

## **Public Relations, Earned Media & Paid Media**

“Public Relations” is an often misunderstood – but incredibly important and valuable -- part of the marketing communications mix.

To best understand “PR” one needs to understand some potentially confusing definitions. Many clients think of Public Relations in terms of sending out press releases and getting “free” stories written about their company or product in newspapers or magazines (or coverage on television or the internet) as a result. More accurately, however, Public Relations is a broad category that includes Media Relations, Crisis Communications, Investor Relations, Government Affairs, Political Campaign Management – any strategic communications activity on behalf of a client with a “public,” or outside audience. In these complex endeavors the goal is to strategically influence opinion and behavior in a positive and measurable way.

The category of Public Relations that involves sending out press releases is Media Relations, and can be a tactic of each of the above categories of Public Relations – hence the frequent confusion between “PR” and “Media Relations.”

The goal of Media Relations – the “measurable” – is to garner “earned media.” We say “earned media” as opposed to “paid media” – “paid media” being “advertising,” such as magazine ads, television commercials, website ads, billboards, etc. This is where one can begin to understand the true value of Media Relations, “earned media,” and press releases – because when properly integrated into a strategic marketing communications campaign, Media Relations pays huge dividends. In fact, no complete marketing communications campaign can be totally effective without Media Relations in the mix.

This is why every single Fortune 1000 company (and every single fast-growing and hot start-up company) uses Media Relations in a well-funded and aggressive manner.

To be effective, however, requires that a company tightly integrate and coordinate its earned media efforts with all of its other marketing communications activities. This requires building a foundation and a little patience. One cannot merely toss press releases into the wind and expect “the media” to immediately respond with glowing coverage. It just doesn’t work that way.

When a company purchases advertising it is paying to be included in media that it believes will reach its target audience – this is “paid media.” The company hires an advertising agency to create the advertising that will appeal to its target audience; it pays the agency to select the media that its target customers read or watch. This is a fairly exact science. Magazines, newspapers, websites and television stations can all tell you exactly how many readers or viewers they have, and who these people are – after all, the more they know about their audience and the more accurate they can be with this information, the more they can charge you.

The thing is, when a reader or viewer sees an advertisement, they always have a healthy dose of skepticism. After all, the advertiser (you) is merely making claims about themselves. Of course an advertiser is going to say that his or her product or service is the “latest and greatest.”

This is where the value of “earned media” comes into the picture.

When a company can get a newspaper, website, magazine or television station to say great things about their product or service, this constitutes an endorsement in the mind of the reader or viewer.

The more strategic the marketing consultant can be about getting the product or service placed, the more valuable the “earned media” – if your product is mentioned in a “safest” or “best” list, how great is that? And if this happens ten times in a year, how much more valuable is that to you than buying 10 advertisements? Better still, how valuable is it to have ten advertisements and ten placements in impartial media sources (that your readers love) saying that your products is the safest and best? That’s the power of the marketing communications mix.

Now, to buy an advertisement, one only has to call a magazine and give them credit card information. They will even create an ad for you (it might not be very good). Or you can hire an agency, and within a few weeks, they can have an entire year's campaign all worked out, and a pretty good line-up of great, creative advertisements worked up for you, all ready to go.

Media relations doesn't exactly work that way. A lot of research will be required to learn about your product, your competitors' products, and who the writers and editors are that cover your industry and products/services. Research will need to be conducted into your target audience – who your potential customers are, what they read and watch. More research will need to be done to develop a media list of these writers, editors and reporters. Then, a very detailed campaign will need to be developed, month by month, for an entire calendar year – one that is coordinated with all of your other marketing communications activities.

This media relations campaign will also have to be coordinated so that story pitches and press releases coincide with the seasons (such as holidays, as this will greatly increase the likelihood of coverage) -- and with the media outlets' established editorial calendars (they each have pre-planned schedules of topics they are going to cover). This is a lot of work!

As you can see, this involves much more than simply writing a press release, emailing it out, and "getting" "free" press for your product or company. Nonetheless, we frequently get inquiries from people looking for just that. In fact, what these people are hoping for is "cheap advertising."

Many start-ups don't feel that they can spend the money on paid advertising, and they feel that "PR" may be a less expensive alternative. In reality, these potential clients simply aren't aware of the work and planning and research and investment that is necessary to bring about effective, relevant, strategic media coverage. Certainly, every now and then somebody might send out a press release and get lucky – but this is the exception, not the rule.



As professionals, we feel strongly that it is unethical to write and distribute “one-off” press releases. For one thing, it isn’t sound practice. And ninety-nine times out of a hundred it is going to be a waste of money. A lot of other consultants and agencies are more than happy to bill companies for services that probably won’t bear fruit and aren’t sound professional practice. But that isn’t our style. We would rather educate our clients on the tremendous value of “the marketing communications mix,” and the important differences between “PR,” “Earned Media” and “Paid Media.”

If you’d like to discuss how a media relations effort can benefit your company, please give contact us today.

