

THE AUTHORITY GUIDE TO PR FOR SMALL BUSINESSES



Use the power of public relations and the media to reach your target customer and grow your business

STEVE BUSTIN

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For regional press ensure you say where you live or where you're from. I get fed up with businesses and PRs saying they're local and then discovering they're from out of the area we cover.

Sarah Lewis
journalist



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Nothing beats a compelling top line, an interesting bit of data, a new trend or an engaging human interest story. Make sure you have the best possible spokesperson to tell the story and that they are available and flexible and if you can, it helps to supply images or multi-media to whet the appetite of a lazy or hard-pressed newsroom.

Gary Duffy
journalist



Introduction

Have you ever wondered why your local newspaper always writes about your competitor but not you? Or why the trade magazine for your industry sector calls on other people to give expert comment rather than you? Or why the BBC News website never seems to feature organisations like yours?

The people, businesses and organisations who *do* get featured in the media are normally those that are undertaking some public relations (PR).

If you want to be covered by the media, from a local paper to national TV, you have to put yourself out there, letting journalists know who you are and what you're doing. You have to be proactive, imaginative, tenacious and committed. The results, however, can be extraordinary. One piece of media coverage in the right outlet, reaching the right audience with the right message can be the making of your business. All with remarkably little work and zero budget.

I'm a big believer in the power of PR and the media to transform a business from little-known bit player to a high-profile (even if still small) business punching well above its weight and reaching out to potentially huge audiences.

Case study

Owen Reading runs Eyejusters (eyejusters.com), an Oxford-based company making glasses with adjustable focus. Owen attended a PR course I ran a few years ago and using the press release he wrote on the course, started getting coverage – and seeing results – very quickly.

Our press release got us a small paragraph in the Mail on Sunday at the bottom of the health notes column. The interest that generated on our website was enough to clear our warehouse as we made a month's worth of sales in a single day. The publication was spot on for our target audience but I was still amazed something that small could get such impressive results.

Since then we've had another piece in the Mail on Sunday, this time getting a half page including some lovely images. We did six months' worth of sales in a day.

There's no doubt that the right story put in front of the right people can generate so much more than an advert would have generated. One of the important things for our company is that people trust us as an unknown brand with a different type of product. People trust what they read in the newspaper. It's an incredibly cost-effective way of getting your name out there.

How I learned about the power of PR for business

I've spent much of my career on one side or the other of the 'divide' between PR and the media. I started my career working as a researcher then broadcast journalist for BBC News, first in radio and then in TV. For a couple of years I worked on the Newsgathering planning desk, part of the team that plans for forthcoming news stories (and you'd be amazed how much 'news' can actually be planned in advance). This desk is also the 'intake' point for many of the press releases sent to the BBC newsroom, so I regularly had to sit down with a pile of hundreds of press releases and sift through them. You very quickly learn how to spot a good story – and how to discard the vast majority of releases with only a glance. I learned what makes an eye-catching story and how best to communicate it.

When I moved into PR, first working for a lifestyle 'dot-com' then running my own PR agency, that ability to know instinctively what was or wasn't a story stood me in good stead, as did understanding the pressures a journalist works under. Alongside my PR career I've continued to write as a freelance print journalist for national newspapers and magazines, most recently for gardening magazines (although I've always kept my PR and journalism work completely separate so, no, I never wrote about my clients).

Being an active journalist means that I still receive press releases daily and it never ceases to amaze me quite how bad many of them are, with no story, no topicality or no relevance to the publications I write for. It's tempting to email back to the PR professional or business who has sent the release with a critique and an explanation of why they haven't got a chance of getting coverage, but thus far I've restrained myself. Maybe I should just send them a copy of this book?

What has become clear is that while a PR consultant or agency may have the contacts and industry knowledge, no one can ‘sell’ your business like you can. I’m certainly not saying you shouldn’t work with a PR professional (I wouldn’t have made a living from it for so many years if people didn’t) but many small businesses, charities and community groups simply don’t have the budget to do so. Getting media coverage by undertaking PR is absolutely within the reach of any small organisation. As a small business owner myself, I’ve seen the power of what even relatively small pieces of media coverage can do to sales and the bottom line.

How to use this book

This book outlines a process that if followed from start to finish will guide you through the stages needed to run a successful PR campaign. I suggest you start by reading it from beginning to end, so you understand all the elements you’ll need to put in place. Then return to page 1 and start putting it all into practice, doing the exercises and absorbing the top tips.

If you have some PR experience or once you’ve run your first campaign, the book is also designed to be a reference guide, something to dip back into when you need ideas or inspiration for your next set of PR activity. If you’re wondering whether your story idea is newsworthy or looking for some thoughts on how to generate media coverage when you don’t have a current story, there’s a chapter to refer to. If you’re wondering what else you could do to boost the coverage you’re getting, turn to the relevant chapter and refresh your PR campaign.

A few words about language

The media is a broad church including national newspapers, local papers, consumer magazines, trade and specialist magazines, national and local radio and TV and online media outlets. Between them, these outlets have readers, users, listeners and viewers.

For ease, throughout this book when I refer to ‘the media’ you should take that to encompass any print, broadcast and online media, unless I single out a specific tool or tactic as being appropriate to only one form of media. When I refer to ‘the audience’ I mean readers, listeners and/or viewers.

Likewise in business, I might mention your ‘product’ or ‘service’ as a catchall for whatever you sell to generate revenue. If you’re a charity or other type of organisation you may not see yourself as ‘selling’ anything, but don’t let that put you off as the approach I’m about to outline will work just as well for you, too.

Finally I consider ‘PR’ and ‘public relations’ to be interchangeable so I’m going to use both liberally. So let’s dive in to what this actually means.

“

Offer a free regular column on whatever you do to your local website – which is probably desperate for content.

Scott Solder
journalist

”

What is PR and what can it do for your business?

So what is PR?

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (cipr.co.uk) defines it as:

Public Relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.

Public Relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.

Let's just unpick that a little. Reputation is key to any business. Before people can form an opinion of you or your product, they have to have heard of you. You may be creating the best product in the world but if you're not out talking about it in public, no one is going to buy it.

Do you really need to influence opinion and behaviour? Absolutely. If you're a business, a charity, a community group or any other organisation, you won't exist for long if you're not able to influence the opinion and behaviour of those you seek to serve or sell to. You need them to change their purchasing behaviour in your favour. You need them to think positively about you in order to buy from you again or talk about you to friends.

Finally, note the plural use of the word 'publics'. You may well have several different audiences. You may need to communicate with existing customers, prospects, suppliers, whole new market sectors and even with policymakers and politicians. Each audience may need a different message via a different channel. You won't reach them if the message or channel is wrong.

If, for example, you're trying to reach urban young people as customers but you're seeking coverage in *The Daily Telegraph* (because that's what you read yourself), you will not get the results you require as your target audience won't see it as it's the wrong media channel. You have to find your audiences and reach out to them via *their* channels and in *their* language. Much more to come on this throughout this book.

Public relations, especially as provided by PR agencies, covers the gamut of services, from the 'Absolutely Fabulous' champagne-swilling world of celebrity parties and product placement to the 'Malcolm Tucker' beer-swilling (or should that be cappuccino swilling) world of political spin and Machiavellian scheming to steer and 'manage' the news agenda. Throw in services such as reputation management and crisis communications and it can feel that PR is too specialist a skill set for most small businesses or entrepreneurs.

But (and it's a big but) all these PR services have the same aim: building awareness of a particular entity or message and the management of how it is perceived.

For most small businesses, the focus of their PR activity is securing editorial media coverage in newspapers and magazines, on radio or TV or online. That's what this book will teach you to do. I'm going to explain the process you need to follow to reach out to the *right* media for your business to reach the *right* audience with the *right* message at the *right* time. While reputation management, crisis communications and all the other facets of PR are important, they're beyond the scope of this book (although many of the techniques I'm going to look at will help with those aspects). For most businesses, PR is about wanting to see their name in the papers to reach their target audience and thus make more money.

Why should your business undertake PR?

I firmly believe every small business would be foolish to miss out on the opportunity to secure media coverage through PR, for four main reasons:

- Media coverage gives you the opportunity to connect to both a huge audience and a precisely targeted audience.

If you're launching a consumer product, you want to get that product in front of as many of your potential customers as possible. As Owen found in the case study in the introduction to this book, even a small piece of coverage in a national newspaper can trigger huge volumes of sales.

Many of the small business owners I coach on PR express doubts about their ability to secure national media coverage, but a good product is a good product, regardless of the size

of the company behind it. Your product or business is just as deserving of national media coverage as anyone else's.

Sometimes, however, it's not the size of the audience that matters but the targeted nature of that audience. Niche media outlets allow you to directly reach really specific audiences.

If you were launching or promoting a service aimed solely at gardeners, for example, you could reach those people by targeting the media outlets they consume. If you were promoting a business-to-business (B2B) product or service, you could target your exact customers using their sector's trade magazines, websites, blogs and so on.

- Getting media coverage is a fantastic way to build credibility. Being able to say 'As seen on TV' or 'Click here to read about us in the press' on your website or social media pages is an immediate qualifier. It says 'We're being talked about, we're noteworthy' to customers and potential customers who may be checking you out.

If a customer is looking to buy a product or service, they may well look for third-party recommendations and testimonials, and what better testimonial is there than coverage in a publication or media outlet they trust?

- Gaining media coverage can be great for your search engine optimisation (SEO). Most print publications now reproduce their content online (even if it's behind a paywall) and any links to or mentions of your website (or even just business name) can really help to boost you up search rankings, especially if the coverage is from a major media outlet such as the BBC or a national newspaper.

Media coverage also makes *great* social media and blog content that you (and hopefully your customers) can share across multiple platforms, extending its reach and impact.

- Securing media coverage can give an enormous morale boost within your business. Everyone wants to feel that they're working for a company that is respected and being talked about (for the right reasons) or that the product or service they're working on is being reviewed in very positive terms.

Being able to pin up print media coverage on the wall or share broadcast coverage online with your team can have the most amazing effect on staff loyalty and productivity. It can also help you to attract the best candidates when you're recruiting, as people want to work for a company or on a product that's being talked about.

Media coverage and profile is also often used as part of the measure of the value of a company when it's being sold.

What can PR do for your business?

PR can achieve a range of goals for your business. The main target is usually going to be sales: selling more products or services as a result of putting your message in front of your target audience. Alternatively, the goals of a PR campaign could be around driving traffic to a website, selling tickets for an event, driving footfall to a shop, publicising the appointment of new senior staff or signing a big new client or deal. It might also be about raising the personal profile of the business owner, establishing them as a voice of authority or spokesperson for their industry.

Just like any other marketing activity, you should go into a PR campaign with clear goals or objectives. If you haven't set goals, how are you going to know whether your campaign is working or not?

Top tip

Don't just launch into your PR activity with a vague notion of wanting to raise awareness or being better known. Be strategic. Who do you want to reach and what do you want them to do as a result of hearing about your business?

Exercise

Write down three things you'd like PR to achieve for your business.

What would be a good measure of success for you and your PR campaign?

Working with a journalist: Chris Johnson

Chris is a former business news editor for *The Times* and now writes business stories for *The Guardian* and BBC News Online.

It's unusual for national newspapers to cover a small business's story, although some now have Enterprise correspondents or editors who look specifically at stories relevant to SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises], so seek them out.

The problem is that news editors don't care that a tiny company has opened a new store or appointed a new senior vice president. If your product or service really makes a difference for customers, however, and is truly innovative, it may work as a story for a national paper. Find something compelling about your business or product. Always try to have a human angle, too, whether that's about the chief executive or the customer. Having no human voice makes a story very dull.

We still need to see a press release, too. It makes it easier for us to quickly see what the story is and what's going on. The less hyperbole the better, though.

Another way you can approach a national newspaper is by positioning yourself as an expert commentator rather than sending a press release or story in.

Get media coverage and grow your business through PR with this practical guide.

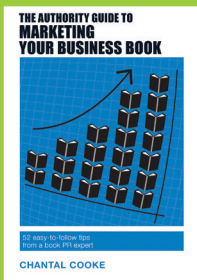
Any business wanting to reach new customers should be embracing public relations to spread their key messages. If you don't, your competitors will. This *Authority Guide* shows you how to grab the headlines (for all the right reasons), reach huge audiences and grow your business by accessing the media to tell your story.



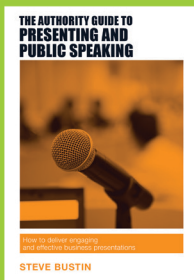
“With a career on both sides of the PR/editorial fence, Steve Bustin knows all the tricks when it comes to securing valuable editorial coverage. If you want to get your business talked about, this book will tell you exactly how to develop a strategy that will get the right story in front of the right readers at the right time.”

Alice Hart-Davis, national newspaper journalist

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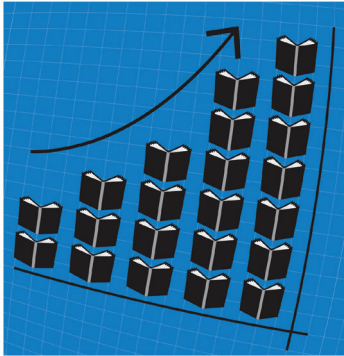


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