

Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.
Abraham Lincoln



Public relations

Public relations (PR) is about cultivating relationships with relevant external stakeholders to help generate understanding and advocacy, while enhancing and protecting your brand and business. Let's discuss some of the functions of PR most relevant to small business, including working with the media, seminars and events, and sponsorship.

Media

Media exposure can be a very cost-effective way of communicating with your target market. In some cases, being known to the media can make you the 'go-to' person when comments from an industry specialist are

needed to support or refute a story. In order to know which media to focus on, you need to know what media your target market consumes – are they high propensity radio listeners? Newspaper readers? Do they watch TV? Do they read *Marie Claire*? Once you know this, you are better placed to choose a publication (online or offline) likely to communicate with your potential customers. Then you can work out who the key contacts are in the relevant media.

Working with the media

Once you have identified a medium to suit your needs, make sure you are familiar with their style. For example, if you decide *New Idea* is the publication that will best reach your target customer, buy a copy and read it cover to cover. Identify stories like the one you have to tell and take note of the journalists who have written them. When you have your story idea firmly in your mind, phone the publication and ask for the journalist by name. Tell the journalist you have a story that might interest their readers and give them a quick summary. Journalists are often working under very heavy pressure from editors and deadlines, so you will probably only have a few moments to grab their attention – don't waffle. If the journalist believes you have a good story, they will probably ask you to send some information. Put together some dot points outlining your story in more detail and fax or email it to them. Follow up a day or so later (sooner if your story is time critical) and see if they are keen to progress. Once agreed, you will need to determine whether they are going to write the story or if they are happy for you to write it and be acknowledged as the contributor. We will discuss approaches for different mediums later in this chapter, but remember, if your story goes to print/air, make sure you thank the journalist. In fact, even if your story does not make it to the publication's pages, call and thank the journalist for giving it their consideration. While they may not say yes to every story, there is no reason why you can't keep trying so it is important to try to develop a positive relationship. If you develop a good relationship, and the journalist finds you to be 'good talent', it is important you are available and accessible so they will be encouraged to contact you when they need an 'expert'

opinion. Be sure to provide your key journalist contacts with your mobile or business number so when they are on deadline and need a comment, they can reach you.

Media training

There are lots of media training courses on offer that can help prepare you for dealing with the media. The courses should provide you with an introduction to the media, how they tend to work, what approaches work better than others, and things to avoid doing and saying in front of the media. While they can be expensive, they are often worthwhile, particularly if you are likely to be in the media a lot or have to deal with criticism in the press.

Newspapers

If you have a national business or you are doing something that might be of interest to a national audience, you might consider approaching a national paper like *The Australian*. Similarly, if you are a Melbourne-based business and your news is state relevant, you might approach metro newspapers such as *The Age* or the *Herald Sun*. A good idea is to buy a copy of the paper you want to approach and make sure you understand its style – is it the sort of paper likely to appeal to business professionals? Or is it a tabloid pitched at ordinary home-makers? Reading through should also help you identify names of journalists who are currently writing on topics relevant to your story idea. Your local community newspaper might be a good first approach. Your local paper should be full of local news. This means they are likely to be interested in you and your business, and what you are doing to benefit your local community. The journalists who write the stories are not interested in product advertising or a sales pitch. Consider sending the journalists a press release with photos (more on this later), and contact the journalists to help generate some interest in your news. Remember, if your story has no local relevance, local media is unlikely to be interested. If you are holding an event or seminar, you should also consider the ‘what’s on’ column in your local newspapers. They

are often free or at least they are usually cheaper than standard advertising and can help encourage potential customers to visit your event.

Most major Australian cities also have regular street-press or free newspapers covering art, music, museums, area events, movie times and local community happenings, so you should also consider these if relevant.

Radio

If you have interesting and locally relevant news to share, you could try contacting your local community radio stations to find out if they are willing to interview you about your news – often radio programs will have a business segment or a specialist segment that might suit your business. For example, if you run a financial planning business, the local radio station might be interested in regular advice for the finance segment. Again, make sure you are familiar with their programs so you know what appeals to their listeners. If you are running an event they consider is of benefit, or interest, to their listeners they may give your event a ‘plug’ or free announcement in the week prior. Keep in mind, though, both radio and local newspapers rely on advertising dollars to cover their costs so they may prefer you to pay for your ‘plug’. If you are paying them advertising dollars, see if they will throw in some free editorial to complement your advertising campaign.

Television

TV news often relies on pictures or ‘footage’ to illustrate a story, so if you think you have some news and a good picture opportunity, contact your local television stations and see if they are interested. Television crews try to capture the biggest stories of the day in order to compete with each other so you may have to work hard to ‘sell’ a station your story – including setting up an attractive or striking picture opportunity their viewers might want to see.

It can be easier to place a story on local television in regional centres, as they usually get their main footage from the metro stations and save their camera crews to work in the local area. Metro stations, on the other hand,

often need to send their camera crews all around the state to get footage, and you will be competing with a lot of other news stories.

Writing an article/press release

Some newspapers and magazines will accept articles from contributors, but you should check with the publication you are hoping to target before spending too much time on this. Many of them will not accept work written by anyone other than their own journalists. Once you have determined whether they will accept external contributions, write a newsworthy story to capture the attention of the readers (and therefore the journalist) of this publication. Tell your story the way the publications' readers would like to hear it, not the way you would like to tell it. Give your story a strong headline and if possible, try to write your story from a couple of different angles – this will allow you to offer it to more than one without upsetting any of them for sharing content. Be prepared to have your submission edited – what you see in print may be significantly different to what you submit.

Photographs

Check with the publication to see if they accept photos – many of them will, but some may insist on taking their own. If they do accept photography, try to include a photo that appeals to readers – try to imagine your favourite newspaper without any. The editorial staff should be able to tell you what format and specifications they need, but generally photographs should be digital, high resolution, and professionally taken if possible. Supplying photographs can help ensure the right context for your story – it is a small way of maintaining some control.

Seminars and events

Seminars and events can be a cost-effective way of increasing the awareness of what you do and who you are. However, they can be time consuming and expensive if poorly targeted. Seminars can be a great way of keeping in touch with your customers and potential customers by keeping them informed and educated. The key to success is ensuring the

topic is something they are interested in and not what you think they will be interested in!

Events and trade shows are another good opportunity and are usually very targeted. They can, however, be very resource intensive – sometimes costly and most often demanding on time.

Some points to consider when planning an event:

- Consider a joint promotion for the event. To reduce costs, you might consider partnering with a complementary supplier of business. For example, a hairdresser and beautician or an accountant and lawyer might work well together. In these examples, both are likely to share the same target market yet offer different solutions, and teaming up can provide an opportunity to share the costs of the mail-outs, printing and venue hire
- Avoid too large a venue. A crowded room has far more atmosphere than a large room with few people in it
- Encourage your audience to bring a friend (very easy with internet marketing). Many of us prefer not to attend an event on our own and most people, when given the opportunity to bring a friend, will bring someone who is likely to be interested in the topic, increasing your potential target audience
- Have a cost advantage or prize offer for early RSVPs. For example, if you are using a major city venue, you might offer free parking to the first 20 people who RSVP
- Give people time – promote your function three to four weeks in advance, then follow up the week prior and again on the day if necessary
- Hold the seminar at a convenient time. For example, if you are targeting small business owners, don't hold it when BAS returns or end of month reporting is due. Know your target market!
- Keep to the timetable you set. Start on time and end on time
- If you are using a major hotel or function centre which is hosting other functions and events, ensure the venue advertises your event clearly so your attendees enter the right venue – try to avoid having your audience go to the wrong venue or getting lost

- At the conclusion of your event, ask attendees to fill out a feedback form. Follow up any leads within 24 hours of the event and record all the information in your customer database
- If having a stand, try to select one where traffic is high – this does not necessarily need to be near the front door. Other options with high traffic are near the coffee cart or catering area, or near some of the larger exhibitors, who might drive traffic to your stand
- Ensure your stand is a decent size. This can help demonstrate market presence and substance
- Attend similar events and gather as much information on your competitors – learn from their mistakes
- Consider a looped presentation of what you offer on a screen or plasma TV so that while you are talking with potential customers, others can learn about your business
- Have samples and giveaways available – try for something unique and something that will make its way home rather than sit in an office. This is a great way to ensure brand awareness is maintained over time
- If you cannot afford to be present for the whole event, hire some professional staff to look after your stand in your absence. If you do this, ensure you provide adequate briefing and training time upfront to these people and provide them with a number to reach you in case they need more information from you
- Consider an event special offer. For example, this could be a special bundle of products, free installation or interest-free terms. The reason for doing this is to measure the success of the event in terms of sales, and also to give people who are close to buying an emotional reason to bring forward a purchase. It can also be a great way to test a new price point or product offer that's only valid for the event
- Most importantly, budget accordingly. Calculate the cost of setting up the stand, promotional staff hire, accommodation and travel, printing, giveaways, show advertising and time out of the office.

Sponsorship

Many small business owners are involved in sponsorship, but don't market it well. If you contribute to a public activity, you should make sure people know about it. In a competitive market it is important to let your customers know when you have a point of difference. Sponsorship can be a great way to show your community support, build trust and raise awareness with potential customers.

- Make sure when budgeting for a sponsorship to allocate funds to promote your support. This could be through advertising, PR or new business cards and stationery printed with the sponsorship logo, etc
- Include the sponsorship details on your website and ensure your website is promoted on the sponsorship recipient's website
- When you hold a seminar, tradeshow or in-store promotion, have someone from the group you are sponsoring attend – they may even be the main drawcard
- Write a press release about the sponsorship (get it approved by all parties before releasing) and issue it to relevant media
- Ensure the sponsorship contract outlines your expectations for branding and make sure they are met
- Ensure you are acknowledged in all communication the group does, if this is in your sponsorship package. If it is not in the package, request it
- Email newsletters can be a cost-effective way of increasing the awareness and value of a sponsorship
- If you are sponsoring an individual, have an 'escape clause' for bad behaviour that may adversely affect your business name.

Cause related marketing

Cause related marketing (CRM) is when a business with a product, image or service to market, builds a relationship or partnership with a cause or not-for-profit organisation for mutual benefit. This means the business partners with a cause in order to achieve both social and marketing objectives. By merging a business' social and marketing goals, the

business, the cause and the society we live in, benefit. It is very important if it is to be successful that the cause partnership should reflect the business' values and brand and should be something that inspires staff, is relevant and appealing to consumers and makes you stand out from the competition. It can often pay dividends to take some time to ensure this is the case and not to simply partner with a cause that you feel passionate about. You may wish to consider drawing on the services of a partnership broker to ensure brand values and objectives align.

As more businesses realise they have a responsibility to support the community, we are seeing more take a stand, support a cause, and utilise their marketing budget to bring awareness to their work and to a cause. A CRM campaign is determined by the objectives of the company or brand. Sometimes it is about brand enhancement, other times it is about resonating with a new market.

CRM is quite different from sponsorship. Sponsorship usually involves a company providing financial support for an event or activity to happen. In return the company's logo and messages are profiled with the event or activity for its audience to see. Usually it is about the company's brand being aligned with the sponsorship 'property' whereas CRM is more about the company borrowing the logo and goodwill of the cause or not-for-profit organisation.

CRM is a popular way for business to minimise its imprint on the planet and contribute resources to the community. When done well, CRM can help a business and its brands to stand out and emotionally connect with consumers.

One of the better known CRM campaigns in Australia is Kleenex's partnership with Guide Dogs Australia. While this is a corporate example, there are many smaller businesses achieving some fantastic results with CRM. For more information visit bitc.org.uk.

PR agencies

If you are uncomfortable dealing with the media or don't have the time to implement a PR strategy yourself, you might consider engaging a PR agency to help. Some PR agencies will specialise in certain elements of PR but many can be very good at developing integrated campaigns to meet a variety of needs. Some might include:

- Launching a new product/business/brand
- Making a major announcement
- Increasing brand awareness
- Developing industry and media connections
- Driving usage of your website or product
- Writing professional documents for your business (Annual Reports etc)
- Coordinating events/sponsorships.

PR agencies usually charge by the hour, so it is best to work out a budget you can afford to spend or invest in the campaign, and treat it like any other marketing activity. Measurement is just as important in PR as in any other marketing campaign. Measurement might be such things as:

- Size and frequency of articles published
- Interviews in the media
- Increase you received in awareness of your brand or name in your local community or industry
- An increase in the number of enquiries sales, and hits to your website.

As with advertising, PR campaigns are likely to need time to deliver results. Some PR agencies will suggest working on a monthly retainer or a project fee, so they have time to understand your needs and deliver on them while helping you control costs.