

5 things your PR team wishes you knew

By [Sarah Danz](#)

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More than ever, public relations is fundamental to your business' success. The public's [trust in organisations is critically low](#), with the pandemic and resulting economic crisis causing a 'failing trust ecosystem'. This is the opportunity for business leaders to come forward and offer their expertise. To stand out with effective PR strategies that meet the needs of the market and audience.



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Debunking Public relations

Yet, first and foremost, most people don't even know what true PR is. PR is, essentially, the relationship a brand has with the media or public. PR professionals do their best to develop positive relationships with these groups. In turn, they earn coverage of their brand or products when there's alignment between what a journalist wants to cover and what a company can provide.

If I had a dime for every time an executive said (something along the lines of) "When will we be on the front page of WSJ? Hopefully soon...." I would no longer be a PR professional. But it's not as easy as emailing a journalist and asking for space in their publication. As my chief operations officer and I always say, there are three ways to get PR: real press-worthy news, a client willing to speak and tell the story for you, and proprietary research that's interesting and useful.

And none of those come easy.

5 fundamentals of PR

With that in mind, when starting out with your PR strategy this year, it's worth remembering these five things.

1. PR is like good BBQ

The best BBQ is cooked low and slow. The same goes for PR or media recognition – it's relationship-based and takes time. The news cycle can be impacted by many things, from sudden world events to politics or social crises. Therefore, it's important to have realistic expectations.

Ultimately, everyone wants to be featured in a Tier 1 media publication like *The South African*, *The Financial Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. Yet, when starting out, you'll need to start your brand-building on a more local and vertical level. Putting in the work with smaller publications is also crucial to building credibility and your brand reputation. Make enough noise in your niche and among local press, and the likes of the WSJ will eventually come calling.

2. It's not pay-for-play

For your PR strategy to be sustainable over the long term, you cannot pay for it. In most (legal) cases, you cannot pay for PR coverage - that's advertising. It's also seen as unethical to ask a journalist to include your company in their articles in return for payment. Many journalists won't cover your company in this case, and may even name-and-shame among their network.

Additionally, it's usually frowned upon to send big gifts and some publications point-blank refuse all gifts. A box of chocolates or company swag might be okay, but be sure to check publication policies.



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3. Become the brains behind your PR

The best stories come from the experts who are at the forefront of your organisation. They come from your discussions with customers, from networking with industry influencers, and from listening to your market.

PR teams will often spend many hours thinking of angles and story ideas. Part of a PR manager's job is to scan for potential topics where your company can have a say. However, if you have some ideas, they will certainly welcome the support. So, if a customer says something interesting, or a piece of news catches your attention, let your PR team know.

4. Be worth talking about

If you want personal publicity, you have to do some legwork. What makes you unique and different and worth listening to? Consider the value that you bring to the media and how you, personally, can make their job easier. Perhaps you have specific experience that can inform an advice piece they are writing, or you can connect them with an innovative customer?

Go beyond the sales pitch - most publications want original advice and thinking that draws on your direct experiences.

Two good rules to follow are the grandma test and the 70/30 rule.

The grandma test: if you cannot explain your story idea to your grandmother, then it's too complicated. If you cannot explain it to your friends at the bar without them stifling yawns, it's not interesting enough. This is especially important for national and high-tier business publications.

The 70/30 rule: when starting to build press relationships, 70% of the information you give to the journalist should be topics that interest them and the industry they cover and you operate in, and 30% should be about your company. This builds your profile as an expert and reliable source.

Be confident in your experience and if you're not, do some media training to understand where your strengths lie and how to effectively communicate this to journalists.

5. Make it easy to work with you

To attract consistent press coverage, you need to be consistently available. Make it easy for journalists to find and contact you. If you have a website, make sure your PR team's contact details are readily available on it. You can also include your spokespeople's profiles and credentials, and also any imagery (like logos and product images) that the press may find useful. If you're on Twitter, make your profile and DMs open and have an email address where journalists can easily reach you.

Likewise, ensure your PR team can get hold of you. In order to get you and your company in the news, the PR team needs to have easy access to you.

When you have an opportunity, be as agile as you can because journalists are always on a deadline. And try not to cancel meetings last minute as that can damage your relationship with the journalist and publication affected.

A timely opportunity

The organisations and business leaders that stand out with their PR efforts now, will become household names tomorrow. We live in an age of misinformation. Journalists and newsrooms are busier than ever before. By sticking to the five fundamentals of good PR, your business can help journalists navigate a volatile time, to inform the market, and share your expert insights.

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