

Using media relations to promote Africa

With good reason, Africa has become a topical subject for investment. The World Economic Forum has listed [Six reasons to invest in Africa](#). These include Africa's need for connectors such as roads, rails, ports, airports, power grids and IT backbone to boost the economy; the benefits of a Continental Free Trade Area; the development of new expectations from Africa's middle class and digital transformation.

By [Nhlanhla Kubeka](#) 7 Jun 2018



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The anticipation of new business on the continent means that investors will also be looking for reputable communications companies to uphold a positive image for them in the media space.

Media relations plays an important role in assisting clients to engage with important stakeholders and build meaningful and sustainable relationships with the media, which includes creating awareness for specific campaigns using different mediums of communication.

Public Relations (PR) professionals, also known as influencers of public perception and behaviour, need to continue with the challenging work of positioning their clients as the go-to people for information in their respective fields of expertise.

It starts with understanding a client's organisational strategy, developing key messages, building a strong and targeted media list, writing and distributing press statements, and securing the right interviews and

speaking opportunities.

But it doesn't end there. I sometimes question why certain statements and efforts don't get the desired attention from journalists, but the truth is that the right message communicated at the wrong time often receives minimal attention.

Timing is key

In addition, media relations encompasses reputation management and the application of ethics. The implications of the Bell Pottinger saga provides lessons in this regard. The British PR company was expelled from the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) after being accused of inciting hatred through a campaign that supported the controversial Gupta family. Africa needs to reflect on such incidents and try not repeat previous mistakes.

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Timing is also key, especially when it comes to hosting events and commenting on hot issues. Communication professionals could miss out on a lot of opportunities to grow a client's voice in the media space if they do not act timeously.

For example, sending an update on an event that happened three days ago as opposed to sending the update a few hours after the event will yield different results. It is always a good idea to establish key messages and have a draft beforehand. In that way, you can quickly update the information and send it to relevant people (also considering the time it takes to get sign off from clients).

This also sends out a message (to journalists) that you understand the art of media relations and know how to utilise established relationships.

As communications practitioners, we also need to look at the media landscape in Africa and understand where media in the communication mix plays an important role. It is important to establish when and where is best to utilise different mediums. While marrying old and new media is sometimes a good idea, it is crucial to first understand and identify platforms where our target audience(s) mostly consume information.

The picture is quite clear that there is thorough thought process that precedes a perfect project report which reflects a high number of media coverage and other desired outcomes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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