

# A short guide to Public Relations

Companies have been benefiting from PR for many years, from appearing in trade magazines, or speaking to industry analysts to communicating with their prospects and customers via online PR.

This short guide explains the main components of today's PR and includes some tips and techniques for B2B and technology companies.

## What is public relations (PR)?

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Public relations (PR) is a marketing communications activity that works to gain a company, product or individual exposure to their target audiences by using topics of interest and news items. Typically, a company will not pay for the exposure they receive via PR unlike advertising.

As public relations exposure is placed in credible third-party outlets, it offers a third-party legitimacy that advertising does not. Common activities include speaking at conferences, working with the press, and employee communications.

**“An organisation's reputation is one of its most valuable assets and public relations can strengthen the**

**way you are seen by the audiences you want to communicate with. A co-ordinated public relations campaign can achieve many things, from creating a buzz around the launch of a new service, product or organisation, to reinforcing the position of an established one. It can even protect your reputation in a crisis.”**

PR can be used to build rapport with employees, customers, investors, or the general public. Almost any company that has a stake in how it is portrayed in the public arena employs some level of public relations, whether formally or not.

## Why conduct a PR campaign?

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A good image is a valuable asset. An effective public relations campaign creates good publicity, building your reputation with customers and others whose opinion matters to you. While advertising can be purchased immediately, generating positive publicity can take time.



## How long does PR take to work?

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PR can take time and does not necessarily work to your schedule. Planting new ideas or changing minds is a slow process. When your PR program rolls out over a longer period of time, prospects have time to adjust their attitudes. Brand recognition that

takes this approach is longer lasting, too.

However, PR, especially in the case of consumer PR, can also work very quickly. A new product or service that appeals to the mass market may benefit from one article in a leading newspaper or TV appearance.

## What is the difference between PR and advertising?

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When a client goes to an advertising agency, he's expecting the agency to put together a campaign to make people aware of his product or service. The work includes some creative effort along with a strategy for exposing it to as many people as possible - and he's willing to purchase media space to place the ads. When a client goes to a PR firm, she is also looking to communicate with the public. However, as opposed to an advertising representative, a PR agent has to convince a journalist/blogger to feature the client - without paying the journalist/blogger. In the cases where a journalist/blogger has already decided to feature the client, the PR agent's job is to ensure that the client

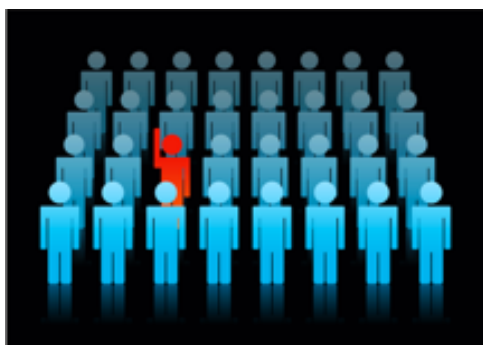
is portrayed in as positive a light as possible.

Publicity is great when you get it, because the public is more likely to believe a newspaper or trade magazine article or news story than an advertisement - but the catch is that publicity offers no guarantees. For example, Benny's Widgets could gain positive publicity by sponsoring a free software development competition, but coverage of the event could easily be overshadowed if there's an earthquake in London the same day. Alternately, Benny could pay for a TV ad campaign. He would definitely get his name out, but he wouldn't necessarily have an edge over all the other widget producers.

## Targeted PR

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To create a target media list for instance, first focus on your business objectives. Focus on becoming an expert, not a commodity.



List, categorise, and prioritise your areas of expertise now and for the future. Ask these questions:

- What do you want your target market to know about you?
- What type of clients do you want to serve now? How about in one, three, five, or ten years? Project as far ahead as you can.
- What services do you want to offer?

## Common PR tactics

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### Media relations

Probably the most common tactic, media relations includes a variety of methods to contact and give information to the media: news releases, press kits, media advisories, news conferences, press tours, and personal letters or phone calls to editors/bloggers and reporters.

### Articles/whitepapers

Authored or bylined articles are very common. Many media outlets accept and publish such articles as a way to add perspective and “in the know” expertise to their publications.

### Special events

Events draw attention to your organisation or bring people to your place of business. Trade shows, breakfast seminars, awards ceremonies, contests and receptions are examples of special events.

### Speakers bureau

Arrange to have individuals in your organisation speak at meetings of

professional and trade associations or user groups.

### Sponsorships

If you don't want to organise a special event, sponsor one somebody else is organising – these can be exhibitions, seminars or conferences. Make sure your sponsorship will be acknowledged on advertising, programs, websites, posters, or other promotional materials.

### Online PR – Social media

This includes blogging, social media presence, optimised press releases, reaching bloggers and using tools such as Twitter. Social media marketing, social media optimisation and blog marketing are all activities that contribute to online PR.



## How to target media/bloggers

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Unlike advertising, where you buy space to publish what you choose, with PR you have to sell yourself to the media to get good publicity.

### Target one reporter/blogger at a time.

Broadcast e-mail spamming of media/bloggers does not work. Taking the time to read a publication or blog and then crafting a unique pitch to a particular journalist /blogger can work

wonders. Sometimes, mentioning a specific article the target wrote and then explaining why your company or product would be interesting for the journalist/blogger to look at. Make certain to target the subject line of the e-mail to help ensure that it gets opened.

Put journalists/bloggers on your mailing list for background information they may find interesting (e.g. your company newsletter) – but always include an unsubscribe button!

## Help the journalist/blogger to understand the big picture.

Often it's difficult to understand how some widget, service or company actually fits into a wider trend. You make a journalist/blogger's job much easier if you describe the big picture of why your particular product or service is interesting. Often this helps you get mentioned in the reporter/blogger's future articles or columns about trends in your space. Give the editors/bloggers what they need. Send them interesting stories they will want to publish. Make sure your press releases reach publications before their deadlines. Some publications have very short lead times. You may need to act immediately to benefit from a PR opportunity, so have case studies, canned comment and your position ready to use immediately.

## Explain how customers use your product or work with your company.

Reporters hear hundreds of pitches from company spokespeople about how products work. But it's much more useful to hear about a product in action from someone who actually uses it. If you can set up interviews with customers or provide written case studies of your products or services, it will be much easier for journalists to write about your company.

## What is a press release?

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A press release is a pseudo-news story, written in third person that seeks to demonstrate to an editor or reporter the newsworthiness of a particular person, event, service or product.

## Don't send e-mail attachments unless asked.



These days, it is a rare journalist/blogger indeed who opens an unexpected e-mail attachment, even from a recognised company. Send plain text e-mails instead. If you're asked for other information, you can follow up with attachments, but be sure to clearly reference in the e-mail what you're sending and why, so the journalist will remember asking for it.

## Do them favours.

For example, send them information they will find useful, even if it has no publicity value for you, and respond quickly to any requests they make.

## Do not be put off.

Send press releases whenever you have a worthwhile story, even if your last release received no coverage. There are many reasons why a story may be rejected or held over, which may have nothing to do with your release.

Follow up promptly with potential contacts.

## How is a press release used?

Press releases are often sent by e-mail or via a newswire. They can also be part of a full press kit, or may be accompanied by a pitch letter. Journalists or bloggers may use it as a

standalone story, for reference (file) or as part of a larger article.



## What makes news?

### Timing

The word news means exactly that - things which are new. Topics which are current are good news. Businesses and consumers are used to receiving the latest updates, and there is so much news about that old news is quickly discarded.

A story with only average interest needs to be told quickly if it is to be told at all. If it happened today, it's news. If the same thing happened last week, it's no longer interesting.

### Subject of news stories

Subjects include new contracts, new products, new services, use of product

or service by a well-known brand, new hires, new offices, sponsoring events, speaking at events, major partnerships etc.

### Innovation

Is your product or service offering something truly unique? If not, is it being used a unique way or by a new company?

### Significance

The number of people affected by the story is important. A security device which can be used by a government department may be of more interest immediately than one that helps an individual user.

### Prominence

Well-known brands get more coverage just because they are well known. If you work with well-known brands, try to persuade them to let you write about your work for them, whether it's a reference, case study or a press release.

## What is the proper press release format?

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Here's a sample press release template you can use to format your press release correctly:

### **XYZ, Inc. Announces Widget to Maximize Customer Response Rate**

This headline is one of the most important components of the press release as this needs to "grab the attention" of the editor. It should be in bold type and a font that is larger than the body text. Preferred type fonts are Arial, Times New Roman, or Verdana. Keep the headline to 80-125 characters maximum.

<City>, <Country>, <Date> - Your first paragraph of the release should be written in a clear and concise manner. The opening sentence contains the most important information; keep it to 25 words or less. Never take for granted that the reader has read your headline. It needs to contain information that will "entice" the reader. Remember, your story must be newsworthy and factual; don't make it a sales pitch or it will end up in the trash.

Answer the questions "who", "what", "when", "where", "why" and "how".

Your text should include pertinent information about your product, service or event. If writing about a product, make sure to include details on when the product is available, where it can be purchased and the cost. If you're writing about an event, include the date, location of the event and any other relevant information. You should include a quote from someone that is a credible source of information; include their title or position with the company, and why they are considered a credible source.

Keep your sentences and paragraphs short; a paragraph should be no more than 3-4 sentences. Your release should be between 500 to 800 words, written in a word processing program, and spell checked for errors. Don't

forget to proofread for grammatical errors. The mood of the release should be factual, not hyped; don't use a sales pitch as it will ruin your credibility with the reader.

The last paragraph before the company information should read: For additional information on (put in the subject of this release), contact "name" or visit [www.yoururl.com](http://www.yoururl.com). If you offer a sample, copy or demo, put the information in here. You can also include details on product availability, trademark acknowledgment, etc. in this area of the release.

- END -

ABOUT <COMPANY> - Include a brief description of your company along with the products and services it provides.

## What are industry analysts?

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An industry analyst performs primary and secondary market research within a particular segment of an industry, such as telecommunications within the information technology industry, to determine accurate market descriptions, market trends, forecasts and models. Well known analysts are Gartner, Forrester and Frost & Sullivan.

Most analyst firms focus on one or more market segments, such as information technology and telecommunications, energy, health

care, or aerospace. However, many analysts are diversifying their coverage areas in keeping with technology convergence and media convergence. Still others are aligning their specialisation based on the convergence of technology with business processes.

If you have an innovative product, technology or service and the potential to target large businesses or public sector organisations, then researching and requesting briefings with analysts could be a part of your PR strategy.

## What are the benefits of entering awards?

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### Recognition

Your customers, your organisation, the IT industry and the business

community at large will be made aware of your achievements.

### Association



Your company will be clearly aligned with professionalism, success, and the kudos of the most important Awards in your industry.

### Media Exposure

Awards generate a high level of media exposure in national, regional and trade publications, in print, broadcast and electronic media.

### Motivation

Entering awards can be highly motivational as it is an active demonstration of confidence in the people within the IT industry. Awards also offer the opportunity to meet other entrants/peers.

## What is a PR case study?

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A case study contains a real life example of a product or service at work and acts as an independent endorsement of a company's offerings.

A typical case study will include:

- Description of a client company and contract win or work done
- Introduction to challenge

- Solutions considered
- Company's service or product, why it was selected and how it solved the client's problem
- Quotes from client

Future uses of the company's offerings.

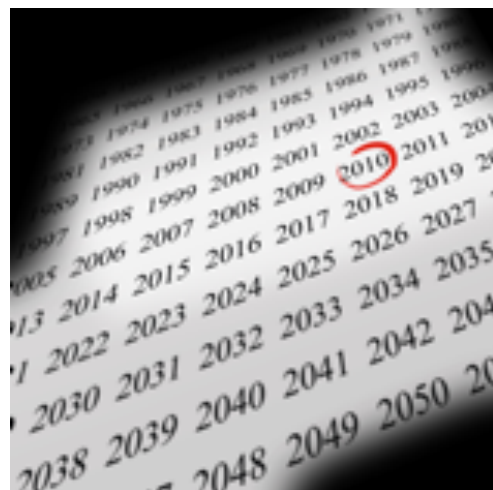
## What is an editorial calendar?

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An editorial calendar shows the major editorial features planned for forthcoming issues of a newspaper, magazine, and similar. It is used by the advertising sales function of the publication to attract advertisers. For example, if Business Week plans to print an editorial feature on hybrid cars, then manufacturers of those cars might want to place advertisements in that issue.

Editorial calendars are also called editorial planning calendars. Public relations professionals often use them in an attempt to increase their chances of coverage. For example, if a publication is going to cover hybrid cars, companies may want to send a

press release, or better still, a dedicated pitch about their hybrid car technology several weeks to months in advance of the story's planned publication.



## Why use photographs?

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An interesting and relevant picture will always increase your chances of coverage. The picture will attract the

journalist's attention, even if it is not used. If the picture is published, it will help to draw readers' attention as well.

Provide pictures that are easy to publish. If possible, have the picture taken by a press photographer. A press photographer will have an eye

for the shots the media want. Ask your local newspaper to recommend a good freelance photographer.

## Online PR - what is search engine optimisation (SEO)?

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Almost everyone in business now looks for information, products and services online. In the B2B world, people searching online are typically looking to solve a problem, researching information or looking to make a purchase. The aim of search engine optimisation (SEO) is to get the person searching online to click through to your company's website (or other online 'property') rather than a competitor's site.

To make this happen, your company's website needs to high in the search results for the main search engines (Google and Bing in the UK).

The goal of search engines is to analyse the search query and return the best, most relevant result.

However, all searches are not equal, looking at the two phrases below, which would you value more?

*"blue widgets"*

*"where to buy blue widgets"*

The second search suggests intent to purchase, the other doesn't. It is important that your SEO targets searches that indicate a predisposition toward an action that you value (like buying something).

Getting your websites to the top of relevant search results involves on and



off-site optimisation work.

On-site optimisation looks at technical issues like the design and structure of your website as well as the content.

The key question to ask when reviewing on-site content of a page is: would a person finding this page via search think 'Wow, this is just what I was looking for!'

Off-site optimisation aims to create links from other, authoritative websites to yours. The number of high quality links to your website is a very strong signal to the search engines that your website is worthy ranking highly.

## Online PR - should you use social media?

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Social media, in particular, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are hugely popular. These social media channels offer a means for you to connect with customers and prospects in a much more engaged way than might be possible otherwise.

Social media offers some powerful benefits:

- **Reach** – you can reach not only your direct connections, but also your direct connections' own personal networks



- **Social proof** – if your website has 1,000 Facebook ‘likes’ a random visitor is more likely to think the page is trustworthy than if it doesn’t (this is particularly effective when some of those ‘likes’ are by people in the visitor’s social circle).
- **Engagement** – social media offers another channel through which to engage with customers and build a

community that leads to better brand awareness and ultimately, more sales

Having embarked upon a social media campaign, make sure you keep at it! It can take a long time to build a following, but even regular, infrequent social media activity is better than a series of sporadic bursts.

## What tools do PR executives use?

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PR agencies will have access to media databases which will usually cost £1,000+ a year to subscribe to. These will provide information on reporters and target publications. PR agencies on a retainer with a client will also develop PR databases, which will include media contacts, awards, speaking opportunities, sponsorship opportunities, and editorial calendar opportunities. PR agencies will also know which newswires to recommend for a particular release. Agencies should also have some form of basic

monitoring in place, including monitoring social media mentions of a client. Clients that generate a large amount of coverage will also employ a media monitoring agency via the PR agency to pick up media coverage. To track journalists’ requests for information, agencies will also subscribe to journalist request mechanisms. Finally, agencies will have mechanisms in place for measurement, for instance access to databases which provide circulation or ad equivalency rates.

## Should I use a PR agency?

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There are no hard-and-fast rules for when small companies should call in outside PR help.

Take into account:

- How **confident** and successful you are at managing your PR and dealing with journalists/bloggers and other influencers
- Whether you’re involved in a crucial **product launch** or sales expansion that might be helped by using an agency for, say, three - six months
- Whether you face a potentially controversial or sensitive issue, or are involved in an industry that’s in the media spotlight
- How much time it’s taking
- How much time it’s costing you



## About Vitis PR

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Vitis PR is an award-winning technology PR agency formed in 2006.

In common with larger PR agencies, the Vitis PR team benefits from investment in world-class tools and media databases. Our goal is not to be the biggest technology PR agency, but the best, and unlike the traditional model of larger agencies, where an account manager co-ordinates the work of junior staff or interns, we focus on specialised teams of senior, experienced professionals to deliver our vision for effective PR.

Our technology experience enables us to understand our client's PR needs at all levels, from the low-level detail up to the strategic intent and to deliver thought leadership and brand-building campaigns that make clients stand out from their competitors.

The key benefits Vitis PR offers are:

### Expertise

- We offer senior teams with know-how and experience to promote your brand, whether your company is a start-up, SME or listed
- Our business model means we can allocate expert resource to your campaign without having to rely on interns and juniors to do the work 'behind the scenes'

### Reach

- We have day-to-day contact with many of technology press, bloggers, analysts, event organisers and more, with particular strengths in the technology, national and business press

- We secure and manage regular briefings with leading industry analysts for our clients
- With extensive experience of managing international campaigns, we can take your message overseas through our international PR partners

### Knowledge

- Our team has both in-house and agency expertise
- We have an in-depth understanding of technology, particularly cloud and security issues