



ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

BOOSTING

IN-HOUSE

PR

A PUBLICATION BY CAPELLA SYNERGY

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INTRODUCTION

With over 20 years' combined PR experience in business travel and events, we've learned from countless PR victories and easily avoidable mistakes.

So, here are some of our best dos, don'ts and general tips for small business owners tempted to manage PR in-house.

Furthermore, we've included some top tips and turn-offs of leading travel and events industry journalists.



Chapter One

BEFORE YOU START



BEFORE YOU START

Ask yourself ‘so what?’

What seems like a big deal to your business, may not be to a newsroom of journalists sifting through potential stories. To be effective, your press releases must be newsworthy. Credible newsrooms are competitive places and getting your story covered means you need to ask ‘so what?’ about every potential news item before you hit send.

Have you launched something unique or an ‘industry first’? Have you carried out new research into a hot topic within your market? If your news doesn’t pass your ‘so what’ test but it supports your brand, you can still use it for social media.

EXPERT’S TOP TIP

Make sure the story is relevant to the person you’re sending it to. Has the publication published similar stories before? You may have an award win that you’re really proud of, but does the publication report on award wins? At M&IT we don’t – but we still get emails boasting about award wins! Find the angle that is likely to be relevant.

Don’t worry too much about it being written perfectly, that’s what journalists are paid for. One of the best PRs I know can’t spell for toffee – but they know what makes a good story. So I know when something appears in my inbox from them it is going to be worth reading.

Paul Harvey, Deputy Editor, Meetings & Incentive Travel

BEFORE YOU START

Do your research

Annoying editors and journalists is not a good way to build or maintain relationships that are beneficial to you or business or your own career. So do your research on publications and journalists before you start.

EXPERT'S TOP TIP

My biggest tip (and in some ways one of my biggest bugbears) – always do some research on a publication before you contact them.

I don't know how many agents I've spoken to (sometimes on multiple occasions) who are contacting me on behalf of a client that has nothing to do with what we cover – everything from surveys about office behaviour (hint: the "Business" in "Buying Business Travel" doesn't mean we cover general business news) to leisure travel agents shouting about the perfect family holiday because the word "travel" appears in our title (whilst probably of interest for travel buyers on a personal level, most definitely not useful in the context of why they read our magazine).

Molly Dyson, business travel industry editor



Chapter Two

WRITING A RELEASE

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Start at the top

If a journalist only reads your headline, could they grasp your main message? If they read the headline and the first paragraph, would they get it? What about your third paragraph?

The best releases lead with your key message and add a little more context with each paragraph or quote. It means time-strapped journalists can decide if your release newsworthy and/or timely.



Read your release out loud to yourself. If you stumble over words or sentences, readers/editors will too, and it could put them off reading any further.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Don't use jargon, acronyms and complex examples

Communicate clearly and cleanly. If you've written a press release, would your best friend understand it? If the answer is no, start again. We've heard people say that PR can 'dumb down' a message. That's not the case if you ask a journalist – you're an expert in your field, but reporters and editors are not – they're experts in sharing relevant and understandable news that can be read and consumed by anyone.



Apply this approach to all of your content to improve the experience for your intended audiences.

Keep it credible

Do you have research, or quotes/testimonials from third parties who can validate your news? Adding these will make your story more credible for journalists and their audiences, alongside your customers, suppliers and employees.

Don't send mixed messages

If you overload a press release with too many messages, your main point can easily be lost. The result will be a journalist who doesn't publish it, or one who publishes something with little relevance to your intended story. The same can be said for interviews for print publications. So, take time to prepare for interviews and make sure your message is stuck in your head - like a mantra, or a REALLY annoying song (Baby Shark anyone?)!



Chapter Three

SENDING A RELEASE

SENDING A PRESS RELEASE

Make it easy for journalists and editors to use your news

Send the release copy in the body of the email, and as a Word file too. But don't send it as a PDF because you're making it harder for busy journalists to open and edit it, especially if they're not in the office when they receive your email.

Don't embed images in the body of your press release. PR isn't a design contest... it's all about making your news and supporting images easy for your contacts to access and share.



EXPERT'S TOP TURN-OFF

My heart sinks whenever I get a press release that's a PDF – they may look nice but they're an absolute pain to open and extract copy and pictures from – keep it simple. Word is fine!

And make sure you send a decent picture in an accessible form. Not too big, not too small – check what they tend to use and aim at that! At M&IT we use landscape pics online, so send us a landscape pic! Otherwise we'll just go online and find a different pic – and it might not be the pic you wanted us to use...

Paul Harvey, Deputy Editor, Meetings & Incentive Travel



Chapter Four

MEDIA RELATIONS

MEDIA RELATIONS

Don't be late

If you can build a reputation for quickly answering journalist's queries, and happily/regularly providing your views on your industry's issue of the day, you'll win their trust, and a spot in their contact list.

And if you can't answer the question straight away, let them know when you can/will. This manages their expectations and helps them to get on with writing a news story, with the comfort that you'll send them what they need.

But, let them down at your peril. If a writer is relying on you for vital information, they won't forget it in a hurry. After all, nobody appreciates unnecessary stress when they're working to a tight deadline.



If you're asked for one, stay 'on topic' in your comment. Shameless self-promotion for your business is far less likely to be used than helpful information and useful insight and opinion.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Build relationships

If you have a solid PR strategy which complements your marketing strategy, you have more than a single campaign. So, where you're seeking coverage for your current campaign, you should also be building relationships with your media contacts so you can ensure you achieve coverage for all forthcoming campaigns.

If you've pitched an idea for a feature and an editor isn't interested this time, ask them why. They're human, and media relations should create mutually beneficial relationships.

Give your key contacts a call now and then. You can may have something of interest to them, and likewise, they may ask for support with a future feature that you didn't know was in their pipeline.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Brush up your sales skills

The best PR takes time, so don't hit send and hope for the best. Call your main PR contacts before you send them your news and work hard to sell it in. Where you can, do this several days or a week in advance so editors can plan your news with some space in their e-newsletters.

Timing can be everything, and if you plan ahead, you can send your embargoed news to editors of periodical publications in time for print deadlines. It means your news is still fresh when the print magazines land on readers' doorsteps.

But be warned...

EXPERT'S TOP TURN-OFF

My biggest turn-off is following up too soon after a release is sent. I think my current personal record is receiving a call from someone not 5 minutes after they'd done a mass send-out of a release. The best advice I can give to young agents or those looking to improve is to understand that journalists have a lot going on and get A LOT of emails, so sometimes it might take a day or two for us to cover something if it's not ground-breaking.

I do, however, appreciate PRs following up after a day or two because sometimes emails get lost along the way and a little reminder can help me pick up something I may have missed.

Molly Dyson, business travel industry editor

MEDIA RELATIONS

Piggyback current affairs

If you have something relevant to your industry that you can add to a news story, let journalists know. If they don't use your content, you can then share the original story online and add your own commentary.

What's more, if you approach PR planning in the same way as other social media or content planning, you already know what's coming and you can send pre-prepared statements before key industry events. Print publications work months ahead of print dates, so planning is vital if you want to get your expert views published.

Stay social

Journalists, bloggers and writers actively use social media to find and read newsworthy content. So, follow and connect with the right people online to help understand them and their main interests. It'll help you grasp what stories they're likely to use, and pitch or write your news in a way that's more likely to grab their attention.



TOP TIP

Keep your PR and social media teams talking to each other. Your business will be more effective because your news will be posted onto your social channels at the right time, using the most relevant writer or media outlet's account name and hashtags.



Chapter Five

IMAGERY



IMAGERY

The value of good imagery

Words are certainly important for sharing a compelling story, but good quality imagery and video is critical too. If you use high quality, visually striking or unique image to accompany a news release, it gives you a better chance of getting more ‘space on a page’. So, use your imagination too.

Impactful imagery will also increase the chances of your news being read once it’s published because it can do the work for you and grab readers’ attention – in print, and online.

Investment

Smart devices can take fantastic, high resolution images these days. But, if you can spare the budget, planned PR photography – especially to accompany a press release or comment, is better off being done by a professional. If you don’t know any personally, ask your network for recommendations.



TOP TIP

If you really do have to DIY with your smart phone, zoom in on the shots or check them on a big screen immediately. If your board of directors has taken the time to dress in daft outfits and pose for your pictures, you really don’t want to ask them to come back and do it again because the pictures are too ‘fuzzy’.

IMAGERY



EXPERT'S TOP TIP

Make sure you or your photographer are aware of what's going on behind you.

We've all seen images of politicians unintentionally blocking off part of the signage behind them for it to spell something rude! Their message becomes lost, or worse, plays right into the competition's hands. And the photo never goes away.

Suzi Johnson, Director, Capella Synergy



WANT TO KNOW MORE

Capella Synergy specialises in B2B and B2C PR. If you've found this guide useful, but don't have the time to deliver an effective PR strategy – then we're here to help!

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