



PR: Patience=Results

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Today's post is courtesy of Jeff Lavery, an account manager for Rhino Public Relations. Questions or comments? E-mail him at jeff@rhinopr.com, and follow his posts on Twitter @RhinoPR_Jeff.



As marketing and public relations professionals, we've all had that call with our clients or department managers. It usually takes place after the first month's retainer payment is due or mere moments after they're quoted in a major publication: Why isn't my phone ringing off the hook?

Cultivating Reporter Relationships

PR is much like pursuing a client for a building project: It takes months, if not longer, to catch the break you're waiting for. Much like an architect who hopes they get picked by a school building committee for submitting the most compelling design, PR professionals work with editors and journalists in the same way—hoping their client's trend story is the one that's picked from the masses of pitches they receive on a daily basis. In fact, given the massive cuts to newsroom staff at both major daily and national outlets, getting any response at all from a reporter is the “new normal” for PR professionals.

For clients, it can be hard to justify paying for such services when results are not immediate. However, similar to that first meeting with a facilities manager or a committee head, it may take several encounters for a relationship to develop that bears fruit. Patience is essential, and with the proper planning and approach, productive opportunities with high-profile media will materialize.

Keep Your Head On—and Your Nose, Too

The expression “cutting off your nose to spite your face” is one that has been used in all sorts of situations of rash judgment, and it can be especially fitting depending on how you handle your PR program. To truly refine your company's messaging; develop key branding points; discover trend pieces; and connect with the most influential reporters in daily print media, trade journals, and online publications can require between three to six months of diligent research and pitching before impactful results are felt. To cancel a PR program after the start-up phase but before the first placements come to fruition can signify both wasted opportunity and money.

I recall a client when I was working for another agency that came to market with a product already years old. Worse yet, they hadn't done anything to improve upon what was supposedly their benchmark, making pitching the version difficult. However, after a few weeks working together, we began to see opportunities. Even for a substandard product such as theirs, we were able to change our focus from feature opportunities to broader round-up stories, smaller and more targeted blogs, international press outlets that hadn't yet heard of the software and more. Without warning, the client pulled the

plug a few weeks before these new channels opened up. Two months of retainer gone and a number of bridges burnt with reporters who felt like we had been wasting their time. Had the client exercised a bit more patience (and judgment), they would have seen the results we had promised. Instead, the client approached PR as a tactic that would guarantee an immediate sales boost. The client's disappointment led to the closure of the account and a number of annoyed writers who likely would not be singing their praises any time soon.

When you opt to use a PR agency, nobody understands better the pressure to deliver on results as much as your account manager. However, they also know the realities of working with the press. In fact, many of the folks currently in PR have held stints or careers as journalists and editors, and recognize firsthand how long it takes to build trust with a reporter focused on your market. If you approach PR as you would when engaging with a new prospect, you can recognize that all good relationships take more than just a handshake and a free cocktail. The most successful campaigns are reserved for those clients who appreciate the investment of time, and like their noses just the way they are.