

Chapter 16

Step 6 – Activity and application

Press and media relations – what to do when you haven't got news

The simple answer is to 'create' a 'hook' or 'peg' for your story. There are a number of ways to 'create' news and angles to get noticed and raise your profile. Creating news is not the same as making it up – you must be clear about that. It's about recognising opportunities to give journalists what they want. The table below gives you an idea of some ways in which you can 'create' news and generate interest to highlight your business – you can use the right hand column to mark up the areas that are of interest to you and that you think you can use in your PR.

	✓/x
<p>Research/surveys</p> <p>This is a good way of securing coverage and it needn't involve spending huge amounts on the services of a research company. You do, however, have to ensure that your research is robust and stands up to scrutiny. There are two ways to use research for PR – the first is to design some research specifically to generate a news story. The other is to look at research that you are carrying out for your business anyway and find, and build in, an angle that can be used for PR.</p> <p>Surveys that are repeated are a useful way of highlighting changes</p>	

<p>in customer behaviour, trends and impact on the market place. Can you undertake a survey that assesses the mood/feeling/inclination/satisfaction of your target audiences?</p>	
<p>Events</p> <p>Creating/organising an event. Remember, you need to do more than just announce the event – you need to provide insightful comment or challenge thinking in some way etc. One way to generate press and media interest is to announce something at the event – go back and think about the 'ingredients' of a news story and how these can help.</p>	
<p>Anniversaries</p> <p>Anniversaries are a great way to get your story into the public domain. Think about the number of times Princess Diana is in the news – anniversary of her death etc is used as a 'hook' for the story. There are a whole host of anniversaries that could be used as opportunities to highlight comment. Can you, for example, provide comment on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the anniversary of a change in legislation ▪ or being in business for xx years ▪ the anniversary of a particular event that impacted on your target market. 	
<p>Letters to editors</p> <p>Letters to editors is a press and media relations tools, as mentioned previously. It is useful as and when but also if you feel that you are lacking stories to shout about. At least every week, if not more often, there will be stories that you can comment on. Writing a</p>	

<p>short, punchy letter to the editor of a local newspaper, or a specialist magazine, is just one very simple way of riding on the back of other people's news. Don't forget that commenting on blogs is equally valuable in the right forum.</p>	
<p>Support a charity</p> <p>Linking up with a local charity or helping to support fund-raising activity is both worthwhile and offers PR possibilities.</p>	
<p>Awards</p> <p>You can use awards in a number of ways. Look out for opportunities to enter your business, and the people that work in it, for an award. You might also want to consider setting up an awards scheme yourself – maybe an annual award for budding local talent, with some link to your business.</p>	
<p>Expert column</p> <p>As you build up your confidence in dealing with the press and media you might want to consider approaching them about an expert column. For an expert column you will need to research the target press – maybe they have an expert column already that you can add to or you can provide advice that contributes to topical debate.</p>	
<p>Sponsorship</p> <p>Are there local groups you could link up with? You could ride on the back of their PR. Think about the types of organisations that would provide synergy with your own business.</p>	

<p>Come to the rescue</p> <p>Scan your local newspaper on a regular basis. It's not that unusual to see stories where someone has been hard done by or requests from local groups and clubs for some sort of help. If you can provide that help then it's an easy way to get noticed.</p>	
<p>Speaker opportunities</p> <p>Local groups, chambers of commerce, networking groups etc are always looking for speakers. It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with these events so that you can tailor your approach and present an idea that will appeal. Speaker opportunities can provide useful PR mileage. Inevitably, the organisation running the event will promote it to their members. You can also use the opportunity to talk about a topical issue, say something newsworthy/launch a product/ offer something for free etc which can be used for PR follow-up.</p>	
<p>Offer something for free</p> <p>You will need to make your offer quite creative and fun and you must ensure that it fits with the image of your business. For example, offering free advice sessions or opportunities for people to try out new skills etc has possibilities.</p>	
<p>Celebrity endorsement</p> <p>It can be difficult to get celebrities to endorse something you are doing. Certainly, don't be surprised if any celebrities you approach request a fee (and a hefty one at that) unless it's for charity. You could, of course, get involved with a local charity and link up with celebrities that way. Your personal profile can be just as important</p>	

<p>as that of the business. On a local level, if you invite the Mayor or Mayoress to your event then there is a good chance of getting a photo in the local newspaper. Just make sure you are in the photo too! Also, it's a good idea to ensure that you don't rely on the local newspaper to send a photographer, always ensure you have your own photographer so you can send in a picture with your press release.</p> <p>If you are fortunate enough to have celebrities as customers then there may be opportunities but remember to seek permission first before announcing it to the world.</p>	
<p>Community involvement</p> <p>Get to know your local community – it shouldn't be too difficult to spot opportunities to raise your profile. That could involve any number of activities – from providing work experience to local students, offering yourself as a mentor to start-up businesses, instigating a business forum to support a particular cause, to supporting the local football club. All have vast scope on the PR front e.g. you could talk to the local newspaper about someone doing work experience with you and keeping a diary of their experience; you could put a call out for businesses to join a forum you are launching, create an event around what you are trying to achieve – businesses for a greener future etc.</p>	
<p>Create a stunt</p> <p>You should be careful when thinking about creating a stunt. It's all very well para-scending down the side of the building but you do need to ensure that the stunt fits with the image of the company – unless you want to change that image radically. Also, keep a close</p>	

<p>eye on your budget as costs can escalate. Look at the Guinness Book of records – is there a record that would fit with your business? If you fit tyres, for example, then you could look to see if there is a record for the fastest tyre change.</p>	
<p>Go seasonal</p> <p>This can often be overlooked but is a good way of planning out PR that will fit with topical issues. There are some things that happen every year – religious holidays, the seasons themselves, summer holidays, Summer exam results, end of the tax year, New Year resolutions, Valentine’s Day etc. You may be able to highlight your product or service by linking with a seasonal opportunity. If you are a financial advisor then you could provide advice linked with New Year resolutions – top tips for clearing your debt etc. Maybe you design jewellery – in which case Valentine’s Day is perfect for promoting a new range. If you sell books then ‘holiday reads’ to take away on your summer break might provide an opportunity.</p> <p>You’ll know if customer interest peaks at certain times of the year – the trick is to maximise that by heightening your profile to coincide with it.</p>	
<p>Lifestyle and life cycle</p> <p>Just as seasonal angles can provide opportunities during the year the ‘lifestyle and life cycle’ of customers and potential customers provide a wealth of possibilities. There are many ‘life’ stages that are common; we go to school, sit exams, open a bank account and manage our finances, have relationships, work, change jobs, buy cars, buy houses, start families, think about pension planning, retiring etc. Are there any points in the lifestyle and life cycle of your</p>	

<p>potential customers that you could provide comment on. If your product or service fits with lifestyle or life stage then it may well be of interest to magazines targeting particular groups – women’s, health, specialist interest etc – but be aware, however, many magazines work several months in advance.</p> <p>So, if you offer a will writing service then there may be opportunities to target new parents via parenting magazines. If you offer careers coaching then a careers healthcheck questionnaire might interest your target press. Estate agents are in an ideal position to offer useful tips and advice on what to consider when buying or selling a house.</p>	
<p>Do something unusual</p> <p>This could be something for the local community, or for your customers or staff. Have you got a story where you or your staff went the extra mile for a customer? I remember reading a story in a London newspaper recently – it reported the promotion to captain of a pilot of one of the big airlines. That in itself is not interesting, or particularly newsworthy. What made it newsworthy was that on his first flight as captain his co-pilot was his wife. Remember, you don’t always have to create the news – sometimes it can be staring you in the face – you just need to be able to recognise it.</p>	
<p>Hold a competition</p> <p>Whatever business you are in there is scope for holding a competition – from estate agents inviting children to draw their dream home of the future to recipes to celebrate a specific occasion. Think carefully about how to promote the competition. If you talk to a local newspaper then they may try to encourage you to</p>	

<p>advertise/pay for a notice to promote the competition – which defeats the objective. You can promote the competition in-store/on your website/at events etc and approach the press with the announcement of the winner and pictures from any prize giving.</p>	
<p>Disagree with your competitors or people in power</p> <p>As you embark on raising your profile it's important to track your target press and media. If one of your competitors says something that you disagree with then why not approach the publication/programme to put your point of view across?</p>	
<p>Be controversial</p> <p>Journalists are always looking for something controversial – something that has an element of conflict. So, if you can do something or demonstrate how you are bucking a trend then you can get their attention. Likewise, challenging the powers that be about something is likely to cause a stir. Again, don't do this for the sake of it – it must fit with your bigger plan with regard to the image you want to project and the messages you want to get across.</p>	
<p>Riding on the back of someone else's PR</p> <p>Remember, you don't have to create the news yourself. It's just as valuable to add to the debate by commenting on the back of other people's PR. Don't think, however, that just by agreeing with the points already made you'll get attention. You need to add something new to the debate – new information, a different slant on the opinion already given, a view that challenges the opinion etc.</p>	

Write a book

It takes considerable effort but if you are planning to write a book then don't forget to use it to maximise your PR. The launch of the book provides one great opportunity – but you should also reference it on press releases and in biographies.



PR plan – section L

- Go back to your list of PR objectives and the initial ideas you noted down earlier. Now, take each objective and define the target audiences and the ideas you have for PR to fulfil the objective, completing the grid below. You may need to do further research to complete information regarding time allocation, budget and other resources/requirements.

Our ideas

Objective

Target Audiences

Ideas/activity

Time allocation

Budget

Resources/other requirements

This is chapter 16 of the DIY PR Toolkit. The toolkit is designed to give small businesses a step-by-step approach to devising and implementing their own PR plan. It includes an hour of consultancy time to help put the plan into action. For more details, or to download the toolkit, go to:

<http://www.profilematters.co.uk/toolkits.php>