

# TOPPLING THE TOP 7 MYTHS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS



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Public Relations, PR, Media Relations... industry jargon meaning what, exactly? Most would agree this terminology refers to the promotion of someone or something, but how does it truly work? The essence of Public Relations is like a game of telephone – you’ve probably heard bits and pieces of what it is, but many of the details on how it’s

achieved have trailed off, thus creating ‘myths’ that drive the perception that PR is A) Definable; B) Tangible; or C) Reliable.

The reality is that Public Relations now requires a sophisticated, strategic approach that addresses the goal of securing publicity in an increasingly complex media industry where editors are striving to tell the most important stories with reduced news staffs while balancing print, mobile, tablet and desktop platforms. The success of PR efforts is almost solely dependent on the time commitment you are able to devote to it—from pitching highly relevant story ideas that will grab editors’ attention to keeping an updated media list.

For example, the TV reporter you thought you were finally building a rapport with has suddenly been upgraded from our mediocre Market 142 to the illustrious Market 107. Yes, it is hard to imagine that walking away from 355 days of sunshine a year to embrace the wet flatlands of Fort Wayne could be viewed as a move up in the world, but in the TV business, it happens all the time.

Keeping up on the media is just the beginning. You need to know who covers what and figure out how you can fit into that mix by helping the media do their job. Understanding the 7 Myths of Public

Relations will give you some tips on the tricks of the trade.

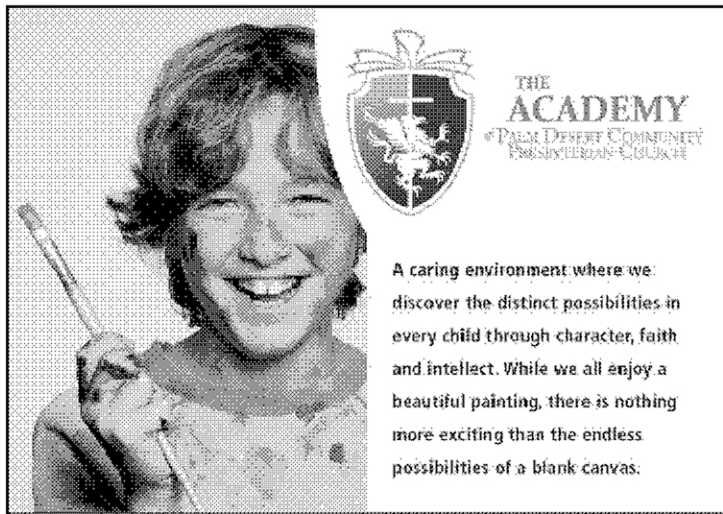
1. If you send it, they will run with it. Many still believe Public Relations is essentially writing a press release, sending it to the media and then it will appear in the newspaper or newscast, word for word as it had been originally crafted. But unfortunately it isn’t as simple as Field of Dreams’ cinematic theme, “If you build it, they will come.” Public Relations in many instances is a sales job—you are competing with hundreds of other press releases hitting the media’s inboxes every day. Get to the point and get there quick. Write concise press releases that include the most newsworthy information within the first paragraph to get their attention.
2. The media will tell your story. Public Relations must be only one component of your marketing program, because even if you score some publicity for your products and services, the media will not tell your story with the same detail and call-to-action necessary to truly drive new business and sales. The most effective marketing programs are broken out with Public Relations being just one category, complemented by other strategies like paid advertising, collateral materials and online/social media strategies.
3. Your media buy is your ticket to news features. The sales department and the newsroom of a media organization must remain “church and state” if it is to be a credible news source. So you can’t go to your media sales rep and ask them to shuffle his/her way into the newsroom and suggest that they need to cover your press release because you drop dollars into their advertising coffers. You’re sending your rep into a wolves den! An editor must be objective in his/her news choices.
4. The media is one size fits all. While the media is often categorized as one entity, they all operate differently. Radio show hosts have a couple hours of content to fill, and therefore can schedule multiple interviews. TV newscasts have 22 minutes, all of which need to incorporate hard news, weather and sports. Publications are great for more in-depth articles, but you still have to convince them why your story is worthy of the ink on their pages. In social media, you can control the content but building the audience becomes your responsibility as well so that must be factored in. If you aren’t constantly developing your fan base, your tweets and posts are time wasters.
5. Charitable giving is your conduit to coverage. Sponsoring non-profit events and making donations to charities is important in business development, but it shouldn’t be done for the sole purpose of getting your name in the news. Many

companies are clamoring to get exposure for their charitable efforts, and frankly, if the media covered every check presentation and glamorous gala, there would be nothing else in the news. Your efforts can earn recognition in other ways like event program ads, but just because you’re listed in the news release for something you sponsored, that doesn’t mean the media is going to include you if they do a story.

6. No harm, no foul in follow-up. Follow up is key, however, it is an art form. You can fail in following up if you do it in a way that alienates you from the media rather than helps you build relationships. Don’t follow-up too frequently. Don’t follow-up too close to a newscast or publication deadline. Try following up early to mid-morning, when editors are most often contemplating story ideas for that day and even the rest of the week. Email follow-up is preferred because it creates a chain of communication.
7. I must have news to get into the news. In actuality, if you tune into what types of stories the media finds newsworthy, you can generate or ‘create’ news. For example, if there is a big national story that you think you have a local perspective on, call up your media sources and let them know how you can help them better tie into a national story by making it more relevant to viewers/readers/listeners right here at home.

Bottom line? Public Relations should be part of every marketing program, whether you bring in a professional or roll up your sleeves and dig in on your own. Be realistic about how the media works and get creative about how you can “promote” within their parameters—then dust off your interview skills and prepare to start speaking in sound bites.

A veteran in the PR industry, Andrea Carter has 18 years of results-oriented experience in marketing, advertising and public relations. Carter’s core skills include garnering PR/publicity, copywriting, preparing and managing annual marketing plans and budgets, acting as media spokesperson for clients when needed and event management. Carter was named as one of Palm Springs Life’s “40 Under 40” Rising Young Professionals to watch in the Coachella Valley in its October 2010 issue. Prior to moving to the desert in 2000, Carter was an account manager with the Maccabee Group in Minneapolis, where she implemented public relations campaigns for companies like General Mills and Buffalo Wild Wings restaurants. She also served as a public relations specialist and spokeswoman for the National Marrow Donor Program, traveling to coordinate stories with national media organizations like Family Circle magazine, USA Today and the Rosie O’Donnell Show.



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