



INTEGRATING MEDIA RELATIONS INTO YOUR BtoB MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Media relations, a subset of public relations, should play an important role in your overall marketing communications plan. Utilizing the media as a communication tool can help you achieve your marketing objectives and strengthen your brand awareness.



85% of business journalists use
PR contacts for story ideas

Media relations, a subset of public relations, should play an important role in your overall marketing communications plan. By using media, including print, broadcast and online, you can achieve marketing objectives, including legitimizing your company, enhancing its reputation, providing thought leadership, and communicating with your target audiences.

While other activities in your marketing mix can also achieve these objectives, media relations reaches beyond other traditional means because of how it is perceived. By communicating through a third party – the media – the message gains additional credibility. There are times when a carefully crafted media relations campaign can achieve greater results than an equivalent amount of advertising.

BENEFITS OF MEDIA RELATIONS

There are many benefits that a good media relations campaign can provide, including:

- ▶ **Thought leadership** – Contributed articles, executive interviews and company profiles can all position your company as a leader in your industry. If you give your audience or prospective customer information that they find valuable, they will then see you as a resource, rather than just a vendor for products or services.
 - ▶ **Repetition of message** – Several studies have shown that it takes multiple “touch points” for the viewer to remember your message. Alone, a press release or a single print ad may draw some attention. But an integrated campaign utilizing media relations will make a greater impact. The more times you can effectively communicate an integrated message, the better chance you have to turn a prospect into a customer.
 - ▶ **Deeper story telling** – An advertisement can convey only a limited amount of information. A media relations campaign, however, can tell a complete story from beginning to end. Because journalists typically take a factual approach to reporting and represent an objective perspective, the story is also seen as less promotional and more credible.
 - ▶ **Search engine optimization** – The more web links about your company and to your website, the higher your search engine listings will appear, increasing traffic to your website. Articles, or even simply press releases, posted to various trade or news websites will help increase your visibility and strengthen your position in organic searches.
 - ▶ **Competitive advantage** – Your competitors may not be utilizing media relations in their marketing communications plan. By integrating your marketing efforts to include media relations, you can have an edge over your competition, while you build your market awareness.
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▶ **Cost effectiveness** – With advertising, your budget may be limited to placements in a select group of outlets. With media relations, however, you can have the opportunity to get published for free – a welcome break in today’s economy.

▶ **Timeliness** – Breaking news can reach the public more quickly through media relations than through advertising. Ad placements can take weeks, whereas a press release can be posted to an online source in minutes. But remember, planning in advance is important when wanting to be published in print.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Plan

When you begin to integrate media relations into your marketing communications plan, a roadmap will help you be successful.

First, know your objectives and desired goal. Ask yourself what success looks like: do you want to be featured on the front page of the Wall Street Journal? Appear on Oprah? Be quoted within a specific trade publication? (Of course, be realistic.)

Second, know your audiences. Who is your target? Think of all of the potential purchase influencers that you need to communicate with.

Third, plan in advance. Print publications can take several weeks – or even months – from pitch to print. Know what you want to say before you need to say it. Giving yourself time to craft your message will help you communicate more clearly.

2. Gather content

Your message is only as good as the content you create. Explore the existing messaging you already have developed. Perhaps you have secondary research, survey results, white papers, or case studies. These can serve as great starting points for thought leadership in key publications. Additionally, begin to brainstorm press release ideas that may be newsworthy.

Topic ideas for press releases:

- New products or services
- Personnel changes
- Certifications
- Awards
- Research results
- Events
- Sponsorships

70% of business journalists use search engines to research story ideas

3. Build relationships

All of the content in the world will not be effective unless you have spent time building relationships with your target media. Start by creating a list of the top media outlets – within reason – in which you would like to see your company mentioned. For BtoB companies, this usually involves identifying key trade publications (print and online), as well as local, regional and national business publications that also reach your target audiences. In some cases, TV and radio may also be appropriate; however, these venues are usually better suited for BtoC communication. In addition, include news websites that may not have a traditional broadcast model. This list will serve as your key media that you pitch first and offer exclusives.

92% of business journalists use news releases for story ideas

If building a media distribution list sounds daunting, there are also subscription-based, Internet services available that can provide this information at a cost. These top media research resources provide direct contact information and extensive editorial opportunities that may not be listed on media websites. A few of the available media research services are Burrelles, Cision, Vocus, and PR Newswire. These resources all vary in cost, capabilities and functionality.

Once you have a list you are satisfied with, you'll need to gather media contact information. Websites often list email or phone numbers for the editor and/or reporters. Research shows that the majority of these individuals would prefer to be contacted by email before receiving a phone call. It is important to note that building relationships with the media takes time and skill.

4. Be prepared

If you do not have a designated person within the company with a background in media relations, consider outsourcing this service to an experienced professional or agency. The individual will need strong skills in communication, writing and sales, as well as the ability to meet deadlines and work well with others. If you do decide to manage this internally, you must be accessible, credible and honest with the media. Be a resource for journalists, reporters, editors, announcers, hosts, etc. If you can make their job easier, it's more likely that your story will get picked up.

When working with an agency, keeping open communication is critical. Things move very quickly in the news world. If your agency gets a call for an interview request, you must be willing to jump on the opportunity immediately. Keeping open communication will also allow you to develop new stories that may not have been thought of before.

Having a dedicated media relations person (internally or outside the company) will help you be prepared and more effective. Day-to-day activities will include writing, pitching, talking directly to the media, and researching opportunities.

5. Track and measure

After the message is built and is delivered to the media, tracking of the coverage is important. Tracking services are available that can summarize and report the amount of press coverage received during a given campaign. This can help show ROI and reinforce effectiveness of your campaign to management. If your message isn't being picked up or you aren't hearing back from a source, be persistent, but don't harass. The media receives an outrageous amount of pitches and releases every day. It may take time for them to get back to you or to run the story.

6. Leverage media relations results

Once your campaign is underway and your message is published, be sure to leverage your coverage by posting links on your website or social media outlets. Remember, the publication of news can be viral. While distribution to standard news outlets or through the wire is an effective strategy, do not forget about newer venues, such as social media – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Blogging – where your audience may be tuned in. Additionally, interviews and article reprints can be repurposed and used as great sales tools, as they establish validity and showcase genuine market interest.

CONCLUSIONS

Media relations should be an ongoing effort and managing your relationships with the media takes skill and time. It can be hard to get the media's attention, even for well-seasoned public relations professionals. Through time, patience and commitment, however, integrating media relations into your marketing communications plan can provide great results for building brand equity and your business.

SOCIAL MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS

The line between social media and public relations is getting smaller and smaller. Here are some ways that you can utilize social media tools to communicate directly with your audiences. Remember, it is important to have a two-way conversation when engaging in social media.



Twitter: In 140 characters or less you can connect personally with various media outlets and individuals



YouTube: By creating a corporate channel with informational videos, you can give the media more than the standard news release



Blogging: Participate in the conversation by commenting on relevant blog posts from your target media



LinkedIn: Make connections with others in your industry and share new developments and best practices

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