

Publicity's Not Enough: Here's Why You Need a Real PR Strategy



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It's time to stop thinking any and all press is good press: that philosophy is old, dead and irresponsible. Using strategic PR is what Michael Olguin advises clients who work with his firm, *Formulatin*, to do.

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To operate otherwise can be a total waste of editorial effort in the name of PR. And in this economy, you can't stand to waste your money or any valuable press opportunities.

"Every dollar has to work and has to be meaningful for you business," says Olguin. "You don't want press in Houston when your retail is only distributed in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. What good is press in Houston when no one can get your product there? You need a strategy where you can tell the consumers what you want them to know and use a strategic PR plan to do that. With a plan, that article should say where the product is available near you and not: 'Here's a product. Go find me.'"

The old-school way of scavenging for press rarely works well. A collection of press clippings and web impressions only means so much when given no context and occurring within a free-for-all of coverage. Take, for example, the overly-hyped and completely unsuccessful *Segway*. The intent of the product was to transform the way people transport themselves. Without a clear target and focus, instead of replacing, say, the bicycle, Segway ended up as a funny-looking, expensive and kitschy product that is now mostly rented by tourists and used by the occasional beach police crew.

"You couldn't turn on the TV without seeing something about the Segway," says Olguin. "There was all this hype and all this press everywhere, but no strategy. They had no target audience and couldn't deliver on the hype."

PR these days is a multi-level process, so there are lots of ways to reach an audience. Looking to get strategic? Here are six PR rules to guide you:

1. Be message-driven. Have goals and stick to communicating the most important message of your brand. Focus on driving mind share.

2. Consider geographic components. If the product is locally focused and distributed in specific places, don't waste coverage in places where the product or service can't be bought. Win the markets you have!

3. Have a call to action. Your editorial should have a call to action for the consumer; for example, to visit your website or store. Focus on communicating the message of what exactly you want your consumer to do.

4. Understand what type of media you want and need for your message. Ten years ago the media landscape was much different. How you target print vs. electronic media is different. Weekly and daily publications operate differently.

"Recognize unconventional target audiences," says Olguin. "That's how we deal with our client: New Castle Brown Ale. For that client, a blogger or blog site like *Thrillist* works better strategically than *USA Today*."

5. Be time-driven. Have something in your PR campaign to tie the news back to. It could be a news peg, a hook, something newsworthy, etc. The launch of a product is always good. A new message for the marketplace can work. Just make sure it coincides with your business objective.

6. Recognize the power of the blogosphere. "Peer-to-peer communication is more valuable than category experts," says Olguin "*Tripadvisor* and *Yelp*, for example, are incredibly important, but so is a blogger in Syracuse who says a restaurant is cool. So is *Jason Chen* from *Gizmodo*. Vertically-oriented blog writers live and breathe their category. Even if they aren't trained on their topics they are super influential with the leverage they have over their followers. They can bring multiple placements, are easy to find, and you don't have to spend much money to have a measurable impact."