



Selecting the Right PR Services for Your Business

Every business - whether private, public, for-profit, or non-profit - can benefit from promoting or marketing itself, and there are many ways to do this. One way is through advertising, another is through public relations ("PR"). PR can work together with advertising and other marketing activities to enhance your brand. PR can also work as a stand-alone strategy, and can be most effective for marketing products and services to consumers who may be less responsive to traditional advertising. Many organizations choose to do their own PR. However, for those that don't have the time, resources, or PR expertise, it's advisable to hire a PR vendor to provide services such as media relations, writing, and events planning. Following are tips to help you find and select a quality PR consultant or firm to promote you and your business, and help market your products and services:

Proven Expertise: Generally, it's best to hire a PR vendor with senior-level experience (at least 10 years in PR) AND experience doing PR for businesses in your industry. A PR agency provides a mix of junior- and senior-level pros, and you'll want to be sure that a senior-level supervisor leads your account team and serves as your point person.

Relationships: PR is about connections, networking, and building relationships with media and other "influencer" groups (i.e., business professionals, celebrities, community VIPs, politicians, etc.). Be sure the PR vendor you're considering can demonstrate a good working relationship with the media and audiences that most matter to you and your business. Ask to see the PR vendor's representative press clips...these prove their strong media relationships and ability to repeatedly place positive news stories for clients with businesses similar to yours.

Proximity: Distance may or may not be an issue since, today, so much of PR is done via email, fax, phone and (to a lesser extent) mail. If your business is national in scope, the best PR vendor for you may be one that specializes in your industry but is located in another city or state. However, if your business is local or regional, working with a PR vendor in your area is highly recommended.

Reputation: You can investigate the PR vendor's work quality by requesting references that can include current and former clients, as well as media and other PR industry colleagues. PR is a referral-based, word-of-mouth service, so vendors without good references don't last long! Consider the source (some are more credible than others) when receiving a recommendation for a PR vendor.

Personality / Professionalism: Some businesses are more formal than others. Your PR vendor's professional demeanor (appearance, behavior, etc) and "personality" (business culture/environment) should fit for your business and match your

industry in order to properly represent you.

Realistic: You want a PR vendor that offers obtainable solutions for promoting your business, with a clear strategy, tactics, and timeline. Usually, smaller businesses and nonprofits can't afford the time and financial commitment to the PR "bells and whistles" that larger businesses invest in. Make sure the PR vendor you select provides a realistic PR plan befitting your business.

Pricing: This goes hand-in-hand with the above. An aggressive PR campaign can cost well into six figures per year. However, a basic PR program can be quite affordable and enable you to

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reach broad audiences on smaller budgets than advertising alone. PR is a "time and materials" service with fees charged by the hour (senior-level practitioners charge more per hour). As with contracting for all professional services, be sure you understand the billing arrangements.

Results-driven: Decide in advance what successful outcomes you desire from PR. The PR vendor you select should be able to guide you in this area and explain how successes will be delivered and measured.

Lastly, your PR vendor should be communicative, responsive, and someone you feel comfortable conducting business with, almost like a business partner...after all, their job is to help you be (more) successful in branding yourself and your business, and in marketing - and selling - your products and services! **HB**

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