

Boost your boardroom credibility

How to get (and prove) better results from your PR investments.



The ultimate asset of your business is your reputation. It is often said that people buy from people, but only from people that they trust. Furthermore, maintaining a strong reputation in your industry means less of a fight to retain and grow your market share year on year. As a communications professional, you'll already understand the value of PR in raising the profile of your business, but how easy is it to demonstrate that to your colleagues?

The truth is that PR's impact on business objectives is notoriously hard to measure. The subtleties of reputation building can take time, and can be affected by a crisis elsewhere in your industry or the financial climate. All this can make it tricky when your boss asks you to show how your PR campaigns have influenced business outcomes.

Here are a few handy tips to make planning your next appraisal meeting that little bit easier:

Manage expectations

If you aren't clear on which results would constitute success when you start your campaign, it will be difficult to show how your PR activities have achieved the desired results once the campaign is complete. In order to be able to show this in a tangible way, you'll need to get used to managing the expectations of your colleagues, before, during and after your campaign.

Start by agreeing on the overall business objectives, and how their realisation can be aided by PR. Next, focus on specifics and consider how you can help the business to meet its goals through your campaign's results. What would coverage in a regional paper mean to your business? How would a press release in a trade magazine boost your reputation against that of your competition? Which bloggers are you keen to get on

board with your story, and why?

Once you know exactly what results you want and how they will support the company in achieving business objectives, it will be easier to justify your campaigns, and it will mean more to colleagues outside of the PR department when you achieve your goals.

“Manage the expectations of your colleagues, before, during and after your campaign”

How do you help the sales team?

Chances are, your communications activity benefits your company's key salespeople in ways other than lead generation. Great deals often start with a conversation about a topic of mutual interest, and the ongoing hard work of the communications team can frequently facilitate this.

Think about how the sales team uses PR in their pitches. Are your press releases giving staff something to talk about that interests prospective clients? Do deals close faster when there's some recent topical coverage to cite? If you can work out the instrumental value that your coverage has in allowing other

people in the business to demonstrate key messages and your company's industry influence, you'll have a great response ready when you're asked to show the company's return on communications investment.

Think Trust

Gaining the trust of customers should be a key aspect of your corporate strategy, and just as trust takes time to build, it takes plenty of time and effort to retain. If it's hard to show the ROI of the communications activity that pushes your business to new heights within the market, it's surely even harder to show why PR spend is crucial to maintain an already strong reputation.

"You could use a monitoring tool to measure your coverage rates throughout the year"

The importance of well-targeted PR in building trust was shown in the findings of Edelman's Trust Barometer 2012. A rise in trust in media globally was observed, with results showing that audiences will generally need to be exposed to a message three to five times before they will believe in the accuracy of the news. Stats like this suggest that the ongoing positioning of your brand in the media is not just beneficial, but essential to maintaining market share while achieving corporate goals.

Refine as you go

Don't leave it until the end of the year to sit down and work out what results your campaigns have produced; it'll mean a difficult day (or week) in front of spreadsheets, and results which are hard to analyse out of context once the moment has passed.

Instead, use media monitoring to measure your coverage rates throughout the year, searching keywords over a 30 or 90 day period. You'll be able to see how metrics such as your media mentions compare with those of your competitors and compile charts that will make your findings easy to present to colleagues at a later date.

Try to isolate one key result from each campaign and act on it. If you get great coverage from a journalist, thank them promptly and make sure you set yourself a reminder to contact

them next time you have a great story. If you had a low uptake of your release, return to your distribution list and consider what went wrong straight away instead of leaving it until the next campaign. It may be a long hard slog to hone the perfect pitch, but showing the determination to improve results with each and every communication will win more hearts in the boardroom than a one-off success.

And finally, remember...

Make friends and influence people

Never underestimate the importance of building relationships; this is an example of a longer term investment that is well worth making. Time spent researching the media contacts that matter the most and finding out more about how they work is crucial if you want to help them to work more efficiently. Great relationships with the journalists and bloggers who are most relevant to your industry are key to achieving the results you want, and not just for the week that you're launching your campaign.

Connecting via Twitter is a good way of making a first acquaintance with the people that you want to contact with your next press release, and using a media database which includes Twitter handles in contact profiles can make this fast and easy. Following and re-tweeting a journalist or blogger is a good first step in making sure that your name will be recognised when you get in touch directly, making it more likely that your email will get attention.

This isn't just about the one-off coverage opportunity. If the influencer knows that you provide quality content in a timely way, the chances of them reading the next release that you send through soars. This means that the time spent today building relationships could really pay off in three months, so it's worth keeping a diary of time invested, how desirable the coverage gained was and the overall effect on business outcomes.

"Showing determination to build relationships with key influencers and improve results with each and every press release will win more hearts in the boardroom than a one-off success at getting great coverage."