the way, celebrities and VIPs can prove to be double-edged swords, because the media may focus more on them than on your product. This is why it's good to put your new product through three PR phases to stretch its launch-related publicity – and take insurance.

Post-event

This is where you can generate more publicity. There is a good chance for you to create more reasons for extending the news on your campaign. You can consider a “success story” or “progress” type news release. It's good to inform the public about sales progress of your products after being launched. The public would want to know how many were sold before deciding to even try it.

The list doesn't end there. A well-orchestrated public relations campaign can incorporate dozens of other ideas on how to position your company or products as being “wildly successful”. Here are some more tips:

Get onto the speaking circuit

Having the CEO give speeches to community groups and trade associations is a wonderful way to “create buzz” about your business.

Create a website

The website should offer free advice, reciprocal links, articles by and about you, story ideas about your business and a list of experts the media can contact.

Look for photo opportunities

Local newspapers, TV stations, weekly shoppers, trade publications and other media are always looking for interesting photos. Call the media with ideas or submit your own photos.

Remember:

- ★ Adding 'newsworthiness' to your activities will attract media attention



GETTING PR TO RAIN ON DRY DAYS

“Kites rise highest against the wind – not with it”
- Sir Winston Churchill

Find out about:

- ★ Opportunities for publicity
- ★ How to fill empty space in newspaper columns
- ★ How to help TV stations fill their air time

Churchill knew how to exploit a bad situation to his advantage and there are a few smart CEOs who know what to do during media “dry” days. They know that even long festive holidays and long weekends aren’t allowed to interrupt the news generating process.

Asia is blessed with multiracial societies that celebrate each other’s festivals. More festivals mean more holidays and the business pages of newspapers and TV news will likely be empty because the business community is not working.

Just think of busy days when you always have trouble getting your stories into those pages because there simply is no more space available. Now is the chance to be in! But chances are you’ll be on leave too.

PR has two goals when leveraging media — raise your visibility and give a boost to your business goals. This happens when you make sure there is a continuous flow of good publicity.


One piece of advice — when your company doesn’t have anything newsworthy to report, don’t waste time pulling together an expensive press conference about nothing. Instead, here are some suggestions on how to use your time and your company’s purse more effectively and efficiently. Think more strategically, and try some of these techniques.

Pump up your news releases

As mentioned several times, this is the Ultimate PR weapon! Drafting and getting a good news release completed can be extremely time-consuming. It is not as easy as you might think. So draft a few ahead of time to be on standby, with non time sensitive topics and release it at the right time. That way, you too can go on leave.

Articles

If your company has expertise on a specific subject, try to encourage your senior executives to write an article targeted to their audience. Perhaps an editor would be interested in featuring a regular column from your company. As most columns are not time sensitive, chances of it being used is high.



Find a handful of key journalists who cover your industry regularly and who you would like to get to know better. This is an effective way to build credibility and get your organisation quoted

Look for speaking opportunities

Nothing compares with meeting face-to-face with your target audience. Look for upcoming seminars or conferences for the target audience of your company. Draft speaker proposals and submit them to conference organisers that might benefit from your company's expertise. Instead of using the media for publicity all the time, why not meet the audience face to face and communicate directly. The impact will be different.

Seminars and roundtable discussions

Suggest that your company initiate a roundtable discussion or teach a one-day seminar — perhaps for free — providing valuable information to potential and current clients. It's a great way for you to garner some new business and for you to reap event publicity!

Personal visits to the editors

Yes, there are a still a few editors who have time to meet with you or someone within your organisation — particularly if your company can offer information for a story his reporter is currently working on. Find a handful of key journalists who cover your industry regularly and who

you would like to get to know better. This is an effective way to build credibility and get your organisation quoted.

Good time to concentrate on media relations

No, it's not about doing lunch or taking them out for a drink. This is more of getting to know the media people whom you are working with. Instead of just carrying out your media relations over the telephone, why not take the time to meet and discuss other news possibilities.

Third-party opportunities

Take that extra effort to read. Make sure you are aware of what's happening in the news everyday. If you do not have access to a television in your office, bookmark online news sites relevant to your organisation. If your company can discuss the subject of data recovery for computers after a major blackout in the city, make sure all of the major dailies and TV stations have a backgrounder on your representative.

Sweet charity

The media so far have been kind to companies that do charity events. Churn out more of these activities. Such work is often quite easy to promote and allows your company to be known as a good corporate citizen among peer companies. Ninety percent of the charity stories are picture stories. Be creative with your photo opportunities and who knows, it may end up on the front page.

Take advantage of the days when the media don't have news to report, and flex your creative muscle. Use some of the techniques here to create media opportunities that will warrant ink, even when the news day is slow.

The lesson:

- ★ Media opportunities are everywhere - you only need to unearth it



THINKING OF INTERNATIONAL PR?

“If you aren’t going all the way, why go at all?”

- Joe Namath

Here you will know:

- ★ Things to consider when attempting global publicity
- ★ How to select the right PR firm for the job
- ★ How to gain extra mileage from your internal PR people

As more Asian companies venture overseas to capture bigger markets, the question about doing some form of international public relations — to build brands and sell products — is being asked more often by chief executives.

That being the case, there are some things you need to be aware of to ensure success in your international PR efforts. First of all, you need to plan ahead and think through the financial and resource implications of running multi-country campaigns. Will the success be at the same level in every country involved? How about language barriers? How to cobble together an international PR programme? How do I go about hiring several PR firms?

Each country is different

Take off your blinkers and stop viewing an area such as Europe or Asia Pacific as an identical whole. The same applies when Americans look at Asia — they need to be told it is really more than one country. It’s worth remembering that countries, even in the same region, are a complicated mix of nationalities, cultures and languages and are subject to variances in business and marketing approach.

Younger organisations with limited international experience tend to believe they can simply modify and roll out their existing strategy and stretch it all over Asia. It may occasionally work – on a hit-and-miss basis – but most of the time they don't. The key here is to apply the well-proven adage of Think Global, Act Local.

Why is it that when top Asian bosses visit overseas markets they set aside very little time to sit down and meet with journalists, if at all?

What applies to Asian companies looking out, also applies to American companies coming into Asia. Although American companies are beginning to be more aware of the geographical, business and cultural diversity of Europe, they can fall into the “one-size-fits-all” trap with Asia. In other words, the mistake of thinking in regional terms rather than taking into account the subtle differences between countries – indeed, the variations that can occur within a country.

One clear example, Japan is an entirely different market compared to Korea, which is also very different from China. The PC penetration in China is low compared with the rest of the region, but TV penetration is very high. The same applies to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei and the Philippines. Each has radically different market and cultural dynamics at work and can't be simply lumped as one ASEAN market.

These factors have a strong influence in how communications and marketing plans are developed within each country. Also the regulatory environment varies from country to country, as does the media. Viewing this as a single market will no doubt create pretty PR programmes on paper that will crash (and clash) during implementation.

International news release

Without thinking, Asian companies usually borrow a leaf from the PR practice of giant US companies by issuing a news release for the international market that was originally written for their own home market. Don't forget that if you have already issued a press release in, say, Malaysia or Singapore, simply trying to “repackage” this release the next day for foreign markets will prove a wasted effort.

One advantage giant US companies have over Asian companies is their ownership of global brands and investments overseas that add up to billions. While Asian brands are still young and only recognised

locally, we can't use the same PR tactics as the US multinationals.

Big guns visits

Why is it that when top Asian bosses visit overseas markets they set aside very little time to sit down and meet with journalists, if at all? Why are they seemingly in an awful hurry to fly somewhere else?

This won't demonstrate a particularly long-term commitment to the country concerned. Instead, think ahead of your trip — always consider having something newsy and locally relevant for the media of the country you are visiting.

Ongoing press relationships

Think how you intend to maintain an ongoing relationship with the press in each country. Do you have resources on the ground that can respond to local enquiries in a timely manner? How do you respond to journalists' deadlines that are also the same as your bedtime?

Language barrier

English is a universal language — so we're told. There is no question that English has become the lingua franca of the international media, political and commercial world. However, that doesn't mean that the media in certain countries will be happy to get information only in English. By not having native language speakers available in certain countries will almost certainly be seen as a lack of commitment to the local market — how can we believe you are serious about competing in this country when you don't even speak our language? Again, thinking through what resources will be required to sustain an ongoing media relationship is crucial.

Leave it all to a global PR agency?

The thought of hiring a global PR company to do the job will come naturally, but you need to ensure the right mix of skill, expertise and resource is really available across all countries. Even though they may not admit it in public, most large global agency networks would concede that there is bound to be a variation of skill and expertise from country to country. An agency may have very good credentials in Europe, but not so in other parts of the world — and vice versa.

What you can also do is to pick the best from each country and have a proper system to monitor and coordinate all of them.

Yes, there are a number of challenges to be faced in running multinational PR campaigns, but with a good understanding of the challenges, the task becomes more manageable. Once you have crossed the planning and teething process, you're on your way to successfully establishing your brand around the globe.



TIPS ON GETTING FREE PUBLICITY FOR YOUR COMPANY

“Opportunities multiply, the harder you try”
- Unnamed PR Man

Media lessons:

- ★ You don't have to pay for publicity all the time
- ★ Sometimes free publicity is more believable
- ★ Why it is important to keep the media in the loop

Let's put aside those activities you're doing to get your company positive publicity and let's discuss how you can do this for FREE (well, almost free – nothing in this world is!). By practicing these tips, you're likely to raise the level of media exposure for your company and reach your audiences in more ways than one.

There are several important things that you need to know first:

- Journalists or writers will choose to write about companies they know as compared to the ones they don't – if they have a choice.
- Writers will write about companies they think readers want to read about.
- Journalists will write about organisations that don't create obstacles while they do research.

You have to remember these six rules of free publicity every time you deal with media and start practicing them:

1. Telling journalists about your company

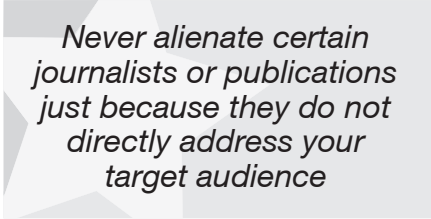
Some journalists will give priority to companies they know about. It is very hard to include your company in a story, or part of a story, when they have no idea what your company does for a living. Have you noticed that journalists are writing about your competitors and not about you? This is because they don't know you.

A journalist friend of mine once told me about how he needed to complete a story on e-commerce and needed to include at least five local “dot.com” companies in the story. He already had four, but he needed just one more.

He had received messages in the past from a number of companies but nothing really impressed him until he received a personal note from the CEO himself introducing his company and explaining what they did. He chose that company to finish his story.

2. Why his readers need to know about your company

What’s in it for his readers? Sometimes companies fail to let journalists know why they are important. Forget trying to impress investors and competitors all the time. Remember, the media depends a lot on readership to earn a profit and failing to help boost interest among readers will be the end of them. The unwritten partnership with the media should always run on a win-win situation.



*Never alienate certain
journalists or publications
just because they do not
directly address your
target audience*

3. Speak in plain English

The other “sin” companies often commit is their love of being very technical and heavy in jargon. Be as simple as possible and avoid what is commonly called “technospeak”. Tell them the benefits and avoid the long process before reaching the benefit parts. Journalists don’t have that much time.

4. Never waste their time

Don’t bombard journalists with e-mail attachments until they ask for them, but do have official documents ready should they decide to follow up. Compress images that are included in e-mail attachments as much as possible. You don’t know whether the writer works at home on a personal computer with a slow dial-up connection or in an office with speedy broadband.

Making their e-mail slower will end up having them taking you off their list.

5. Helping them research your company

Most times, in house PR people become paranoid and begin to worry when a journalist decides to do research on their company. They shouldn't be. They should only be worried when the research is unguided and unaided.

Do take the trouble to assist the journalist and never delay the information you promised them. Being helpful will always make them remember you as being dependable. Journalists welcome reliable sources that can deliver on time and stick to their promises.

6. Always keep them in the loop

Never alienate certain journalists or publications just because they do not directly address your target audience. Remember, we are talking about free publicity here. He may be a journalist in a different target publication today, but tomorrow he may be the editor of your target magazine.

Efforts in educating a journalist will always make your company top on the list, when they know they can depend on you for good stories and good people to work with.

Conclusion:

- ★ If journalists were to be fed with information, it would be that it can help them with their stories



PLANNING FOR PR

*“Some mistakes are too much fun
to only make once”*

- Joe Namath

Here you will know:

- ★ PR planning - keep it simple
- ★ Convert strategy into activities
- ★ Stay focused with a PR plan

When planning for PR activities, a CEO must always have this check list in mind. Who says what? On which channel? To whom? With what effect? When translating this basic approach to public relations, the critical questions become — What is to be communicated? In what way? To which audience? For what purpose?

If you are confused by now, it shows that PR needs planning and in turn, planning should be as simple as possible, thorough and never too ambitious.

Maybe you have been to one of those management workshops or seminars where they dig planning formulas from standard textbooks and expect you to follow it. You've probably heard: "You should do more planning. It's good for you, it will make you more successful."

Undoubtedly planning for PR is good and contributes to the success of public relations activities. But it takes time and effort. It can be tedious, and it's neither glamorous nor exciting. It lacks the appeal and the challenge of media relations or crisis communications and for most CEOs, falls short of providing the satisfaction and sense of accomplishment that completing a special event does.

Planning is generally viewed as one of those things that “should” be done, rather than something people “want” to do. However, not all public relations planning are the same. Some require very little preparation and others require much more time and effort.

Many faces of planning

Planning has gone through changes in terms of jargon.

The traditional planners set goals, identify objectives, and define action steps to reach their goal. Contemporary planners have added buzz words like strategic, visioning and organisational advancement to the planning lexicon.

*Mistakes and successes
should always be recorded
for future use*

They shift into an “organisational advancement mode” to draft “strategic planning documents that enunciate organisational visions.” Talk about making easy things hard! When put in the simplest terms, planning is figuring out the best way to accomplish whatever you want to do or to get wherever you want to be. The basic concept is clear, simple and straight-forward.

Jargon or no jargon, PR planning is simply identifying with whom you want to have a relationship, what you want from that relationship, and what you can do to achieve it. This may seem simple, but it’s surprising how often such basics have been overlooked.

A public relations plan helps maintain self-discipline as well as being an excellent information tool. Planning forces you to ask questions and review their underlying assumptions. Each successive step in the planning process sharpens your focus on how the organisation operates and where it’s going, as well as clarifying public relations’ role in that operation.

Basic planning

Just remember the two types of planning- strategic and tactical. Even though overused, the term “strategic” still has an important meaning for planning, especially when it’s used in the traditional sense to distinguish strategic planning from tactical planning.

Strategic planning represents an overall framework, focus and goals for a long-term or an on-going process or operation. Tactical planning zooms in from strategic planning that often focuses on a specific time period, for example, a quarterly action plan, an annual plan, or a monthly plan, rather than the entire life of the company.

The strategic will naturally be followed by tactical. Think of an organisation's strategic plan as its global view of the world and its tactical plan as its local street map. The tactical plan converts the big picture plan into a series of objectives that are practical, do-able tasks involving specific campaigns, audiences, programs, or activities.

Each of these tactical objectives, or project, can be completed independently of the other, but they are ultimately intended to move the organisation toward its long-range goals.

The PR road map you develop will only make sense when your team actually can execute it. Remember to stop planning on paper and instead, plan collectively with your team. Always take into account past experiences to ensure no same mistakes are repeated.

Mistakes and successes should always be recorded for future use. Consider it as writing a PR history book for your organisation, where reference can be made at a glance or in detail.

The one lesson:

- ★ In PR, the slightest change in politics, economics or social scenes will affect months of planning



LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES IN PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

“Vision is the art of seeing things invisible”

- Jonathan Swift

Say cheese:

- ★ Why people become famous through photo opportunities
- ★ How to create a good photo opportunity
- ★ Let the picture do the talking

It's faster to understand a news report by looking at a picture than to read an article!

I think most of us agree this is true. That is why illustrated literature or comic books are popular with children, because they take away the task of reading and understanding the whole story. The same principle goes in public relations, where pictures are used extensively to convince and educate target audiences with terrific results.

Enter “photo opportunity” - the deliberate planning, implementing and recording of an act that will sum up the whole or part of an event. Example? Presentation of blown-up cheques (horrible stuff), signing ceremony, ribbon cutting, tree planting, food tasting, plaque presentation and the list goes on. So what do you need to do to bring out the best of your photo opportunities?

Good PR practitioners will always be cracking their heads to come up with unique photo opportunities every time, though some prefer to use the same stance over and over again. Winning over your target audience is getting tougher every day because of the very short attention span they have.

Here are some tips in creating better photo opportunities:

a. Be creative

Creativity will set you apart from the rest. We know that good, interesting pictures may make it not only into the inside pages of newspapers, but there is a good chance it might

land on the front page. It's worth studying photo opportunities done by other companies and to identify the features that make them interesting. Always imagine your photo opportunity appearing on the front page of a newspaper – this will help you to be reasonable and realistic. During the Second World War, General Douglas MacArthur was one person who knew how to “make a good picture” when he kept his promise to return to the Philippines — with an excellent photo opportunity - as he waded ashore at Lindgayen Gulf in January 1945.

TV cameras will also need to capture your ‘event’ and you need to make it as interesting to them as you would to the still cameras

b. Your corporate identity should be visible

The idea of including your corporate logo is to get immediate identification. Pushing your company in the news pages is what you must do and this can be done so that your logo fits in nicely as part and parcel of the photo. Never use logos that are torn, dirty and with faded colour.

c. Explain the event

By just one glance, the reader should be able to understand what the event is all about. For example, you may want to launch a new food menu in a natural way by having the chef or restaurant owner trying out the food. Many have tried to be super creative and only managed to confuse a lot of people — including the editors that threw their photo opportunity pictures into the wastebasket. Get to the point. Keep it sweet and simple.

d. Not time sensitive

Try to avoid photo opportunities that can be time sensitive. Dates in the background of when the event took place will only be good for dailies and not magazines. Try to make your photo opportunity look as recent as possible.

e. Caption your pictures

Without captioning, photographs can be misinterpreted; names can be misspelled and most probably, editors won't use the picture. Make sure that the captions are properly glued to the picture - no caption, no go.

f. Keep an eye on your competitors

Knowing what your competitors are doing will keep you on your feet and help your PR team in designing a great photo opportunity. This will also prevent them from using the same photo opportunity and make your corporation look like a copycat.

g. Spend moderately

Good photo opportunities need not be expensive — but that doesn't mean that big budget photo opportunities will not benefit your corporation. Weigh the importance of the photo opportunities and make it work.

h. Must be good for all medium

Never think that photo opportunities are just for still pictures. Photo opportunities go beyond the analogue and digital still cameras. TV cameras will also need to capture your 'event' and you need to make it as interesting to them as you would to the still cameras. If in doubt, create two photo opportunities to cater for their separate needs. When planning for video cameras, make sure your PR team choreograph the flow with care. Accidents captured on TV will not be a beautiful sight.

i. Always ask others for help

Why not include everyone when planning for a good photo opportunity. This is important because other members of the group may be able to spot or remember if your idea has been used by others recently.

Picture perfect ending:

- ★ A picture really paints a thousand words
- ★ A really good picture can become an icon
- ★ Be sensitive when planning for photo opportunity



TIME TO HIRE A PR AGENCY?

“The nice thing about standards is that there are so many to choose from”

- Unnamed PR Man

In this piece:

- ★ What to look for in a PR agency
- ★ What to ask from a potential PR agency
- ★ Compare a full-fledged PR agency with a single PR practitioner

CEOs who want to utilise a structured PR approach will quickly realise they need professional PR help and this means working with an outside firm. But buyer beware!

This relationship is just like a good marriage! Sex appeal alone may prove inadequate over the long term and a good business relationship between a CEO (and his corporation) and his PR agency must go through a process to make sure it's a good match.

Then again, a PR agency that's good for one CEO may not be good for another - but the right match pays off quickly. And you want a partner that will have good chemistry with your staff and is comfortable with your corporate culture, while remaining bias-free.

Here's what you should consider:

Nail down your communications objectives

Decide on the objectives the PR agency will be helping you achieve. The more actionable and measurable the objectives, the better off you

will be in evaluating your PR agency. Having the objectives well articulated prior to beginning the search also allows you to determine how much you can accomplish with your internal resources and to discuss those tasks with your own staff before hiring the agency.

Request for credentials

Once you have your objectives defined and an understanding of which areas you need “outside help”, you can determine what you want the agency to

do. It could be strategic counselling, tactical execution and development of partnerships or building relationships with third parties. Whatever it is, you want to find an agency that will be a true partner rather than just a “do-er”.

*Allow the agencies
“creative license” and they
might actually surprise you
- they may come up with
plans that you would never
have thought of*

Proper briefing to potential agencies

When briefing the agencies, you should be clear but should not be too strict on the execution. Allow the agencies “creative license” and they might actually surprise you - they may come up with plans that you would never have thought of. Sometimes being too rigid will discourage the best agencies from pitching for your account; they are more likely to focus their energies on their current clients.

Avoid for example, asking for a list of functional capabilities such as media relations, event management and crisis communications. You want to see which capabilities the agency thinks are necessary to solve your problem, and you don’t want to miss out on innovative capabilities that are not on your list.

Ask for case studies and references

It will be good to ask specific examples where the agencies solved similar problems or addressed identical audiences for another client. These case studies illustrate a lot about an agency - its knowledge, strategic mindset, creativity, media relations and accountability for measurable results.

Research and knowledge sharing

Since you will be the recipient of your agency’s cumulative experience and acquired knowledge, the request for credentials should ask the

agency to describe its experience and knowledge about your industry and its process for sharing knowledge with its clients.

As PR has become an increasingly strategic business tool, agencies have invested in research, database and measurement protocols. You want an agency with a solid knowledge base that it can draw on for your benefit.

Pay good attention at presentations

It's show time and every one should look forward to a PR presentation because this "show" gives you an idea of what they can do on top of all those credentials and references presented to you earlier. Never ask more than three agencies to present. Too many concepts and ideas will confuse and may tempt you to change your original PR objectives -- and in the process, select the wrong agency.

The presentations should be completed in two days. Allow about an hour, 1½ hours max, emphasising to the firms that at least half of that time must be reserved for questions and discussion. It should be your choice whether to host the presentations or visit the agencies. The latter will give you the opportunity to add on to the overall impression you make of the firm.

Never base the selection on fee

Yes, you want to be mindful of the costs in hiring a PR agency, but the selection should never be based on fee alone. Cheap agencies may create temptation for you to hire them, but it's not the fee that will fulfil your PR objectives.

Administrative and account policies

Always consider how easy the agency will be to work with administratively and how they manage your investment in their work. Insist on their billing and account management. Check whether there will be hidden costs later on. It's good to know upfront what's owed to you and vice versa so that your good working relationship won't be spoiled by a bill dispute!

How soon should the agency start?

In most cases, right away. If the agency is not ready, it will never be ready. The head of your selection team should immediately work with a designated person at the agency to prepare a contract, establish

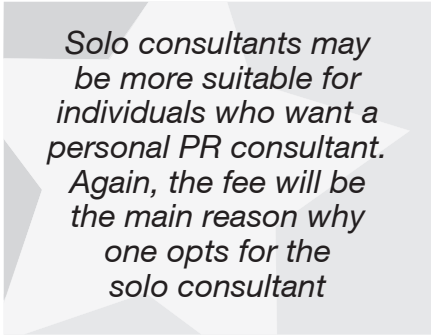
confidentiality procedures, arrange for the transfer of background documents and company data, and create a smooth line of communication.

One-Man Show or Full-Service Agency?

After outlining the basics of hiring a PR agency, there is this lingering question on which category of PR agency a CEO can depend on. Many have asked on the pros and cons of hiring solo PR consultants as compared to full-service public relations agencies.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with PR lingo, solo consultants are individuals who run one-man outfits - without having the regular hierarchy or manpower of senior consultants, consultants, PR executives, researchers, writers and so on.

In short -- a one-man team that undertakes 90 per cent of the work, perhaps with one or two part-time assistants as and when the need arises.



Solo consultants may be more suitable for individuals who want a personal PR consultant. Again, the fee will be the main reason why one opts for the solo consultant

It's a tough call picking one model from the other, so what I'm going to do is explain the situations you may face in making choices:

The fee factor

Many agree that money is a key factor in hiring solo consultants simply because they are able to offer a lower fee for their services -- considering that he (or she) only has his own salary to pay.

This is one of the great advantages that solo consultants have -- very low overheads. They would probably only need a personal computer, a fax machine, a telephone line, a mobile phone and years of PR experience. Some of them may operate from home.

Having said that, many CEOs fail to grasp that successful PR campaigns can't be based on fee alone. Your own PR objectives come in many forms and not all may be suited for solo consultants to handle.

Can't be at two places at the same time

Solo consultants have limitations and face risky situations if they handle more than one client (which they must do to survive). What if two of his clients want to organise a PR event at the same time? He may suggest different dates, but circumstances may dictate they take place at the same time, and unfortunately, at different places.

Dependable - when he is not sick

Even the best solo consultant will not be any good when he is sick, or out of town. If your company deals directly with the consumer, your chances of getting complaints and facing crises are very high. It will be very risky to be without a PR consultant during a crisis.

In fact, your PR consultant is worth his weight in gold when a crisis strikes. What if the solo consultant needs to be hospitalised for a whole month? Will you stop your PR activities for four weeks?

Personal touch

Solo consultants usually bring a more personal touch to the account simply because he is likely to service only two or three accounts. Most public relations agencies will assign its staff to at least two accounts. This personal touch is something that an agency cannot provide to the fullest unless its consultants have a "soft spot" for you. Yes, there is such a thing.

Knowledge sharing is limited

In a PR consultancy, where skill levels may be roughly the same between different firms, knowledge is what separates the better ones from the not-so-good ones. Knowledge is developed in the larger agencies through sharing that goes on among senior PR managers and directors.

Specialisation - for example in branding, investor relations and media among these senior staff, will enhance their PR strategies for your business, which can seldom be achieved by the solo consultant.

Good for personal PR

Solo consultants may be more suitable for individuals who want a personal PR consultant. Again, the fee will be the main reason why one opts for the solo consultants who charge a lot less.

It is very unlikely that multinationals and large companies will appoint solo consultants to carry out their PR programmes. Their communications programmes run on a larger scale, which the solo consultant might find himself hard put to deliver.

A similar situation also occurs when a multinational prefers one agency to handle them worldwide. If the agency doesn't have an office in the same country with the multinational, chances are it won't be given the opportunity to service the account.