



DO IT
YOURSELF
PR

DIY PR

'Do-It-Yourself' Public Relations Can Help You Increase Sales and Create Value

Public Relations (PR) has never been more public.

The Internet and social media have made it easier than ever to tell your business's story to the world. No longer are you completely dependent on the media to tell that story for you. Now, you can go directly to your customers through email, your website, social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, web-based newswires, thousands of blogs covering every conceivable topic, and many other media channels.

It's still important to promote your business through tried-and-true methods by telling your story to the publications, online sites and broadcast outlets that cover your market. But there are many other new ways to get the word out as well. The Internet enables all of your "stakeholders" – customers, suppliers, employees, investors, competitors, and neighbors in the community – to gain access to news and information about your company.

Every small to mid-sized business owner needs to know how to use PR to increase sales, enhance competitive position, build or maintain your reputation, and create value. Doing effective PR isn't as daunting a task as it may first appear; in fact, there are a lot of tools available that allow you to do much of it for yourself. So there is nothing to stop you from telling the story on your own – even before you have a formal budget for PR.

What are the critical elements of a successful PR program?

1. YOUR POSITION: Know who you are – and where you stand.

You know your industry – inside and out: the strengths and weaknesses of your company, and your competition. You know what you want to achieve in terms of pursuing opportunities in your marketplace. So what separates your company from the pack? It can be:

- ▶ You offer better quality products or services
- ▶ You offer the greatest value for money
- ▶ You have the best customer service and a reputation for integrity
- ▶ You are the most convenient source of products or services
- ▶ You fill a unique need in your marketplace

Understanding and articulating the basic difference between your business and your competition defines the position of your business and this position drives the story you tell and the perceptions you want to sustain among your various audiences.

2. YOUR STORY: Develop a powerful, clear and credible story for your company.

Everyone has a story – what's yours? Come up with the best and most compelling story that will excite your customers and motivate others to spread it in

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the media and by word of mouth. Then, take your story and extract the newsworthy items it contains. These may include:

- ▶ New products or services that you offer
- ▶ New people joining your company
- ▶ New investors in your company
- ▶ Big successes – like sales, customer wins or awards
- ▶ Participation or leadership in important community service programs.

3. YOUR NEWS: Create press releases that tell and re-tell your story and prove its credibility.

Each of these newsworthy items constitutes a potential **press release**. A press release is NOT an advertisement; it is written in journalistic form and should be concise, no longer than 400 words. Think of it as the ideal story you would like a journalist to write, or your customers to read on the web.

Journalistic form means that the press release reads like a news story. It's written clearly, puts the most important news items in the headline and lead paragraph, and contains no grammatical or typographical errors. It's powerful enough to excite or interest people (especially the media) enough to make them want to re-tell it to their audiences. And it must be credible: all of your statements or claims should be supported by factual information.

"Key words" for your business are also used in the headline and lead paragraphs for SEO (search engine optimization), meaning your stakeholders will find your news release easily when they type those words into a search engine Google.

For more on writing press releases, download this [tip sheet](#).

For more on search engine optimization, download this [tip sheet](#).

4. YOUR MESSENGER: Connect to the people who can spread your story.

Now you need to get the word out. The easiest and most cost-efficient way to get your story to the media is to post your news to a search-engine-optimized (SEO) website. There are both subscription-based and free options for you to choose from.

CisionWire is a web-based news distribution service with thousands of subscribers and millions of "unique visitors" among media and influencers. You can create your news release by typing (or pasting) it directly into CisionWire, and add photos, other graphics and captions. By posting your news release to CisionWire, your small or mid-sized business can deliver its news to the world, generate web traffic, create online buzz, impact sales, and strengthen its brand and reputation.

Using SEO, CisionWire increases the likelihood that your news will rank at or near the top of lists when users enter key words into Google, Yahoo! and other search engines. Including live hyperlinks in your news release drives traffic to your website, and social bookmarking tools enable stakeholders to easily share your news with others – and take your story viral.

Should you email your release directly to journalists, you must be highly selective and you must conform to the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003, which sets standards for the sending of email containing "commercial messages." Seek out only those outlets and influencers that cover your specific industry or your local area, and learn and follow the Federal Trade Commission's commercial email guidelines.

For more on distributing your news on the web, download this [tip sheet](#).

For more on rules and protocols about direct emailing of press releases, download this [tip sheet](#).



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5. YOUR MEDIA COMMUNITY: Building relationships with the people who cover you.

Now that the release has been posted or distributed, what can you expect? In the best-case scenario, other outlets will link to your news release, or it will be “re-tweeted” by Twitter users. Or you may get a follow-up telephone call, email, tweet or text message from a media person, influencer, customer or another stakeholder seeking more information.

Be prompt and forthright in responding to these calls, and be patient if it takes some time to generate media coverage. Your release is one element of an ongoing story that will take time to build, and creating and sustaining relationships with influential contacts also takes time. You must promptly honor any “opt-out” requests that you receive from any directly emailed news release. And as you gain a truer understanding of which people and outlets are most interested in your story, your success rate will grow.

Every business is a people business, and that goes for your relationships with the media as well. “Social media” can connect you with the news media in entirely new ways while deepening your relationships with your customers.

Smart businesses use Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other such sites to engage with the media and start building communities around their products and services. Think of social media not as a means of broadcasting your story but as a means of building long-term relationships with people who are in a position to recommend you to customers.

For ideas on How, When and Why to use social media, download this [tip sheet](#).

SUMMARY: PR is Cost-Effective – And Effective

PR has always been among the least expensive means of marketing your products and service. Unlike advertising, where you must pay for placements in the media, PR generates visibility that you don't have to pay for. And if your story gets reported in a quality media outlet, PR can offer credibility that advertising cannot match.

Even if your growing business doesn't have a marketing or PR budget, doing your own PR can pay off handsomely. With readily available tools such as CisionWire, you can start right away.

