

Ten Wincingly-Bad PR Mistakes

Public relations is not an obscure science, but to be successful there are some things you should avoid.

- 1) **Failing to plan your PR.** Every successful public relations program begins with a sound plan of action tied to realistic goals and objectives. Your PR plan should be a part of your overall marketing & advertising plan, but it should be able to stand alone as a separate program.

- 2) **Not understanding what PR actually is.** In a nutshell, public relations is garnering positive media coverage for your business or yourself -- coverage that is targeted to an audience who will respond favorably to the message. This is done in several ways – by sending out news releases, staging special events that might draw the media, holding press conferences, etc. PR has much greater credibility than paid advertising because, ideally, it is more objective in its content. Because editorial and advertising departments at most media outlets are purposefully separate, the paid advertising you buy should never influence what is written or broadcast about you. That’s why your PR practitioner will never call the news/editorial departments of a newspaper or broadcast station and demand that a news release about you be picked up simply because you have purchased advertising space from the sales department. If this does happen, most likely the editor will react negatively and discard your release altogether. News should be objective and “pure” – relatively untainted by overblown advertising messages.

- 3) **Thinking local PR must be handled by big-name agencies.** If money is no object, and you actually believe that name PR firms can forge better relationships with media in this web-connected world, then by all means, sign up!

- 4) **Being a prima donna about information or photos.** It’s all about control and ego. If you insist that advance copies of your press coverage be read and approved

by you before it is printed or broadcast, you've just talked editors out of covering you at all. Word travels fast in the media world, and egos don't fly. News coverage is a privilege and breaking the rules is a sure way to guarantee that you'll never be covered again.

- 5) **Bugging the reporter or journalist with questions after you've sent a release.** Don't keep calling them to ask *when*, or *if*, your item will run. Respect their workload, their professionalism, their deadline-sensitive existences. If your release is newsworthy and timely; if it falls into existing categories or departments (which you should have researched first), you should receive coverage.
- 6) **Including trite, shop-worn statements in your release.** If your news release is not written objectively as valid news, your chances of pick-up are greatly decreased. Using tired, meaningless descriptors like "quality service" and "state-of-the-art" will also reduce your chances of coverage. Keep in mind: it's not a paid ad, it's a news item.
- 7) **Not answering the Who? What? Where? Why? When? in the first paragraph of a release that announces a special event.** In fact, it's best to write only a paragraph or two for event-driven releases.
- 8) **Adding quotes from people mentioned in your release.** Do this only if you have a client or boss to appease, because the chances of reporters or editors at larger newspapers, magazines or broadcast stations using quotes that *you* supply are small. On the other hand, include all the quotes you like in releases sent to small weekly newspapers, shoppers' papers or broadcast stations in smaller markets. They will often use your well-written release verbatim and welcome your quotes.
- 9) **Failing to list a contact person who can actually be reached.** Don't list your CEO as the contact at the top of your release if he can't be easily reached. This

will greatly reduce your chances of pick-up because of the hectic, deadline-sensitive schedules that reporters keep. When a reporter stops to follow up on a news tip, he needs to reach the spokesperson *now*, not tomorrow. Contact information should include cell phone numbers, pager numbers and e-mail addresses.

- 10) **Not giving reporters enough information.** Keep your news release or news pitch short and succinct, but be sure that all essential information is included. Often left out is the Why? (see #7). Give the media a reason to cover your story. The reason may be obvious to you, but not to them. Send a news release to the media in general, but send a briefer news “pitch” to a specific reporter or editor.

And here’s another biggie...

Don’t call a press conference unless it’s really important. Unless the news you deliver at the conference significantly affects the lives of many people. Crying “Wolf!” will guarantee the media will reject your press conference invitation next time. And they’ll probably be snickering behind your back for quite awhile.