

Choosing the right PR agency



By [Ronelle Bester](#)

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Companies looking to further their corporate communications strategies serve to benefit greatly from appointing the correct public relations agency. PR is a long-term investment, so it's vital that you make the right decisions when it comes to deciding whom to hire.

Take the following points into consideration:

What can PR do for your business?

Before setting out to appoint a PR agency, it is vital that you establish a thorough understanding of PR practices, and ensure that your business objectives can be most successfully met through the implementation of an effective PR strategy, rather than traditional advertising and below-the-line marketing campaigns.

Large vs. small?

In the world of PR, bigger is not always better. Whilst larger, more established agencies may provide you with a level of reassurance in terms of high level clients and resources, boutique agencies can end up being a better choice, particularly if your business falls within a specific industry sector.

PR campaigns can succeed and fail based on the strength of an agency's media relationships, and specialist agencies tend to have more solid contacts within pertinent fields. Not only that, but they generally demonstrate a better understanding of the industry as a whole, and are able to more effectively identify key news angles and story pitches for your brand.

Large agencies also tend to allocate accounts to more junior members of staff, whilst smaller agencies usually have all hands on deck, with senior management playing a key role in the actual execution of PR campaigns.

What do journalists say?

Journalists are the key to the success of your PR campaign, and have the final say in terms of providing coverage for your brand. Whilst desktop research is likely to reveal a wide range of PR agencies, all boasting spotless track records and excellent results, you are likely to get the most accurate assessment of your prospective PR agency by speaking to journalists themselves.

Should they feel that the agency in question provides clear, pertinent communications and well-tailored story pitches, it's

fair to say that the chances of them executing a successful PR campaign are high.

Relationships are key

Ultimately, the PR agency you appoint will be acting as the public voice of your brand, and it's imperative that you are mutually engaged and aligned towards a common goal. Good relationships are very important, and likely to yield more positive results, with agencies more prone to go the extra mile for clients they like on a personal level.

Management commitment

It is imperative that PR is a strategic management decision and that they are involved in the process. PR will not be effective if the agency has to deal with a junior person only as PR needs to be aligned with the business' strategies.

PR is also a significant commitment for the chosen company spokesperson in terms of time spent to brief a copywriter, availability for interviews with the media and the effort to research topics and approve articles. Make sure beforehand that the spokesperson understands this and confirms his or her dedication to the process.

Expectation management

It's important to ascertain what can be realistically achieved in terms of coverage for your brand, so you should be looking for proposals which take into account both the potential strengths and weaknesses of your brand.

Nothing is ever guaranteed in the world of media, and PR agencies that understand and acknowledge this are best equipped to become custodians of your brand.

Long vs. short term?

PR is a long-term investment, and it's unlikely that you'll start seeing its full value until at least three months down the line, taking into account magazine lead-times and campaign preparation. An ever-changing news agenda also means that the nature of your communications strategy is likely to adapt and evolve accordingly.

As such, it's recommended that you do your homework thoroughly, and make a long-term investment in your agency of choice. It's likely to pay off in the end!

ABOUT RONELLE BESTER

Ronelle Bester, MD of Red Ribbon Communications, started her career in technology at Dimension Data as marketing manager of the Western Cape. She has a BTech degree in public relations from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and has lectured in public relations at both the University of South Africa and Varsity College. Email Ronelle at ronelle@redribboncommunications.co.za, read her blog and follow her on Twitter at @ronelle.

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