



PUBLIC RELATIONS

101

HANDBOOK FOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

Vetrano  Communications

PUBLIC RELATIONS 101: HANDBOOK FOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

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Public Relations: A Working Definition

Public Relations (PR) is an all-encompassing term for several types of outreach: 1) external PR to the media (editors/reporters); 2) external PR to industry analysts; 3) external PR with third-party partners; 4) internal PR for the corporation. PR should consider brand-building — of both the company name/image and of products/technical solutions.

PR and Investor Relations (IR) are treated as separate entities, and most companies, whether in the seeking-funding, getting-funded or IPO preparatory stages, need both the counsel of their attorneys and of PR professionals who specialize in IR when they delve into the world of financially oriented press information. *Public Relations 101* focuses on PR only.



Your PR Toolkit

While the press release is a standard means of communicating with the media, it is not the only tool in your toolkit. Press releases and media advisories are two formal methods of communication. Press tours/briefings, whether face-to-face meetings or teleconferences, and proactive media campaigns are also essential to a good PR program.

Contributed articles, white papers and product/technology backgrounders, speaking engagements and product reviews (if applicable to your company) are other standard components of effective PR.

Webinars may also be included, and social media platforms (particularly LinkedIn and Twitter) are increasingly important.

Your objectives and resources should determine which tools to activate within your program.



New Product Launch

While PR is much more than just new products, communicating the availability of your new products/technologies is fundamental to the PR process. This allows you to reach your target audience through the broadest means possible. While not the most glamorous part of the PR process, planning is always the place to start.

Questions to ask during the planning phase include:

- a) How is this product better/different from anything else on the market? Can we quantify this in the press release? (Please note that you should not use superlatives unless you can back this up with data. If your accelerometer is the industry's smallest or lowest-power device, you should state this, as long as you can support it.)
- b) Better than announcing a new product by itself is to announce your product in light of an emerging industry trend or industry standard. Tying your announcement into a hot topic will increase your chances of getting coverage. What are the hot topics to which your product relates?
- c) Do you have customers who will provide testimonial quotes for your press release? While securing customer quotes can be very challenging — as you may be precluded from promoting design wins by contract — customer references can validate your messaging to add meaning to your announcement.
 - a. If you cannot announce a customer, you can ask if that customer would be willing to speak to the press about their experiences with your technology. Just remember to pre-qualify them in advance — and check with your business development team — before approaching them.
- d) Industry analysts are vital to your PR program. Please include pre-briefings of industry analysts in your product launch plan. Analysts are viewed objectively by the press; having them support your technology and messaging gives credibility to both your campaign and your presence in the industry.
 - a. Some analysts may be willing to provide a quote for your press release. Note that analysts cannot “endorse” a particular company or product, so you must construct a quote for their review that is topical — but supports your own messaging as well.

Product Launch Plan

When you are bringing something new to market, developing an action-oriented product launch plan 3 months before launch will keep you focused. Identify key messages that you want to communicate, understand product differentiators and the market needs met by your product, build in time for media list development, and determine whether this product merits a press tour that will take you on the road or merely to the phones. Also evaluate whether you want to time your launch to coincide with an industry tradeshow, already attended by many of your target media. If face-to-face meetings are important and budget is limited — and product demos are essential to making an impression — you may want to consider planning press meetings at a tradeshow. While editors are faced with information from your competitors, they are also trolling for hot stories and emerging trends at tradeshows. Meeting with you could provide good fodder for articles in the short- or long-term.

Tip: If you are planning press meetings at tradeshows, start 4-6 weeks out. Getting invitations to the editors/analysts early in the process could lock your spot onto their schedule. This also means that you need to get your messaging nailed down early on.

Press Tour

Face-to-Face — when the phrase, “press tour,” comes up, most of us envision a major junket involving suitcase-living and red eyes for two to three weeks. However, you can tailor a press tour to accommodate travel schedules and budgets.

You should seriously consider a press tour if:

- a) you want to begin developing personal relationships with the media and you have information about your product and related market areas that will prove valuable to them
- b) your product needs to be personally demonstrated in order to make an impression
- c) you have the funding required to take key spokespeople on the road — with a PR advisor
- d) you can afford to have key staff out of the office for a period of time

While the impact of life on the road can be minimized — by having pockets of meetings in areas in which numerous editors are based (such as the Bay Area, New York and Boston) — planning a press tour is an investment in time. Because of the potentially positive impact of a press tour, however, the planning and funding are worth it — as long as your target group of media and messaging are synergistic.

A less expensive alternative to a press tour, which still preserves the personal contact, is to schedule meetings with the media at industry tradeshows. Regardless of where you meet with the press, the fact that you have gone out of your way to meet with them is important to building long-term relationships. And in this age of increased email reliance, having a good, old fashioned meeting adds a personal touch that can set you above the competition.

Teleconferences — when your news does not warrant the investment required for face-to-face meetings, teleconferences are the next best thing to being there. Arranging pre-announcement briefings (under embargo, if necessary) is still an excellent way to communicate your message.

Services (such as WebEx) that allow you to share your screen with the press are another potentially valuable solution for meeting remotely with the media and your spokespeople. Just check with the press to see if they prefer conference calls to something like WebEx. If you decide to use WebEx, make sure that you and your spokespeople are familiar with the tool, before you hold that first briefing.

Whatever means you use to communicate with the media, one constant remains. You should always be asking what you can offer them — and not the reverse. PR initiatives are most warmly embraced when they add value to your relationship with the press.

Product Reviews

Are you ready for prime time? It is a serious question, and you need to answer it objectively, by scrutinizing your product before you allow anyone else to do so. There is nothing better than a great review, many have said, and nothing worse than a bad one. Preparing for the review process by commissioning an independent evaluation of your product (through feedback from customers or analysts) is the first step. Packaging the product for review is the second. A reviewer's guide and other support information, such as product/technology backgrounders and other collateral material should be included in press kits for reviewers. You should also list contact information for a specific technical support person, who has been trained to work with reviewers.

Once these materials are in hand and your product has been thoroughly tested, you can begin the process of pitching reviews. Following up with committed reviewers by sending product and the reviewer's kit in a timely fashion shows that you have your act together. Having tech support or PR check in with the reviewer sometime during the review process is also a good idea. Build a relationship with the reviewer and seek out early impressions, so that you can address any obstacles before they become public knowledge.

Contributed Articles

Contributing (bylined) articles has become increasingly important in our business, particularly as many "traditional" publications have leaner paid staff and often need to rely on contributed articles for content.

Contributed articles allow you to both control your message and position company spokespeople as industry luminaries. Technical articles about a particular hardware or software design, written in a problem-solution format, allow you to publicize your company name, if not your actual product. Viewpoint pieces allow you to position your executive spokespeople as industry gurus. If you do not have the writing talent or time in-house, but have ideas for compelling articles, you can employ professional freelance writers to ghostwrite articles for you.

Tip: Consider placing the contributed article written for a North American or European publication in a second region of the world. For example, you may be able to place an article with a publication in Asia – as long as it is translated into the local language. For the price of translation, you get two placements with the same article.



Media List

Media list development is like old-fashioned research. You can purchase media information resources, from companies such as Cision. This can give you a way to get started with media list development as well as a live database in which to keep your media lists.

The best way to create targeted lists, however, is to get to know your media. If you hire an internal PR person, getting to know the publications should be part of the job. If you hire a PR consultant or agency of any size, you should expect your PR representatives to have or develop hands-on familiarity with your target media.



Press Release Basics

There are numerous flavors of press releases: new product, industry partnership, customer relationship and corporate announcement. Because it is the most widely issued type of news release, we will focus on the new product announcement.

News Angles

If you want to get a news story for your new product release in something like *EE Times*, *New Electronics* or *Electronic News*, you cannot just talk about your product in terms of its features and benefits. You need to tie your news into key industry trends, informing editors that they should care about your news because it will change the way that OEMs or systems integrators realize new functionality in their products, because it speeds design-to-delivery time for engineers/product designers, or some other attribute that clearly spells out why the press should care about your news.

Here are few tips:

- Include product differentiators in your announcement and explain why they are relevant.
- Prepare to support superlatives with data. If you have the world's smallest combo device, include specifications.
- Include availability — even if it's a quarter of the year and not a specific month, and consider including price as well — as editors like to see this information.
- Try to avoid cliché words/phrases such as “breakthrough,” “groundbreaking” and “best of breed” as these words have become hackneyed.

Product PR

If you want to get new product coverage in publications such as *Electronic Products*, *EDN* or *ECN*, you should follow the accepted “formula” for a press release. A template follows:

Product Release Template

For Immediate Release

Heading — catch your audience with the lead subject, telling them why they should care about this particular story. Use key words for search engine optimization (SEO) in heading.

Subhead — supports the subject heading; product name can be included here

Paragraph one — the most important paragraph of all:

BOSTON — (December 3, 2014) — Your company [stock symbol here if publicly traded], modifier about what you do, today announced the industry’s first 10-axis motion-sensing device, SuperCool®. SuperCool is designed for wearables, smartphones and other resource-constrained portable devices.

[Add more detail about why this is important and who it benefits.]

[Quote from industry analyst or executive on your company positioning.]

Tip: You may wish to cite industry data as well. Just be sure to reference the data in your press release.

[Technical detail in features and benefits. Could be a bulleted list.]

[Price and Availability — Include website, phone number and general-information email address.]

[Company Boilerplate]

Trademark statement in small type: Your company name and SuperCool® are registered trademarks of your company name. All other product and company names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders.

PR CONTACT PERSON INFORMATION

-end-

COMPANY CONTACT INFORMATION



Active vs. Passive News

Knowing how strongly to promote news can be challenging, particularly if multiple parties within one organization have different opinions about the potential value of a single release. Categorizing your news as “active” or “passive” will help you to determine the best approach to sharing your news with the wider world.

Active News — Active News is important. It has the potential to generate interest among customers/partners, investors, industry analysts — to the point at which it could help move a company’s business forward.

Active News warrants some form of media relations. It requires email distribution at minimum, may require newswire distribution, and may also require pre-announcement briefings. Most technology trades (particularly industry verticals where you have close relationships with press) will honor embargoes, but check with them in advance before sharing too much information with them up front.

News-focused “mainstream” technology outlets (*CNET*, *Tom’s Hardware* or *The Boston Globe*, for example) may not honor embargoes so take care before approaching them, particularly if your news is of a material nature and your company or client is publicly traded.

Within this Active News category, there are various subcategories. Some Active News releases require the gold standard in media relations — advance briefings or a press tour, lots of follow-up, wire distribution and more.

Other Active News may require email distribution only, without an active media relations campaign. After talking with your company or client, just use your best judgment in determining how many resources to invest in a particular Active News announcement.

Passive News does not warrant media relations. You may decide to post a press release to a newswire, for example, without conducting proactive media outreach. If you want to share your news — but do not necessarily expect actual press coverage — then you are looking at a Passive News release. No campaign required.



Internal PR

Evangelizing your successes within your own company or with your own client celebrates the fruits of the PR process. Share news coverage in a timely fashion by sending article titles, publication dates, authors and URLs. Even include a few words about the merits of the article. Was the tonality positive? Did the editor capture your core messaging? Was a spokesperson quoted? Taking a few extra minutes to interpret the significance of the news adds further value.

Internal PR is about more than news coverage. It is about making current and potential employees believe that a company's executives are developing business strategies that will succeed and that its engineers are developing exemplary products.

Speaking Opportunities

Position your company as a thought leader by pursuing speaking opportunities at tradeshows and conferences that are attended by your target audience. Target tradeshows to reach your audience, develop speaking abstracts and submit accordingly to deadline. Also consider participating in industry panels as well as sponsored opportunities if budget allows.

Ongoing Media Relations

Last, but not least, how do you bring value to relationships with editors and analysts? Ongoing media relations activity is important to building long-lasting relationships with the press. Knowing when to call editors and when to email them about news, when to schedule a press tour, and when to simply disseminate information using more passive approaches is a skill developed over time. As you evaluate your PR needs, consider whether you want to hire a full-time employee, a small and more specialized PR consulting group, or a mid- or large-sized PR agency. Whatever you decide, you will find that PR provides a great return-on-investment.

Social Media

B2B companies benefit from social media in a variety of ways. Social media such as Twitter and LinkedIn give you more mechanisms for staying in touch with customers/partners, employees/potential employees, investors and the press.

And blogs — as long as you are publishing meaningful (non-promotional content) — can provide great value as well.

Develop and implement a strategic plan for Twitter, LinkedIn and your corporate blog. Once you have your plan in place, establish consistency in posting the types and frequency of content that you want to share via these important mechanisms.

If you are a B2C company or have a B2C client, you will need to consider other social media sites as well, including Facebook and Instagram.



Resources

Media Resources:

Cision	www.cision.com
TechNews	www.technews.io
Marketwired	www.marketwired.com
Business Wire	www.businesswire.com
PR Newswire	www.prnewswire.com
WebEx	www.webex.com

Style Guide:

The Associated Press Stylebook www.apstylebook.com

Public Relations 101: *Handbook for Technology Companies* was created by Vetrano Communications, LLC. For more information about Vetrano Communications, a senior-level public relations consulting group dedicated to technology companies, please contact us:

Tel: 617/876-2770

Email: pr_info@vetrano.com

Web: www.vetrano.com

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