

PR Success Tips: 4 Myths To Combat Along The Way

By Matt Baron

Over my 20-plus years in journalism, untold thousands of people have launched press releases, news tips, and assorted miscellany in my direction in relentless bids to hook me with story ideas.

A tiny percentage of the time—somewhere in the low single-digits—I took more than 10 seconds to consider the pitch at all. Of that total, a minuscule proportion led to coverage.

These hopeful souls were, by and large, hopeless in their approach. PR should never be so overwhelmingly futile, especially if you have a genuinely newsworthy story to share and place it in the hands of a professional who knows how to guide it through the choppy media waters.

Along the way, it helps to avoid falling prey to some common PR myths. Four are outlined below:

Myth #1: It's all about the press release.

Reality: First of all, the proper term is “news release,” since the press is only one of the targets, anyway. In addition, the news release is simply one part—often, but not always, an integral part—of a multi-pronged approach to increasing your target market's awareness.

Other vital elements to get your message across:

*Creating a professional, dynamic website that clearly communicates what makes your product or service superior to and distinctive from your competitors;

*Understanding what the various media want in a story and then going all-out to fulfill those cravings with timely, localized, visually compelling material.

*Identifying Internet venues where you can connect directly with your audience, such as contributing to a blog, creating a blog of your own, or posting a video on sites like YouTube.

Myth #2: If your publicist has strong media connections, then don't worry about having a great news hook.

Reality: This is a classic example of confusing causality and correlation.

How do you think a publicist develops strong media connections in the first place? It comes through excellence—top-notch story ideas, outstanding written and other communication skills, and a well-earned reputation for professionalism and integrity.

If your news pitch is weak, then any solid publicist would do the right thing and take the time and energy to develop a stronger pitch.

Myth #3: The publicist's top goal should be media placement—getting as many stories told through the media as possible.

Reality: The top goal ought to be delivering on the client's goals. Clearly, generating publicity is one of the means to that end. But it's important not to confuse process with results.

Which scenario do you prefer: a 150-percent increase in media coverage with a 5-percent growth in sales, or a 5-percent hike in media coverage with a 150-percent sales surge?

Silly question, right? But our focus can stray unless we have a clearly defined purpose driving PR efforts. PR pursued for its own sake doesn't serve the client.

In addition to standard news organizations and freelance media professionals, are there blogs with large audiences that may be appropriate targets? Who else wields major influence with your target market, and how can you connect with them?

Media coverage can trigger more sales, but not always and usually not right away.

Myth #4: PR is a contact sport—the key is to flood as many media outlets with your story, then cross your fingers that some will be interested.

Reality: Throwing mud at the wall is a great idea—but only if your goal is to get a really muddy wall.

Far more effective than PR-spamming is making personalized contacts that are targeted to appropriate, potentially interested individuals.

You shouldn't have to sacrifice long-term media relationships for the short-term urgencies of an immediate PR campaign. Those short- and long-term considerations should go hand in hand.

Find a publicist who has nurtured numerous quality contacts, so that you have media outreaches high in quality *and* quantity.

*For more than 20 years, Matt Baron, founder of Chicago-based **Inside Edge: Public Relations & Media Services**, was a staff and freelance reporter for small-town weeklies, big-city dailies and national magazines. Through workshops, webinars and columns, Baron has trained thousands of reporters and PR professionals how to tell stories more effectively. You can reach him at Matt@InsideEdgePR.com or 708.860.1380.*