

Brand-new brand

How effective public relations can help you reach your targets **Interviewed by Matt McClellan**

Whether you realize it or not, people form opinions about your company based on your brand. And every organization, no matter how large or small, can benefit from using public relations and strategic marketing to improve the way you communicate your brand to potential customers.

“PR can help you define that brand, so you are presenting yourself and your qualities the way you want to,” says Maria Evans, adjunct professor with Delaware Valley College and president of Martino Evans Communications. “It can then help you create messages to help you communicate that brand.”

Smart Business spoke with Evans about how to use effective public relations to bolster your brand.

What can a good public relations program do for you?

A good PR program can create greater awareness of businesses and individuals, attract additional clients, and increase the revenue of the business — not necessarily the number of clients but how much and how frequently they are purchasing.

If you are recognized as an expert, you can increase your revenue through additional sales or through increased demand generated from raised awareness.

PR can build your credibility, enhance your reputation and establish you as a leader in your particular niche, area of a profession or geographic area.

That doesn't necessarily have to be tied directly to the business. An employee's good deeds or involvement in community events can increase your company's reputation. The halo effect gives that benefit to your company or the products and services that you sell.

How can a company improve its brand?

The first step is to decide on your brand. Keep in mind your unique offering and what the competition offers. Develop your message, then get it out consistently and constantly.

It can be something everyone can do. For example, the signature on your e-mail and the incoming and outgoing messages on your voice mail should all be consistent. They should all include whatever benefit you are trying to make sure



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people realize you have to offer.

Whatever that benefit is, you need to get it out consistently and constantly in small and large ways.

What different avenues can you use to get the word out about your brand?

There is a lot of chatter out there, so you need to participate in the chatter that your target audience pays attention to. You can go on some of the social media sites, but if your target audience isn't on them, that's not going to benefit you.

However, if they spend a lot of time online, you want to make sure that you keep coming up and coming to their attention. It's a matter of focusing.

Public relations can help you get a buzz going on your services, and it can help create that word-of-mouth, that raised level of enthusiasm and awareness about your products and services. PR also works to cultivate media, which is not just pushing out stories. It means learning what people who are important to your audience need and becoming a resource for them.

Public relations done right is a very time-consuming endeavor.

Public relations also involves managing a crisis. A good PR program deals with that before it happens and has a plan in place so you have people trained to speak to the media so they can be clear and concise about what they need to communicate. It also helps make sure they get the information out in a timely manner. Public relations is all about timeliness.

Is spending money on PR or marketing wise in today's economic climate?

With the downturn in the economy, a lot of people say they can't afford to do PR or marketing. Now is the time you should, though, because it is a little bit quieter out there.

Whether you are a small or large company, you want to position yourself as viable. If you intend to be a company that is around in five years, you need to be out there letting people know you're still out there doing good things.

People say they'll get the word out when the market gets better. But remember: Out of sight, out of mind. Public affairs is about consistently being involved and sharing your knowledge.

How can a business determine which branches of PR or marketing they might need?

One thing I always advise clients is that you don't want to start with, 'I need a press release!' You need to start a few steps back. Ask yourself, 'Who am I trying to reach?' It's basically a marketing plan. What do I have to offer them? What is special about what I'm trying to offer them? Where are those people I'm trying to reach?

If you figure out what that is and develop your message, it starts falling into place. You have to start by looking at it strategically.

Once you've decided that, you can determine priorities. Sure, it would be great to reach all your targeted audiences, but your resources may allow you to only do some right now.

Your PR plan needs to be strategic, or else you'll be overwhelmed, and nothing will happen. <<

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