

TOP TIPS FROM PR PROS

60 Tips from a Collection of Experts



Sponsored by
the Orange County (CA) Chapter
of the Public Relations Society of America

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INTRODUCTION

Whether you are a public relations professional or have ever considered hiring one, whether you have been in your own business for a while or are just starting, there is always more to learn about what makes it all tick.

This booklet brings you practical and immediately usable insights in bite-size pieces from public relations experts, each sharing tips from their areas of expertise. These well-tested tools and techniques are sure to get you thinking about what works best for you, now.

You'll see suggestions about good ways to pitch stories to the media, ideas for gaining approval on your projects, recommendations for communicating well in a crisis, and things to consider when hiring a PR professional for your business - all of that right here in this booklet.

Test one thing at a time. See how it suits you. Contact the authors in this booklet. They remain successful by contributing to your success. Plus they are really terrific and interesting people, people you'll want to know and have in your life.

Interview these authors in your publication if you are a journalist. After all, they are professional public relations people who know how to give you a great story. Multiple sources and bulleted content are all in one place right here for your article, radio or television interview, blog, or website. Ask for a price quote if you are shopping for the services they provide. Purchase printed copies of this booklet as a customized promotional tool for marketing your own business or talk with us about licensing the downloadable version for other promotional applications. Like publicity, the possibilities are truly endless.

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GETTING APPROVAL FOR YOUR PROJECT

- 1 Listen to your audience, decision makers, and the opposition.** Use effective, affordable research to gather information. Then plan your approach. Collect valuable information by listening, using focus groups, telephone surveys, and online resources such as discussion boards.
- 2 Prepare to communicate.** Not everyone plays fair. Be ready to respond. Engage community leaders, elected officials, and opinion leaders as spokespeople. Train your upper management to address the community's questions and comments. Make sure your employees have accurate and up-to-date information about the project.
- 3 Invest where it counts.** The fight is (usually) not over the technology, the money, or the actual project. It's in the arena of public opinion. Effective communications counsel will help you achieve your goals and save money in the long run.
- 4 Develop messages that resonate.** Craft an emotional appeal, which works more effectively than straight facts alone. Make sure everything you say is truthful, but not too complicated. Provide details that are appropriate to your audience's technical level.
- 5 Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Then communicate some more. Become the authority on your project. Provide information. Give rebuttals to misinformation. Arm your allies with facts. Make your website the go-to source.

Katie Coates Ageson, APR is president of PR Projects, a public relations consulting firm specializing in crisis communications. PR Projects helps their clients communicate effectively through strategic message and crisis communication plan development, community outreach, and public affairs.

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COMMUNICATING DURING A CRISIS

- 1 Respond quickly.** Silence kills your reputation. Consider these different responses: Oil spill in Alaska – no response until much too late. The media and the public judged the response as unsympathetic and full of legalese. Oil spill offshore in Huntington Beach, California – CEO flew to the spill scene, stood on the beach and lamented the devastation. The first crisis has an easily recognized name; the second spurred grassroots efforts to save wildlife continuing to this day, without discernable anger towards the company.
- 2 Release as many facts as possible as quickly as possible.** A slow trickle of bad news is much worse than a full accounting up front.
- 3 Make it obvious that you care.** A perception that your company is indifferent to suffering, whether real or perceived, will do much more harm than the actual crisis could ever do.
- 4 Develop messages that resonate.** Craft an emotional appeal, which works more effectively than straight facts alone. Get help from a specialist who has experience in crafting messages.
- 5 Make sure that your spokesperson is a sympathetic person who can express empathy.** Ascertain that the spokesperson's personality is read accurately on camera. (Practice with mock video interviews before a crisis occurs.)

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RESEARCH PROMOTES PROJECT APPROVAL

- 1 Answer the question, “What’s in it for me?”** Make it clear how the project will contribute to the organization’s bottom line or help achieve its mission – and you’ve defined why the project should be approved.
- 2 Ask their opinion.** By taking time for a one-on-one meeting or answering an online survey, leaders and other stakeholders become aware of the project and develop a stake in its success. Gathering useful information also doubles as a promotional opportunity.
- 3 Adjust the project.** Leaders and other stakeholders are more likely to form a favorable impression of the project if you honor their comments by making even small adjustments in the original plan.
- 4 Provide feedback.** Just as feedback is a vital part of all communication, it’s critical to getting organizational support. Reporting survey results and what steps have been taken to implement the ideas will bolster support for the project.
- 5 Plan the follow-up.** Make it clear that your commitment to the success of the project doesn’t end with approval. Show your plan for how you will continue to make it valuable to the organization. It’s the first step in selling your next project.

Ames & Associates develops high-impact, targeted, external and internal information strategies and programs. We have years of experience inside news organizations as reporters / editors, as well as leading communications departments for public corporations. We can help you successfully tell your organization’s stories.

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CAPTURING THE MEDIA'S ATTENTION

- 1 Be proactive.** Target one or two reporters who write about your industry, service, or products. Call or email with a story idea or suggest yourself as a source. Invite them out for coffee or lunch to develop a relationship.
- 2 Realize that not everyone needs a news release.** If you have “hot” news for a reporter or you want to make an announcement, many times an email with the pertinent information will be as successful as a news release.
- 3 Get Linked In through LinkedIn.** LinkedIn can be a great resource to find reporters to update a media list. Often times, a LinkedIn profile for a reporter or editor is more up-to-date than a traditional media database service.
- 4 Write an article.** A great way for professionals to establish themselves as industry experts is to write an article. Consider what your target audience reads, then suggest an article idea to an editor. When it is published, send it to reporters who cover your industry as a perfect introduction.
- 5 Vary your PR tactics.** From speaking engagements to social media, there are now many more tools to generate name recognition. Utilizing them all will generate more exposure than ever before.

A former television news journalist, Cheryl Bame now devises public relations campaigns that gain her clients name recognition and new business.

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CONNECTING WELL WITH THE MEDIA

- 1** Customize your pitch. Research reporters who cover your topic and modify your pitch to engage each reporter's interest.
- 2** Make sure you are pitching the correct person. While it may seem advantageous to pitch the managing editor, a reporter might be more willing to do the story.
- 3** Create a relevant story angle. Capture what is "now" and adapt your story to it.
- 4** Make a journalist's job easy. Give them new ideas and make comments on new trends.
- 5** Be persistent in your follow up. Add interesting tidbits of information about your topic to keep their attention.

Wendy Dahl's background is in corporate marketing where for over a decade she worked full-time and then consulted for small businesses. She has continued to apply the marketing and public relations principles to her company along with other companies in the special events industry. She also enjoys speaking to groups of event professionals to improve their businesses.

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IDENTIFYING YOUR IDEAL PR PROFESSIONAL

- 1** Hire a Specialist. Look for a PR Pro that specializes in the topic or industry you are in.
- 2** Find out how they build relationships with people in the media. This will tell you if they just write and distribute stories or if they have solid relationships with the media.
- 3** Go for someone with a track record. Determine which media outlets have picked up their stories.
- 4** Choose a PR Pro that can be your advocate. If they have too many clients or too few staff, you might get forgotten.
- 5** Make sure it is a fit. Ask for references from previous clients. Be clear on their working style and be sure they can suit your needs

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SUCCESSFULLY PITCHING THE MEDIA

- 1 Define what success means for your brand from the beginning.** Creating quantifiable goals enables PR professionals to “work backwards” to efficiently map an effective plan. Having clear expectations from the start is the key to providing an accurate return on investment measurements.
- 2 Know your audience!** What do your customers value and how does your brand align with their ideals? Surveying audiences prior to implementing marketing efforts lays the foundation for your publicity plan.
- 3 Utilize media relations to create awareness for products or services.** The “PR 101” tactic is still very effective in today’s media landscape – as long as it’s done right! Be sure that story angles are newsworthy and you’re able to effectively accommodate the media contacts’ needs.
- 4 Focus on genuine, transparent, and value-added messaging when communicating with social media users.** The key to effective marketing on modern mediums is conversational dialogue offering real value. Overly branded messages packed with buzz words lose web-driven audiences who want authentic conversations, not corporate boilerplates.
- 5 Remember that timing is everything!** Know the lead times of media outlets you’re working with. Pitch your product or service’s news appropriately. Lead times for many major media outlets can be as much as six months in advance.

Founded in 1991, Morgan Marketing & Public Relations LLC provides marketing, public relations, and event-planning services to a variety of industries, including: hospitality, consumer goods, restaurants and professional services. Located in Irvine, Calif., the office features test kitchen and focus group facilities

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CHOOSING THE BEST PR PROFESSIONAL FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- 1 Look to past competitors.** Which company regularly had better PR coverage than yours? Hire that company's PR agency.
- 2 Consider hiring a virtual agency.** Virtual agencies often are led by senior-level PR pros who make use of technology to operate their firms. The reduction in overhead translates to senior talent at affordable rates.
- 3 Look for an agency that specializes in an industry, e.g., wireless, food, or fashion.** This expertise makes the agency a trusted resource for the media. Consistently talking to the same core group of reporters on behalf of all its clients enables the agency to discover more PR opportunities.
- 4 Skip the dog and pony presentations.** PR professionals give presentations for a living; they all sound great. Invite finalist agencies in to talk about your account. The informal setting will give you better insight into the agencies' teams.
- 5 Check references – both past clients and reporters.** Ask past clients about results, the team, billing practices, and pet peeves. Ask reporters if the agency secured their permission to use them as references.

An all-senior level team and a la carte marketing communications services set Eliot Lane Communications Studio apart from traditional agencies. We specialize in working with technology companies, municipalities and non-profits. While our offices are in Long Beach and Orange County, California, our clients are nationwide.

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FINDING YOUR IDEAL PR PROFESSIONAL

- 1 Choose a PR person with the right expertise.** There are many disciplines within PR, including media relations, event planning, social media, and more. Matching your PR expert's expertise to that of your company's needs ensures that you get the very best strategic advice and tactical execution.
- 2 Consider the PR person's industry experience.** PR people typically specialize in a variety of industries, from technology and medical to retail and automotive. Choose a PR professional with experience in your industry to give them an edge for your PR.
- 3 Consider a Virtual PR Agency.** Virtual PR agencies can deliver the expertise of a big agency with more personalized service and an affordable price tag, plus a team that is handpicked to match your company's needs.
- 4 Be wary of costs.** PR fees can vary greatly depending on the size of the agency, its expertise and client experience. For example, big agencies often charge in excess of \$350 per hour for its senior practitioners, where a younger PR consultant may charge less than \$100 per hour. Virtual agencies are a great solution because they can give you the best of big agency experience at a more affordable cost.
- 5 Recognize that your PR person is your face to the media, so you need to feel in sync that they will handle outreach for your company in an appropriate manner.** Without synergy, nothing else matters.

Teri Sawyer owns T&Co. Public Relations, an award-winning virtual agency in Orange County, CA, that focuses on delivering exceptional media and analyst success for its clients.

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A.W.A.R.E.

- 1 Assess goals of campaign.** Define objectives. Clear cut objectives make a powerful delivery whether pitching a story or promoting products and services through a story line feature.
- 2 Write and submit materials so copy can be edited up or down.** Media professionals have odd “holes” to fill. Make the first paragraph a strong summary statement, not a teaser. A well designed 75 word snippet may just get “in.”
- 3 Add author credentials to every package.** Experience, education, age, disabilities, and pertinent associations impact the pitch’s influence. Include taglines, signatures, and follow-up contact information.
- 4 Research available tools, including internet, print, radio, and television in order to identify which delivery methods may reach those most likely to act on your offering.** Always consider at least two working simultaneously.
- 5 Email, fax, and call each media outlet’s primary contact.** Do it again. Successful public relation professionals use this formula. Sending daily emails without follow up is ineffective. Editors are bombarded with information. Make your message demographically specific. Customize for each audience approached.

Senior Industry Professionals, Inc. is a boutique consulting firm. Our unparalleled access to the “mature, 50+ audiences” of consumers and business professionals working with older adults distinguishes us from traditional approaches. We provide training, analytics, marketing, sales competencies, and public relations to assist your success in capturing the attention of older adults. We work within and throughout the growing senior environment, touching all aspects of the industry. In addition, we publish ***Not Born Yesterday!***, Southern California’s Senior Newspaper.

Amanda Blake Secola, President/CEO

Senior Industry Professionals, Inc.

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MEDIA RELATIONS: HELPFUL HINTS FOR PITCHING YOUR STORY

- 1 Highlight your newsworthiness.** Gather information about your organization that is new, unique, entertaining, educational, and beneficial for others. Emphasize who benefits from your offerings, and why this is important now.
- 2 Build targeted media lists.** Conduct Web research to obtain editorial contacts among your local and regional press, and media that cover your profession and your clients' industries. Include media that cover a "beat" relating to your business/expertise, product/service, topic/trend, etc.
- 3 Write a news release.** Use AP style (see free examples online) for best reception of your story. Write a clear, concise news release with "who," "what," "where," "when," "why," and "how" information. Include a catchy headline and your contact details.
- 4 Distribute your news release.** Most media prefer to receive releases via email or fax, others provide online links for editorial submissions, and some still prefer mail. Call to check preferences.
- 5 Follow-up.** Call each contact on your lists, introduce yourself, and ask if they have a moment. They may say "yes," or offer another time to chat. In 15-30 seconds, explain your story as news their audience can use!

Stacy Taylor is principal of Taylor Public Relations, a Huntington Beach-based consultancy serving local, regional, and national clients, and specializing in media and community relations, writing, and events-planning. With 20+ years of PR experience, Stacy works with consumer product and service companies in several industries, including health, retail, restaurant, entertainment, travel, real estate, government, and nonprofits, as well as other PR/MarCom agencies.

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FIVE FACTORS FOR FINDING THE BEST PR PROFESSIONAL FOR YOUR BUSINESS

- 1 Select seniority.** Seek a senior-level professional with 10 years minimum in PR, AND experience working with organizations like yours. If considering an agency, ensure a senior-level supervisor leads your team, and serves as your main contact.
- 2 Regard relationships and results.** Choose a “networked” PR vendor connected with media and other “influencers” within your target audiences, perhaps as a member of your local business, community, or trade organization(s). Ask for their press clips, illustrating media relationships and news placement results.
- 3 Pick personality and professionalism.** Select a PR representative with a professional demeanor and work personality that “culturally” fits your business and industry.
- 4 Review reputation.** Ask the PR professional for references from clients, media, and other business colleagues.
- 5 Ponder proximity and pricing.** Consider your preference for an “industry-specialist” PR vendor, even if based elsewhere; for a regional company, a local PR professional is probably ideal. Regarding pricing...request options—from a basic PR package, to mid-level service, to an aggressive campaign—so you can select a plan that best matches your budget, marketing, and business goals.

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WHY PRSA?

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the nation's largest community of public relations and communications professionals, provides training, sets standards of excellence and upholds principles of ethics for the profession. Some of the benefits of PRSA:

Your Clients and Employers

- Access a members-only database of case studies, articles and research that can generate ideas and benefit clients
- Stay informed of emerging public relations industry news through the daily *Issues and Trends* email newsletter and free subscriptions to *Public Relations Tactics* and *Public Relations Strategies*, national publications packed with valuable resources and insight
- Be part of a vibrant, 21,000-strong, highly respected professional organization

Your Continuing Education

Access the exclusive PRSA LinkedIn group and receive discounts on professional development opportunities.

Your Career and Your Business

- Earn accreditation in PR with the prestigious APR designation
- Use agency and freelance referral services and access resources to accelerate your career
- Get notified of jobs locally and across the country
- Receive preferred rates on insurance, save up to 27 percent on FedEx shipping and enjoy special rates with Budget and Avis.

Your Local Chapter:

The Orange County Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America (OC/PRSA) – www.ocprsa.org

- Meet media representatives and network with 300-plus PR professionals
- Become a leader
- Receive discounts and perks at OC/PRSA events
- Access the OC/PRSA Jobline

Please join us by becoming a member or renewing your membership now:

- **Online** - www.prsa.org/JoinUs/
- **Call** (212) 460-1400 to speak with a Member Services Representative.
- **Mail** a membership application and dues to PRSA Member Services, 33 Maiden Lane 11th Floor, New York, NY 10038-5150

