

Focussed PR techniques



Nick Brooks, managing director of B2B marketing communications agency 4CM, introduces the basics of industrial press and public relations.

For most industrial organisations, PR is usually read as Press Relations and is focused tightly on a relatively small group of target media, with a number of key objectives. These are generally as straightforward as:

- building a strong market profile
- generating sales enquiries

By comparison, the wider definition of PR - Public Relations - encompasses a range of activities which, to use a common definition is: The planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.

This definition plainly covers more than just media relations; indeed, PR agencies frequently use techniques such as advertising, newsletters and direct mail as part of a campaign.

Nevertheless, media relations remains the one activity that is key to generating sales enquiries and building brand or corporate awareness.

At 4CM, we define media relations as "planned and sustained editorial coverage in the appropriate trade, business or consumer media".

An important point to remember is that editorial coverage is achieved due to the quality and relevance of the information produced, not because the client agrees to book advertising or advertorial space.

Creating a media profile through PR requires a particular set of skills and a long-term commitment. In many respects, the process can be compared to that of building a jigsaw, using a variety of techniques or types of media information, to create a composite picture of a particular company, its products and services.

Typically, media information can be divided into the several categories.

- **Product Information:** this can range from the launch of a new product or service to the re-release of existing information on updated or modified products - press information of this type is generally distributed to all relevant media simultaneously or released to a key publication on an exclusive basis and is then subsequently distributed to the remaining media.
- **Case Studies:** these are designed to demonstrate the success with which a particular end user is using

products from our client and provides an effective medium through which the benefits of a product or technology can be highlighted using the endorsement of a third party.

- **Technical Articles:** these are designed to position a company as an authority in its chosen market sectors; technical or feature articles generally carry a byline from one of the company's senior managers and can cover a range of technical, marketing or commercial topics. Appearing on a regular basis in different journals these articles are a valuable technique to raise a company's profile and produce quality sales leads.
- **Corporate Information:** this can cover a wide range of items, from the appointment of a new member of staff to the announcement of a new order or technology breakthrough - such items tend to be relatively short and result in smaller one or two paragraph mentions in the press, effectively keeping the name of the company in front of both existing and prospective customers.
- **Journalists' Visits:** further opportunities arise from arranging visits by editors to a company's offices or to specific sites where the company's products are being used. These events familiarise key editors with the products and personalities at the company while creating an environment in which it is possible subsequently to persuade the editor in question to accept technical articles and case studies.



- **Press conferences:** where a number of editors and journalists are invited to a single venue - offer a further opportunity to obtain wide media coverage. It is, however, important to remember that each editor will have their own interest and will want a unique angle on the information being released.

Two other points that are worth noting; first, media coverage can be significantly improved by the use of creative, good-quality colour photography; secondly, once press information has been written and distributed on general release, it can subsequently be reused for specific editorial features or, with different photographs, redistributed at minimal additional cost.

Choosing a PR agency

Although PR can be carried out in-house, it requires the efforts of an experienced, full-time member of staff if it is to be achieved successfully.

For most companies, the favoured route is to work with an external agency to ensure that the PR campaign is planned, managed and implemented professionally, within agreed budgets and with measurable objectives.

Selection of the right agency can, however, be a tough challenge, especially for small to medium

sized enterprises. It is, for example, often difficult both to differentiate between agencies and to determine how well they will really interact with a client organisation.

Ultimately, choosing an agency is like choosing your friends or work colleagues. There has to be a natural synergy so that both partners benefit from the relationship. In practical terms, this means that the agency has to understand your company, its products, services and marketplace. It also means that the agency must be prepared to be flexible, professional and accountable. Before making a choice, talk to the agency's existing clients in similar industries to the one in which your company operates.

In addition, make sure the agency is prepared to set and stick to agreed objectives and that you have access to senior agency staff at all times.

Finally, once you've appointed an agency, ensure you continuously evaluate their performance - this should be relatively simple as a good agency will be producing consistent results and have a monthly reporting structure in place to ensure you're aware of each success they achieve.

