

SECTION D

PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Section D 1



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D1. INTRODUCTION

Public Relations should form a major part of your marketing campaign and when implemented effectively can increase your profitable turnover.

To ensure your P.R. campaign is effective it should be planned carefully ensuring you fully understand the overall objectives.

Certainly, it is not a one off effort but should be sustained throughout the year. Your message should be clear and concise ensuring that you are reaching the correct audience with the correct message.

P.R. only works if it is carried out on a regular basis and in a proactive manner.



D2. WHAT IS GOOD PUBLIC RELATIONS ?

A Public Relations definition:-

“Public Relations practice is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public.”

Put more simply it is about Communicating your message to ensure your potential customers know: -

Who you are
What you do
Why you do it
How you do it
When you do it
How long have you done it
... etc etc.

This section is designed to assist you in planning your P.R. activity for your nicensrippy business and take advantages of opportunities available to you.

Above all else, however, use P.R. to be creative.

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D3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN P.R. AND ADVERTISING

Probably the first and most apparent difference is that P.R. does not cost you anything other than your time and creativity.

When people read editorials they are much more believable as they are written or at worst edited by a journalist. This usually gives a more balanced view and if you have not conveyed your message clearly could sometimes work against you!

Whether a story is published or not clearly depends upon the newsworthiness in the journalist or editor's eyes. You cannot insist that a local newspaper prints your article because you advertise with them regularly . . . indeed if you pushed it, is likely that you would *not* get your story published as journalists and editors alike defend their independence strongly.

There are times, however, when an advertising department will offer an incentive of placing an advertisement to gain a few columns of editorial.

This is not true P.R. but can be an effective method of gaining 'free' space. The rate charged is often **not** negotiable, therefore the benefit is reduced, again check before booking.

Newspapers, however, are always looking for a good story. In the present economic climate good news . . . is news! Opening of a new business unit, employing another member of staff, 'nicenstripy Franchise of the Year', etc., etc. all make newsworthy stories and is worth 'feeding'.

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Public Relations, however, is more than just an article about your nicenstripy business in the local newspaper.

It is being involved in a charity, sponsoring the local cricket, tennis, bowls, football or rugby club, or any other activity that will assist in building a professional reputation and image within your local community.



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D4. YOUR P.R. AIM

Your P.R. aim should be simple :-

*“To increase the public's awareness of nicenstripy and in particular **your** business”.*

Unlike an advertisement which should encourage a member of the public to make a purchase *now*, a P.R. campaign should build the public's knowledge and awareness of your business and the products and services you offer . . . so that when a purchase is required the nicenstripy name is at the front of their mind.

By achieving this awareness of your services and products, their quality, the ecological factors, etc., etc. etc., the public will have an informed view of nicenstripy which, if positive, will lead to their using your business and not a competitor.

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Your P.R. objectives are: -

- To create an accurate awareness of nicenstripy
- To create an accurate awareness of the service and product range.
- To create an accurate awareness of the ecological aspects of our business (i.e. green).
- To create an accurate awareness of our competitiveness.



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D5. HOW DO I GET FREE PUBLICITY ?

There are several methods you can use to obtain media coverage for your business on a local basis. Media in this regard generally refers to written media such as newspapers and magazines. But media can also include radio and even television.

In the seeking of media coverage, remember that editors are looking for timely, newsworthy subject matter that will be of interest to their current and prospective readers and even their paid advertisers.

Such newsworthy coverage can include favourable and unfavourable information about you and your strategic business unit.

You have no control about what the editor wishes to say about you! But this very lack of control on your part is what makes favourable coverage so valuable.

Media coverage automatically enjoys a great deal of credibility because the public also knows that the editors control the content of the coverage, not the subjects of that coverage.

Whenever you submit an article for publication, always include a photograph.

Editors are actively looking for *any* graphics that will help them break-up the long blocks of visually boring text. So it is quite likely that they will use a photograph.

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Include information about your business, emphasise local employment and outline the services and products that we offer to readers of these publications. Naturally include your full address and telephone number so that readers can easily contact you.

Try to include the nicenstripy name and business telephone number part-way through the article - not at the end. If space is tight, editors will sometimes "chop off" the bottom section at the very last minute.

In addition to articles, you can also prepare Press Releases.

These are shorter than typical articles. They are intended for wider circulation. A Press Release should always be timely.

A Press Release showing that you have done something of interest to their readers can often be picked up by several relevant publications. They may write their own articles or they may contact you for additional information. Such contacts could possibly result in invitations for you to write a full-blown article

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D6. PRESS AND MEDIA RELATIONS

The advantage of using the media effectively are many and varied: -

- ☺ the knowledge that every reference to you may be seen by potential customers whose interest may be aroused
- ☺ the boost to your own teams morale when they see your name and achievements in print
- ☺ the envy of competitors
- ☺ reinforces the message to customers that they have made the right choice
- ☺ saves you a small fortune in "paid for" advertising
- ☺ enforces your image as an expert in the eyes of the public

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D7. EDITORIAL COMMENT CAN BE ACHIEVED BY A VARIETY OF WAYS :-

- ☺ Press Release
- ☺ Telephoned News
- ☺ Telephone comment
- ☺ Establishing good relations with journalist
- ☺ Interviews
- ☺ Individual press briefings
- ☺ Special articles on 'How to cross cut your lawn and the benefits of doing so', 'The benefits of feeding your lawn on a regular basis', 'The importance of keeping your mower blade sharp at all times and what happens if it's not!' etc. etc.

Deadlines and production time for photography can be as important in selection of a target publication as the nature of it.

The dead days are the days after going to press when journalists and editors have time to think and are more receptive.

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D8. EXCLUSIVES

No newspaper really wants to publish just what their rivals print. They want better, different, more interesting stories.

Substantial coverage in one influential publication is better than a few cramped lines in several.

Offering an exclusive to an editor can be worthwhile, particularly in building up a relationship with them. When you get to know journalists better you will be able to angle news most effectively for them.

Remember that the drawbacks of editorial coverage are that you have little control over timing, content, style, or even whether the material is even printed at all.



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D9. PRACTICAL ADVICE

Do not ring a journalist late afternoon on a weekday unless absolutely necessary, as he may be in the middle of writing his copy for the next publication.

Likewise, do not be surprised if journalists are not in their office first thing in the morning.

With weekly or monthly publications, although there may not be quite the same urgency, they are still unlikely to be pleased by calls in the few days before going to press.

There is also more chance of getting a story in, in the early stages of planning and laying out publication.

Journalists are quite mobile, frequently changing jobs.

Consequently you should regularly check names and positions, as the discourtesy of mailing someone who left ages ago causes irritation and a poor impression of the sender.

Do not try to re-hash a story, or milk a story to the last drop. Generally speaking, the news value of an item deteriorates in direct relation to the frequency of its appearance.

D10. JOURNALISTS

Journalists are ordinary people with opinions and problems like anyone else. This is the basis for highly motivated investigative writing.

Many journalists and editors get most of their articles from a small circle of tried and tested personal contacts. By approaching them with good newsworthy stories over a period of time, you may be able to become one of those sources.

Get to know the needs of the local media. Cultivate the news editors or any other journalists. Remember that they want news, good, or bad - it's their livelihood.

Local media want news that is relevant to the local area. They need reliable contacts, especially on "Human Interest" matters. They are not gardening experts - therefore they need careful and accurate guidance.

If you 'produce the goods', they will come to rely on you, and you will be assured of regular coverage - although this may well be achieved only by responding immediately and sometimes at considerable inconvenience.

Journalists will not forget someone who helps them. They also will not forget someone who misleads them - or does not understand their needs.

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D11. HOW TO PREPARE

The first step is to list all the publications in your area. Then research the nature of each one: -

- ⇒ Who are its readers?
- ⇒ What is its circulation?
- ⇒ Is it daily, weekly, or monthly?
- ⇒ What kind of news stories does it contain?
- ⇒ Newspaper or Magazine?
- ⇒ Charged or Free?

From this you can assess what type of people read them, what they would be interested in and whether you should bias your story in favour of Caring for the Environment, Caring for Lawn, When to plant bulbs etc.

Find out who else will be interested in the story if the particular journalist you want to speak to is not available. There will usually be someone else covering for them.

Always be direct, concise and factual when replying to a journalist. See whether you can think of another bit of information to make the story more interesting, but do not be tempted to make things up or go overboard.

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If you cannot give an immediate answer, say you will ring them back, **and do so**. Never keep anyone in the dark about an answer. If necessary, say you are still trying to deal with their question rather than just ignore them.

If it is best to give the name and number of someone who can give an overview, warn the relevant person first and make sure that they are actually available.

Do not lie. It is tempting to say yes instead of no to a question, just to get the article published : (such as, "Is this an exclusive ?"). It may work in the short term but it is sure to backfire after that.

When a journalist rings asking for background information for an article, or your professional view on a particular matter, try really hard to give some interesting comment (even if you think of what you should have said after you put the phone down). Do not regard the call as an irritating interruption, if the journalist is on a deadline and desperate, they will remember your help.

Make it quite clear when you are speaking "off the record" (in other words, you cannot be quoted) the choicest quotes are usually spontaneous and invariably something you would rather not see in print.

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D12. PREPARING A PRESS RELEASE

Format

Press Releases should be double spaced, with wide margin (2 inches on the left hand side) to allow editors to edit, and sub editors to write instructions to typesetters. It must always be typed not hand-written. Do not underline anything - underlining is a printer's mark meaning "set in italics".

Headings

Date the release, otherwise editors may not use it simply because they do not know if the material is new or old. Write is like this :-

17th February 2010

If the news is for immediate publication, mark it at top left :-

"FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION"

If you do not want it to be published before or until a particular date (for example, the announcement of your business starting) then head the release:-

"EMBARGO - NOT FOR PUBLICATION BEFORE
...(DATE)"

If there is a particular reason for an embargo then it is best to explain it by saying in the covering letter "this information is sent to you for your convenience" followed by the reason.

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The person that you want to see the release should be clearly indicated, e.g. FOR THE BUSINESS EDITOR or FEATURES EDITOR.

Leave a space of 4 cm (1.5") between the heading and the title. This is for the editor to write in where the story is to be printed.

Text

Use double spacing, with an extra space between paragraphs. Type on one side of the paper only.

Each page should be numbered and should carry a continuation note at the bottom of each page except the last, -

Page No. /continued.....

and at the top of the next, -

/continued.....

Page No. ...

This makes it obvious if a page is missing, and also makes sure that the pages stay in the right order.

Do not run over a copy to the following page if it breaks up a sentence or paragraph.

Type the word MORE at the bottom of each page to show it continues on the next page. At the end, type END.

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Notes To The Editor

Always give your: -

Name

Your Business Address

Telephone Numbers
(including mobile/evening)

and the Date

Put the number of words in the release. This makes it easier for the editor to know where he can slot the story.

Content

A Press Release should be written so that a journalist could publish it without having to do any work.

Concentrate on what is likely to interest the readers, as it may be necessary to angle the same news differently for different newspapers. You can get a good idea of what they look for by reading their publication.

Think of an interesting, catchy title if possible.

Summarise the main issue, including any local angle or personality, in the first paragraph, and in no more than 2 or 3 concise sentences.

Arrange your paragraphs in descending order of importance - the quickest way for sub editors to make copy fit the spaces available is to chop off the end!

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Avoid long and convoluted sentences, and do not use jargon. If you need to explain anything, then either do so in brackets or include more detailed clarification in the "Notes for Editors" at the end. Do not interrupt the pace of the release with unnecessary information.

Keep the release brief - do not pad it out with anything that is not essential for local interest or the understanding of your basic message.



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D13. HOW THE PRESS WORK

Differentiate

Although all journalists are interested in news, what they consider “newsworthy” will vary according to the newspaper, or publication, on which they work, whether they are staff, journalists or freelance:-

- ⇒ local or regional
- ⇒ regional or national
- ⇒ business or consumer
- ⇒ specialist trade or technical
- ⇒ free newspaper or paid for
- ⇒ daily, weekly, or monthly

D14. EDITORIAL

Editorial mentions have certain advantages over advertising.

- ☺ They look more impartial
- ☺ More people read them, in the same medium.
- ☺ If they include enough data they may pull as well as, or better than, advertising in the same medium
- ☺ They should be free.

It follows that they are likely to be cost effective, if you can achieve them without too much effort or expense.

It is generally not necessary to feed or bribe the press to earn a basic standard of editorial mention. Most specialist media and even some nationals are bored by the poor quality of press releases reaching them.

If you can rise above the general level of mediocrity you stand a very good chance of getting some or all of your releases or verbal briefings into print.

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Your press release should meet the following criteria: -

- brevity;
- news value;
- relevance to the medium's editorial policy;
- novelty, if possible;
- exclusivity, if the journal is important;
- crisp, clear, simple English.



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D15. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRESS

All the way through this section we have made references to your relationship with the press. Suffice it to say a good relationship with the press is crucial.

You must continuously build and develop this relationship. You need to continually remind them about nicenstripy, communicate any changes or developments.

Use almost any opportunity to make them think of nicenstripy to the extent of remembering their birthdays etc.



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D16. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As a businessperson you will realise it is beneficial for you to make the time to support and keep up-to-date with the local community.

Sponsorship and donations are ways of supporting the local community but you can also help the community survive and prosper by passing on your business acumen and experience to others in the community.

It is helpful to sit on local trade associations, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. Not only is this a useful forum for swapping ideas and information, but it also gives you the opportunity to influence progress that will benefit nicenstripy in your local area.

Sponsoring a local pub in the local flower show, sponsor your local allotment, offer to provide prizes for local gardening shows, cut the grass of your local football club in return of free advertising etc. etc. etc.

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D17. COMMUNICATING WITH NON-DIRECT CUSTOMERS

As a rule of thumb - anyone you deal with could be a potential customer therefore you must always treat everyone in a way you would expect to be treated. This can get difficult if someone lets you down but whilst you should not give in to him or her, you must always deal with him or her in a professional manner.

Remember anyone who perceives that you have dealt with them in an unsatisfactory manner will not only stop dealing with you but also even more seriously, tell their friends who may stop dealing with you. The smaller your customer base, the more dangerous this is.

Obviously this also relates to direct customers.

Non-direct customers who help your business or may help in future

e.g. Bank Manager, the Mayor, Chief Administrator of your local Hospital, your Accountant, Local Newspaper Editor, your Insurance Broker etc. etc.

deserve special attention. It may be worth keeping them up-to-date with your progress and special events you are holding.

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