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the Internet

PR on a Shoestring

Online PR...

...and how to use it with traditional marketing

WSI White Paper

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Introduction

“A good reputation is more valuable than money. “

-Publilius Syrus

Latin Writer and Mime artist

85BC to 43BC

Publilius is the Latin word for PUBLIC

How much does reputation really matter?

Would desperate first-time buyers actually shy away from a mortgage deal because of the banks' bad reputation?

Asked how important it is that a company from which they are considering buying shows a high degree of social responsibility, around 29 per cent of the general population would say it is 'very important'. But among the brand influencers, around 43 per cent would find corporate responsibility very important.

So what about YOU? What does your REPUTATION say about you? Your reputation is key in public relations. When you are out visiting potential customers, your reputation possibly made it to the appointment first!

Public Relations

For PR, firstly we need to identify who our publics are. Consider the people who we would want to think good things about us and our companies:

- Employees
- Customers
- Prospects
- Investors
- Colleagues
- Suppliers
- The local community

Perhaps it is all of those groups...

It really is very important to remember that PR is not just Customer Relations but encompasses everyone we meet or are involved with. PR is all about the impression our companies give, and remember it's the people that make a company. This is all about us and our REPUTATION.

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The difference between PR and advertising

With Public Relations, a company does NOT pay directly for the exposure it secures. It's this third-party endorsement that gives PR its power and credibility; again it's what people say about US.

The Aim of PR is to promote your products or services, show off your brand, and make people aware of the good things about you, your business, your company services or products. We all know that business is not a level playing field. Your competitors may use everything in their power to make sure they are seen more than you are, and so you may have no choice but to fight back.

The thing that should make you stand out from the crowd though will be your reputation. You may have the same offering at the same price as Joe Blogs down the road, but you have the experience and the knowledge, you have standards, you have testimonials, you have YOUR reputation, that's what makes you special, and that's what often closes the deal.

This whitepaper will hopefully give you some inspiration and motivation to use traditional PR and Social Media in your own business.

What's the benefit?

Public relations can play a critical role in achieving a competitive advantage no matter how big or small. For example:

- **Opening new markets** – for our smaller companies, this could be the lifeline you need to grow and survive.
- **Creating a high value for products and services** – If your reputation is valued, then you become more valuable.
- **Attract high-calibre employees** – This could be vital to sustain your business growth.
- **Access funding and investors** – Cash flow could be an issue, but if you have a great reputation, then you are more likely to get the investment you need to take your business to the next stage.
- **Protect your businesses in times of crisis** – There is no guarantee, but if you are a reputable company, then you stand more chance of surviving.

All organisations, whether local or international, **big or small**, benefit from public relations. There is a real **GAIN** to be had from using PR. On the other hand, if you do not have good PR, or you don't take advantage of the opportunities that come your way, what are you missing out on? What is the **PAIN** caused by not getting involved?

- **Limiting your markets** to only what is in your comfort zone
- Attracting employees that **may not be 100%** enthusiastic about working for you
- **No confidence** from funders or investors
- **Cheapening** your products or services
- Worst case scenario, **no business** at all

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How is it done?

Public relations professionals use many different techniques as part of their PR campaigns, things we all know work:

- **Networking and Public Speaking**
- **Sponsorship**
- **Media Relations**
- **Viral Campaigns**

The thing with PR is that even a calamity can often be used to create good PR, just look at Gillian G-string, remember the Bob Sleigh competitor whose latex suit split at the seams. The sport were very pleased with her “exposure”, it raised their profile ready for the Winter Olympics 2010. It did Gillian the world of good too; she carried on regardless and laughed it off.

And have you heard anything about the company who made the suits? Of course not, because the spin was played on the good news.

On the other hand of course, negative PR can do a lot of damage if it is not addressed quickly. The Internet is full of places where people can comment, positively or not, about products, services, companies and people. Being able to respond, correct or sometimes eat a little humble pie is very important for a business.

The aim of PR is to handle the bad news, but to promote all your good news in such a way that all you can see and hear is the good news.

So how can we use both Traditional PR methods, as detailed above, alongside Social Media? A good mix of both works very well for most companies. Let’s take one area at a time.

Networking and Public Speaking

Networking is a long term relationship building thing. We like to trust in the people we buy from. Traditionally networking is face to face. Public Speaking is again face to face, but you are generally the focus of attention for a length of time. You are literally the face for your company, the representative.

Your elevator speech (60 seconds) for example, is a very brief opportunity at a networking event, where you are the focus of attention, and when it is your turn to speak, you have to make that first impression count. It could be that this is the 100th time you have spoken to the same group of people, it still matters, and they still need to see you as upbeat, confident and capable.

If you are given the opportunity to speak publicly for a length of time, to integrate Social Media into your marketing mix, as long as you have appropriate permissions, there is no reason that you cannot video your speech. Once you have a recording, it is there for people to refer back to, and there are many places where you can post your video recording in order that others can “listen in” whenever they have the time. This way, even if someone you really wanted to attend your event could not make it, they can still benefit from what you had to say. Linked In, Facebook and YouTube are the obvious choices for video upload.

Online, as with offline networking, there are many places that we can meet people. Social Media groups such as Facebook, Linked In and Twitter are great examples. Here you must understand the “rules of engagement”, but generally they are the same as offline; you must always be seen as professional, but authentic too.

Sometimes this is a difficult balance to achieve online, when everything is written down or recorded for playback. Online you are open to public scrutiny. Forums, Blogs and Social Sites have been the ruin of many a reputation online. It is important, therefore, to teach yourself and your staff the importance of acting responsibly online so as not to engage in any controversy. After all, it’s the people who make a company, and also the people who can let it down. It is also important to monitor what is being said about your business online. Your WSI Consultant can help you with this.

Although I would never suggest you stop meeting with people as face to, online networking does its’ advantages and these are detailed below:

- **Time** – travelling to and from an event can take up time in your day that could be used for working on or in your business.
- **Costs** – networking groups often charge a fee, online networking is generally free, and there are no travelling expenses to be incurred.
- **Fear** – some people are a little nervous about meeting people for the first time, and online networking eliminates that totally.
- **Speed** – this is different to time, in that you may be able to respond fairly quickly to a question online, because you are more likely to have all your resources at hand.

Networking and Public Speaking - Free Advice

One of the most cost effective ways of promoting yourself and your business is giving some free advice. We often do this automatically when we are in a face to face situation, and again with networking and public speaking, we are generally offering hints and tips to help other people.

When we are listening to people who are giving us good free advice, we usually get a nice warm feeling about the person, and if they have explained themselves well, you will think of them next time you are in a situation where you need similar advice. They will be the people you turn to, and others think the same about you and your business if they are on the receiving end.

Face to Face is one way to help others out, but there are many other ways you can do this as well. Online, there are many opportunities to help other people;

Linked In, for example, has a section dedicated to asking and answering questions, and if you answer a question, the asker can vote on how good your answer was. This elevates your status as an “Expert” on Linked In, which is the professionals’ choice of Social Website.

Blogging is another great way of offering hints and tips, and because your blog will most certainly be a wealth of information on a particular subject, your blog will be indexed well by the search engines, in fact Google has a special search area just for blogs. The more advice you offer, the more content and keywords your blog will have, and the better it is likely to be ranked.

Commenting on forums where appropriate is another great way of dropping a few hints and tips for people to read. All these comments, answers, hints and tips help to increase your relationship with your publics online.

Alternatively, you can organise a webinar. This is very similar to standing up and giving a presentation, but online. You just need some screen sharing software, a computer with microphone, you and your presentation. It takes a little organising to get the attendees, but it is well worth doing as it really helps engage your publics.

Every now and then you may get thanked for your help, some of these thanks may come in the form of a testimonial, and Linked In again has a dedicated area for testimonials. There is no reason you cannot use Social media to reinforce the good news that is being spread about your company. With your customers’ permission, you can add this to your website, or your traditional portfolio, but you can also use Twitter and Facebook to tell the world you did a great job!

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Sponsorship

Sponsoring a local charity, school or sports group can really raise your profile. You can donate products or services, money or just time, but the benefits of sponsorship, no matter how small, are very real.

Of course you have the benefit of increased exposure to all the people within that community, and then you have their extended communities too. For example if you sponsored a local school, their community would be the children, teachers, parents, governors etc. Their extended community includes relatives of each of these, other suppliers, and if they have a newsletter that goes out to the local area, then potentially all of those people too.

But the biggest personal benefit you get is feel good factor, knowing that you and your company has acted with Social Responsibility, and knowing that what you have given has benefitted others who really needed your help.

With regards to traditional PR opportunities, this is an area that most PR companies really advocate. Look at the big names on our television screens, they all support a charity of some description, because it increases their visibility, and makes them appear to be caring and considerate, be it a personality or a large company, they all support a charity of choice. The Charitable Sponsorship is a small part of the PR campaign, the word of your good deed is then promoted through various mediums to gain a good reputation for you and your business.

Online, you can do a similar thing. Once you have the correct approvals from our chosen charity, you can issue an online press release. Once written, this press release can be posted on many press release websites. More about online press releases can be found further on in this whitepaper.

Furthermore, your online press release would be similar to your offline press release, so whilst you are posting this to the inline websites, perhaps you can email this to the local press too.

In addition to this, you can announce your good deed on your choice of Social networking websites, and also to your Blog. You can see that we are starting to build up a checklist of things we can do in addition to traditional techniques.

Media Relations

When you consider the media, we automatically think of television, radio and the newspapers. Online, there is an opportunity for all businesses to own their own television station, their own radio station and to publish press releases online as well.

With video download websites such as YouTube, we can all post videos online to increase our exposure on the web, and to enhance our credibility too. A good quality video can also be embedded into your website to showcase what you do. Some people are lucky enough to have the opportunity to appear on television, and can use that footage on their own video channel, as long as you have the appropriate written approvals in place. Video upload websites also offer the opportunity to use keywords in order that your video can be found. This in turn increases the opportunity of your business visibility on the internet.

Similarly, we can do the same with audio files, by creating a podcast. The beauty of a podcast is that it can be downloaded and the listener can tune in to your “radio station” whenever and wherever they want, and as many times as they want. Mobile phones and MP3 players mean that podcasts are the choice of more people than ever before.

Media Relations - Press Releases

Online Press releases are a great way to gain notoriety. Journalists are always looking for a new story, and if they don't have to write it themselves, it really helps.

The Press are looking for a story that perhaps has feel good factor, and that may offer something of value or interest to their audience. Remember, journalists are not just from the national papers, but could be from specialist magazines, like “Go Fishing” or “Women and Home”. Your story could well be of interest to someone, somewhere.

Journalists and publishers subscribe to online press release website as standard. In addition to a great story, they are looking for a really catchy headline and great images to go with them too.

We can use press releases to showcase our news, our awards, our public speaking, our charitable donations... In fact anything that you would ask the press if they were interested in publishing offline, we can do the same online.

There is no guarantee that your story will get picked and a lot of them will not, but you are pretty much guaranteed additional online exposure, because all these stories are jam packed with keywords and key phrases that are indexed by the search engines.

Viral Campaigns

Traditional PR can include a viral campaign, sometimes called a “Word of Mouth” campaign. This relies on people to pass the word around to get a product or service known. It generally starts with major news on the traditional platforms.

Of course, with the internet, emails and Social media a viral campaign is so much easier to do. There are many examples of many companies creating viral campaigns, who use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Twitter is great for spreading news quickly, with re-tweeting of a post being the simplest form. If you look at blogs, often these are linked to twitter in order that a blog link can be re-tweeted too.

Facebook is great for Viral Marketing and competitions can really fly if the prize is good, or the competition is unusual. Facebook is also great for communicating an event; if the settings are in your favour, then your event can appear on your friend’s pages and their friends’ pages too. This means your event can spread very quickly indeed.

Again, YouTube is also good for viral campaigns. Certain videos gain notoriety very quickly, and generally they are witty but informative. So, when you are uploading your video onto your channel, you may want to add a touch of humour if it is appropriate for your business, if nothing else your video will be humanised.

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Conclusion

Traditional PR is a great way to get your company noticed. But with the trend towards using Social Media more and more, it is important to know how to use them together to maximise the impact and effect they can have.

If you can do something to increase your PR offline, there is a Social Media equivalent online. Below is a checklist of things you can do to promote the good news that is happening within your business (it is not exclusive, and we do not endorse them, they are simply useful tools that you could consider):

- Facebook
- Linked In
- Twitter
- Blog
- Press Release
- Online Forums and Social Sites
- Webinar
- YouTube
- Podcast

About the Author



Tracy has been a WSI Digital & Internet Marketing Consultant for around 6 years and runs a very successful business in Northampton, UK.

Tracy uses PR in her business and for her customers and has achieved many successes on their behalf.

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