

HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE PR PROGRAM

By Gina F. Rubel, Esq.

There are many public relations tactics you can employ to develop new business and increase existing business. Tactics designed to increase awareness among your target customers, create an ongoing buzz and position you as an expert in your industry will inevitably increase profit. But first and foremost, it's about confidence. You must believe in your message and your ability to deliver in order for your PR efforts to be successful!

Great PR can substantially accelerate business development cycles, shorten rounds of capital formation, help generate awareness and credibility, and help promote rapid growth. Harnessing this power can be a great boost – if it is done with clear objectives and is held accountable to your core business goals. Setting measurable PR objectives is the first step towards effective PR that can build your business.

Revisit – or articulate – your company's core business goals. Understanding your business or performance goals is the first step in defining measurable objectives for a PR program. When you measure the value of your PR program, you need to demonstrate that PR has furthered your business goals. Answers to these questions will help identify your business goals and guide your PR. In particular, take time to identify:

What is your core business goal? What are you trying to achieve?

From a communications perspective, what will help, *or hinder*, your success?

How can PR efforts help achieve your business goals?

What is the most effective role for PR in your communications mix?

Now, define your PR objectives:

Who is the target audience(s)? Your target audience should be the thought leaders and decision makers who you want to hear your message and will ultimately affect your company's bottom line.

What do you want your target audience to think about your company? Have you defined your PR message/position? How do you wish to be perceived? Your message is your story so what do you want to say?

What do you want your target audience to do? You can answer this by defining your **call to action**. What action do you want people to take when they hear your message?

How are you going to get your audience to answer your call to action (strategy)? Strategies are used to reach your target audiences and convey your messages, as well to form the basis of your PR plan.

By when do you want your target audience to act (timeline)? You must be cognizant of what it takes to execute a successful PR campaign, and how long it takes to do it. Some programs take three months and others take three years – be reasonable when determining the timeline for a successful program.

Will your PR objectives help achieve your business objectives? If you can answer yes to the following questions, then you've set measurable PR objectives.

Is your PR strategy measurable? Measurable objectives in PR do two things: (1) they facilitate and support business objectives, and (2) they enable PR practitioners to demonstrate programming success and accountability.

Is your PR strategy an end, not a means? Strategy must be defined in order for you to identify the best tactics (means) to accomplish your objectives. Ask yourself, "What is the purpose of (insert objective)." The answer to this question is likely to move you closer to a clear, actionable objective.

Is your PR strategy and timeline realistic? If your strategy is not realistic it can neither be executed nor measured, and you are wasting a precious resource – your time. Be realistic when you develop PR objectives. A common mistake is to over-promise without attention to whether there is anything in the program that could achieve such an objective.

Have you identified the PR tactics that will accomplish your business objectives? In order to identify appropriate tactics, answer the following questions:

What types of tactics will generate the response you desire? Take a look at the list provided below to see if any of these simple tactics are right for you.

What are some of the typical activities of your target audience? For example, if your target audience is comprised of professional service providers, you need to know what publications they regularly read and what conferences they commonly attend.

What are some of the trends in your business and what types of programs can you design to respond to those trends? What are the newspapers covering? What are the news anchors talking about? What's all that buzz about . . . ?

Defining possible PR tactics for your business. There are many PR tactics *YOU* can employ that will help you to achieve your core business goals, develop new business and increase existing business. By consistently, inexpensively and effectively executing the tactics that complement your core business goals, you can increase your bottom line for years to come. Possible tactics include:

Write and publish articles/e-zines/blogs. Much of today's business comes from direct referrals. By writing articles for local newspapers, business journals, e-zines, blogs and industry publications, your peers will identify you as an expert and refer you business.

Issue press releases. Announce new business wins, new products, hires, awards and promotions to local newspapers, business journals and industry publications. It is as simple as sending a press release to the **right** reporter. When writing the press release, focus on something exciting about the story and make sure it's really NEWS.

Author Op-Eds. Opinion-Editorial articles contribute significantly to increasing visibility, name recognition and credibility. They are a cost-effective and underutilized way to reach newspaper and Web site readership, especially when raising topics that are controversial, legislatively motivated, or public policy-based. Make sure your op-ed is concise, short and to the point.

Create a series of tip sheets for your target audience. Make tip sheets available on your Web site. Send your tip sheets to customers and prospects via mail, fax or e-mail (if your customers/prospects opt-in) to keep your company's name in their mind and to build name recognition.

Create fact sheets. Fact sheets present information about a single topic to a variety of audiences, including the media, prospects, clients, etc. They are concise, seldom exceed one or two pages, and must answer essential questions about the topic. They must present your business well, and the writing should be objective and straight forward.

Create a media kit. A media kit can be used in two ways: (1) to inform the media about your company, principals, products and services, and (2) as a leave behind for new business prospects. Some of the items you should include in a media kit are: a backgrounder, biographies of key players in your company, frequently asked questions and answers, fact sheets, photos, recent press releases, brochures, etc. – all depending upon the nature of the intended use.

Network, network, network. You never know who you are going to meet and how your message will touch them but it's up to you to tell your story to the right audiences. I often say, "If you don't tell, they won't come."

Measure your success. Once you have identified the PR tactics that achieve your goals and reach your target audiences with the message that is yours alone, you must identify the tools that you will use to measure the success of your PR program. **You will need to know *how* to ask, and answer, several questions.**

What were our original goals?

What are our measurable goals?

Have we succeeded in achieving our goals?

What happened as a result of our PR program?

How can we improve our PR programs in the future?

For more information, send an e-mail to gina@furiarubel.com or go to www.furiarubel.com.