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PR

Create a PR
sensation,
whatever your
budget, whatever
your business



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PR

press, and instead pick one or two key stories to look at in more depth. These stories increasingly tend to be event-based, such as a fire, car crash or crime in the area, or political. That said, there is always room for the quirky, ‘rollerskating budgerigar’ type stories, so bear regional TV in mind. Outlets are interested in national stories with a regional angle as well as stories that directly or exclusively affect the region.

National press

The Times, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and so on are all exceptionally desirable targets. That means that you, and the rest of the world, wish your business or client could be featured within them. Getting coverage in the nationals is possible, but it is a fine art, and not a task to be undertaken lightly.



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Expect to have to work extremely hard to get into the nationals, and brace yourself for the possibility that your phone calls and emails will be completely ignored. Most national newspaper journalists will not bother to take the time to say ‘thanks but no thanks’. You need a thick skin to deal with the national press.

National TV and radio

As with national press, coverage on national TV and radio is possible, but exceptionally hard work, and you must be prepared for countless rejections, or simply to be ignored. If you are representing a small, local business, any coverage in national press, on national TV or national radio is an extremely unlikely, but not impossible, scenario. Try not to build your PR

strategy around getting on to the nationals at first. Keep them as a desirable target, but until you are consistently scoring on a local and regional level, do not be disappointed if BBC Radio 2 does not leap at your pitch.

Consumer magazines

These are another super-desirable but extremely difficult target, although some consumer magazines are easier than others. Weeklies are an easier bet than monthlies, in particular women's monthlies, which are bombarded with PR activity from all angles. Coverage in a glossy women's magazine is pretty much the holy grail as whilst a national newspaper may take a critical approach, magazines are largely upbeat, positive publications and rarely say anything bad about any product or service they choose to feature. Readers are also hugely influenced by what they read in women's magazines, so if the beauty editor of *Vogue* says a product is good, women will rush out to buy it *en masse*.

Consumer magazines cover a myriad of sectors and interests, although the most-read tend to be quite generalistic in approach, such as women's magazines, foodie magazines and house and home style magazines.

Each publication will have its own areas of interest and there are no hard and fast rules for consumer magazines, so the best way to identify possible stories for them is to read at least three issues of the magazine you are targeting and be aware of what they cover and what they do not.

Trade press

As a consumer of everyday media, trade press may not really be on your agenda. Look deeper and you will find that for every profession, there is at least one trade magazine dedicated to producing news, features, comment and opinion about that

profession. Case in point: *PRWeek* publisher Haymarket owns titles covering the wonderful worlds of windpower, printing and even caravanning.

Trade press tends to be respected within its sector, even if the wider public is largely oblivious. Trade press is always worth targeting, as in general it is far easier to get a piece in a trade magazine than many other forms of media, and the trade press does tend to command attention from those working within the sector it covers. Good trade press stories can be picked up elsewhere – stories that appear in *PRWeek* can get picked up by the national media from time to time.

Most, if not all of the above categories of media will have an online offering. Media websites range from constantly updated hubs of breaking news, views, comment, opinion and features, such as the websites of national newspapers, to basic sites which contain teaser copy from the media outlet in the hope that you will go out and buy the magazine itself. It is hard to give a detailed outline of the websites of media outlets, as they are constantly changing and being updated. To illustrate this point, at the time of writing, *The Times* had become the first national UK newspaper to put all its online content behind a paywall, swiftly followed by the *News of the World*. Whether or not this approach will work remains anyone's guess at the time of writing.

Blogs

There are more blogs out there in cyberspace than you, I and the entire population of London have had, or ever will have, hot dinners. The vast majority of blogs are entirely, utterly, fundamentally pointless for our purposes – they are simply websites housing the thoughts, views and rants of the blogger, and are often read by the blogger's mum and – that's about it. There are however a large number of significant, influential blogs, ranging from first-person accounts, such as the hugely

successful *Girl with a One-Track Mind* blog from writer Zoe Margolis, to entire blog-driven news and lifestyle sites such as *bitchbuzz.com*. Blogs are as varied in tone, style, subject matter and content as is humanly possible, so decide which blogs to target, and make friends with those who write them.

Media relations

The rules of good media relations are relatively universal and apply to all outlets. You will need to tailor your approach to the individual outlet to which you are pitching, but first and foremost you must always remember some very simple do's and don'ts that every journalist you deal with will thank you for.



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dos and don'ts

- ✓ DO your homework. Read the newspaper or magazine, watch or listen to the programme you want to target, before approaching them. Ideally read or watch at least three separate editions. Find out when that outlet's deadlines are and avoid ringing when the journalists are likely to be up against it.
- ✗ DON'T pitch anything that will not fit into that media outlet's various sections or geographical beat. Find out what they cover and stick to that.
- ✓ DO pitch your story to the right person. If your story is about education, pitch it to the education reporter. If it is about health, the health reporter, and so on. If you would like to pitch a feature, take it to the features editor. And always ensure you have spelled their name correctly.
- ✗ DON'T phone up just to introduce yourself or 'have a chat'. Journalists are busy. It is not their job to find a story in piles of background waffle you have sent them under the guises of helping them 'get to know you'. Be targeted. Have a story, news hook or feature idea all ready for them – make their lives easier.

- ✓ DO as you are asked. If the journalist wants a photograph or case study, do everything in your power to find one. If the journalist wants you to pitch the story by email, do it. If they prefer Twitter, send them a tweet.
- ✗ DON'T be a nuisance. Bombarding a journalist with phone calls and emails asking them if they need any more information or are they going to run your story is not 'being persistent', it is borderline stalking.
- ✓ DO accept that the journalist is in charge. It is your job to provide them with all the information they need to write their story. It is their job to actually write it and 'helpful' suggestions from you are not required.
- ✗ DON'T ever ask to see, or check, the story before it is printed or broadcast. No good journalist will ever offer copy approval unless you are an A-List movie star (which is why most interviews with A-Listers are so nauseatingly sycophantic). A journalist is a professional, writing stories is their job. They will check their facts as standard. The story will also go through an editing process, firstly by news or features editors, then sub-editors, then the overall editor. So even if you do get to 'check' a story, it still gets changed, altered and tweaked by at least three other people before it is published. Hence your 'changes' will be whipped straight out.
- ✓ DO manage your expectations. If you want gushing testimonies and a 100 per cent positive tone, buy an advert. Journalists are obliged to be fair, balanced and accurate in what they report. They are also not obliged to plug your business, print your web address and include your logo and corporate biography.
- ✗ DON'T try and be clever. Journalists do not have the time to jump through hoops for a story. They need information now so do not try and 'pique their interest' or any other teaser campaigns. Leave that to the PR professionals, who have limited success with these tactics.

- ✓ DO send journalists review samples and offer them access to your products or services without expecting anything in return. If they have the time and seem inclined, take them for lunch. Never expect any coverage as a result of this activity, but know that it will stand you in good stead and will pay off – next time the journalist wants a quote or has to write a review, they will think of you.

The above list is long, and only goes to show that the potential to ‘get it wrong’ is rife. If I had to break this list down to just one, crucial, vital point, it would be this: always be useful. Every time you pick up the phone or go to email a journalist stop and ask yourself: Am I being useful? Is my phone call or email going to make this journalist’s life easier? If the answer is no, do not make that call or send that email.

The follow-up call

There is a practice rife among the PR industry that will never fail to provoke a long, vehement rant from any journalist – and every journalist, without exception, has been on the receiving end of this practice. It is known as ‘the follow-up call’ (although it is usually prefixed by a rather unflattering adjective by most journalists) and it goes something like this:

PR agency sends press release to journalist. Journalist does not respond within 12 hours. PR agency forces some unfortunate junior member of staff to make a follow-up call, which usually goes something like: ‘Hello! How are you today? Isn’t it a lovely day? I hope the weather holds out til the weekend! Anyway, I’m just calling to see if you got my press release. Was the story of interest to you at all? Do you have everything you need or would you like more information?’