

4 reasons you should be investing in public relations

By Sue Charlton APR

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Public relations (PR) gets a bad rap and that's probably because so many people don't understand the concept at all. And although the industry hasn't always done a great job of communicating its value, PR really is a key part of the marketing mix. But before I can convince you of that, let's start by defining what public relations is.



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According to the [Chartered Institute of Public Relations](https://www.cipr.org.uk/) (the chartered body for public relations and the largest membership organisation for PR professionals in Europe), “public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.”

I find the explanation from Australian communications firm CP Communications is quite helpful in understanding how PR is different to marketing: “Overall, marketing activities are trying to achieve direct revenue, while PR is trying to drive a positive reputation”.

While marketing tactics are directed at your customers and potential customers, PR is about creating positive awareness and communicating key messages to broader audiences, including media and the general public. In truth, they work best together. Here's how:

1. Marketing is more effective when it's supported by PR

There's an old saying that goes, “Advertising is what you pay for, publicity is what you pray for.” While advertising entails paying for space in media (whether it's in a magazine or on a website), PR is about getting you positive, **unpaid coverage** or **editorial coverage** in the media in all its guises. Advertising can be very pricey, so if you do it, you want it to work. And PR helps because people are more likely to be open to your advertising if there is already some knowledge of and understanding of your product or service.



For example, let's say you are looking to purchase some new industrial instrumentation. You do your research by reading up on options that may be suited to your plant in terms of accuracy, application and availability, including review articles in a leading publication. You narrow your search down to three suppliers. Then you see an advert for one of them, highlighting whys and wherefores. You call the supplier to arrange an on-site demonstration.

Now, the advert was what sparked your decision to call, but the articles you read were what got that particular piece of instrumentation on to your shortlist. And those articles were not paid for by the instrumentation company, but their PR team who arranged for the journalists to have access to the product in order to see how it is applied within industry, before writing about it, and provided accurate specs and even high-quality photos to the publication where you found the article.

Before you saw the ad, you already knew about the product and had started to form an opinion of it. Rather than having to convince you that the instrumentation was worth pursuing, the ad simply had to convince you to pick up the phone.

PR boosts the efficacy of advertising, as well as other forms of marketing, from social media campaigns to point-of-sale promotions. If people already know your brand and like it, they are much easier to sell to.



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2. PR is more cost-efficient than advertising

With advertising, you're paying for a certain amount of space or a set package, which can be very pricey. With PR, on the other hand, you're generally paying a set retainer amount to an agency or PR professional, and they are trying to get you unpaid coverage in as many relevant publications as possible.

I'm amazed by how many organisations see the value in advertising, but not in PR, given that PR builds perception of your brand over the long-term, and not just during a specific promotional campaign.

3. PR helps when things are going right... and when they're not

Obviously, every organisation wants to be in the media spotlight for good reasons. But occasionally, when things go wrong, a strong PR strategy can help you to manage an unforeseen crisis through what we call "crisis communications".

Life is unpredictable and sometimes stuff happens, whether it's a workplace injury, a staff member who acts unethically or a product that needs to be recalled. PR can help to manage the way this is handled by channelling media enquiries to the correct people, providing information to answer questions, and ensuring that conversations are well thought out, rather than reactive and in the heat of the moment.

You can't afford to lose out to your competitors simply because they get more attention than you

Have you ever read an article where someone was quoted and thought, "I know more about this topic than they do"? PR ensures that your expertise is accessible to journalists looking for information about a specific topic. It builds relationships with media covering your industry.

You might be selling the best product or service or doing something truly special in your niche, so why not bring some media attention to it?

ABOUT SUE CHARLTON APR

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