

Chapter 1

The Power of PR

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the meaning of public relations
- ▶ Exploring what a PR person does
- ▶ Looking at the differences between PR and advertising

When I was a young man of 24 and almost a complete beginner at public relations, I got on the front page of *USA Today* with a feature story about the baseball strike and a color photograph of my partner and myself. That piece put my then-fledgling PR firm on the map, so to speak, and helped advance my career in the PR business.

At the time, no one had heard of my agency or me, and I had no press contacts with *USA Today* — or any other major media. That lack of contacts could easily have become a major stumbling block for our PR firm in getting new clients: The agency did good work, but larger corporate prospects would naturally — and in my opinion, naively — ask, “Who are your key media contacts?” When I confessed that I didn’t know the editor in chief of the *New York Times* and wasn’t invited to Oprah’s dinner parties, potential clients could have easily lost interest and chosen other firms. This problem was one I wanted to solve as quickly as possible.

So how did I get *USA Today* to put my picture on the cover? At the time, a Major League Baseball strike was the news of the day. My partner and I sent out a press announcement and called the media to announce that we had formed a new organization, called Strike Back, to protest the baseball strike. The premise was simple: For every day the Major League players refused to play, we would boycott their games for one day when the players did return to work.

Did I do this for the love of the game? Yes — partially. But it certainly wasn’t lost on me that turning ourselves into a national news story would (1) demonstrate the type of PR we practice, (2) showcase our ability to get media exposure, and (3) attract new business. *USA Today* was the first big media placement for my agency, and it got potential clients to pay attention to the new kids on the PR block.

This anecdote illustrates three basic PR principles that form the core of our agency philosophy and the how-to PR techniques in this book:

- ✔ **You have to be different.** The media and the public are drowning in data but starved for amusement. Conventional publicity strategies get lost in the noise. You have to find a creative way to stand out from the crowd and get noticed — and Strike Back is just one of dozens of examples I show you throughout this book.
- ✔ **Getting publicity is fun, but it's a waste of time and money if it doesn't help you achieve your marketing objective.** If getting on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal* doesn't help you make more money or increase your firm's market share, is it really worth the trouble? In the case of Strike Back, the campaign did achieve a specific objective: getting corporate PR clients to take our PR firm seriously and hire us, despite the fact that we had fewer clients, fewer years of experience, and a fraction of the media contacts of the big PR firms.
- ✔ **You don't have to have media contacts to get big-time publicity.** (Strike Back certainly helped us communicate this principle to our own potential clients!) A creative idea, a clear marketing goal, and effective implementation are what count. You don't have to know Joe TV Star to get on his TV show; you just have to come up with an idea that will interest his producer. So what if you're a small business and you don't have time to schmooze the press? In *Public Relations For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, you find out how to get all the publicity you need to achieve your marketing objectives — without making public relations your full-time job.

Who Needs PR, Anyway?

If you have all the business you will ever want and are rich beyond the dreams of avarice, you may not need public relations.

A crisis is an obvious exception. A lot of my work as a PR professional is in response to clients who have an immediate PR crisis to solve, like a tainted shipment of food products or a toy posing an unexpected safety risk to children because of a product defect. So in some cases, even if your sales are skyrocketing and you don't need to promote yourself, you may want to engage in PR activities to avoid negative publicity or correct any bad press that comes your way. (See Chapter 21 for crisis management.) Other reasons a business or person may want to use PR are

- ✔ To grow the business
- ✔ To make more money
- ✔ To increase sales

Doctors, lawyers, dentists, chiropractors, therapists, and other professionals can promote their practices with public relations. PR is used with virtually every product category, from construction equipment and industrial goods to food, health and beauty products, healthcare, travel, tourism, real estate, and investments. In high-tech industries, everyone from hardware manufacturers to software companies, e-commerce Web sites, and service providers has benefited enormously from the power of PR.

So one perspective of PR concerns a person's goals, where she is now, and where she wants to be. Good PR can turn marginal businesses into profitable ones and ordinary folks into millionaires.

Another perspective of PR has to do with resources. If a business has an advertising budget that approaches infinity (or say, 20 million dollars or more) and it won't miss the money if it's spent, the business can probably get its message across without relying on the subtler medium of PR. That doesn't mean it *shouldn't* use PR as part of its marketing mix, however: Many clients find that a relatively modest investment in PR greatly extends the reach of their total promotional program.



And cost, frankly, is one of the great appeals of PR to both small businesses and large corporations alike. Small businesses with limited budgets simply can't come close to matching the ad budgets of larger competitors. PR can help them level the playing field and get the same or better promotional bang for a lot fewer bucks.

As for the big corporations, if you work for one, you know that getting more money in the marketing budget is always an uphill battle. With PR, you can achieve the objectives senior managers want even if they don't give you the money you think you need to do it.

Beyond Stunts: The Real Value of PR

It's fun to see stunts like Calvin Klein's models swimming in a perfume bottle in Times Square and hot products like the iPod get truckloads of front-page and prime time coverage. Obviously, PR can work wonders for those who seek publicity for publicity's sake. (See Chapter 19 for more on staging publicity events.)

Actually, that's the easy part of public relations. The real value of PR is using it to solve a real-life marketing situation for a real product, service, organization, brand, or image. PR can work for any and every industry, from florists to funeral directors, software to soft ice cream. Any organization or individual with a message to deliver or a goal to achieve can benefit from a PR effort. You don't even need a license or special certification to practice PR — this book shows you how.



You don't need a creative or unusual product to gain publicity; you just need a creative idea that meets two criteria:

- ✓ It's newsworthy.
- ✓ It communicates the marketing message.

Creative PR, with proper execution, can work wonders for manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, resellers, agents, service companies, and professional practices in any industry. I delve into marketing messages in detail in Part II of this book, but here's a quick example.

British Knights wanted a way to sell more of its sneakers to kids. As a seasonal promotion, the company sent out press releases announcing an unusual "Summer Exchange" program: Parents who were concerned that their kids were spending too much time indoors watching TV and playing video games, rather than getting wholesome exercise playing outdoors, could mail British Knights their TV remote control and receive in return a brand-new pair of British Knight sneakers. (The remote control was mailed back to participants with the sneakers at the end of the summer.)

In another PR campaign, also successful, British Knights sponsored a World's Smelliest Socks Contest. The top ten winners — individuals who sent in the stinkiest socks — won free British Knights sneakers for three years.

Stinky socks? Joseph J. Kelley, a speechwriter for President Dwight Eisenhower, once said, "There is a kernel of interest in everything God created." How true! Every product or service, no matter how mundane, contains a PR hook or angle if you think creatively. Even sneakers.

Make a graph of your sales by week. If the graph is smooth and your sales are consistent, your marketing is probably steady and continual. But if the sales curve has peaks and valleys, you may need to increase the frequency of marketing communications to smooth out the bumps and eliminate the lows. PR is perhaps the best means of getting your message out on a continual basis and eliminating periodic sales slumps.

The Relationship between PR and the Media

Publicity certainly is free advertising, but it's also legitimate news. By alerting the media to newsworthy events, products, services, and people, you can

prompt an editor to cover everything from the opening of a new restaurant to the publication of a new catalog, from the techniques of an acupuncturist to the makings of a new trend.

In the early days of public relations, many PR practitioners held the belief that their job was to get the client's name in the papers as prominently and frequently as they could. George M. Cohan, the famous composer, knew how PR worked. "I don't care what they [the media] call me," he said, "so long as they mention my name." Actress Katharine Hepburn gave that idea a twist, remarking, "I don't care what is written about me so long as it isn't true."

A more recent and, to my mind, relevant definition states, "Public relations is the business of creating public opinion for private advantage." At my PR agency, Jericho Communications, we think of PR as "using the media to achieve a client's marketing objective." By practicing what you find in this book, you can use PR to communicate your message, build your image, motivate desired behavior, and generate greater revenues and profits.

Instead of putting up signs, sending banner ads across people's computer screens, or holding sales rallies, PR practitioners persuade the media to publish and distribute stories, articles, news, and information that promotes our clients' goals — whether it's to attract venture capital to a dot-com start-up or help Domino's Pizza sell more pizzas. I have sometimes cynically told new clients that we exploit the media on their behalf. But strictly speaking, that isn't true, because it's the media — not the publicist — who is the final judge of what appears in print or on the air.

More accurately, public relations is, at its best, a win-win partnership among publicists, the clients whose products they promote, and journalists. Here's how that partnership works:

The journalists have too much to do and not enough time to do it. Every day they must fill pages or airtime with stories that interest, entertain, and inform their readership, viewers, or listeners. The deadlines are too tight, and the editors and reporters are overworked.

The publicists step in and offer assistance by providing what journalists need — ideas, information, interviews, and even ready-made stories — in abundant supply and absolutely free. The media choose from among the press releases, use them as is or reworked, and discard the rest — with no cost or obligation to the publicists who supply the releases. The media can fill their pages and airtime, meet deadlines, keep their audiences happy and entertained, and thereby deliver a large audience to the advertisers. (To find out how to write a press release that the media will use, see Chapter 8.)

Publicity Plus: The Many Components of PR

Public relations is more than just pitching stories to the media or mailing out press releases. The PR umbrella covers a number of related activities, all of which are concerned with communicating specific messages to specific target audiences. If you're the PR person at ABC Enterprises, you're responsible for managing communications between your company and your public.

The label *public relations* typically encompasses the following:

- ✔ **Research:** You have to thoroughly understand not only your company but also your customers and potential customers. What do you offer that is unique or special? What are customers looking for? And how well do you fill those needs? Market research and an internal company audit are the starting points of successful PR campaigns. For more on the research and audit processes, see Chapter 2.
- ✔ **Strategic planning:** Define each target audience, your marketing objectives for that group, and the messages you must communicate in support of those marketing objectives. Chapter 2 outlines this planning process.
- ✔ **Publicity:** For most small businesses, the central public relations activity is publicity — getting visibility for your products, the company, and the owners in print and broadcast media. I define *publicity* as “proactive management and placement of information in the media used to protect and enhance a brand or reputation.” Simply put, this means getting ink and airtime. (See Chapters 13 through 19.)
- ✔ **Community relations:** Recently, I saw a TV news report about local citizens protesting a big retail chain that wanted to build a store in their town, because it would wipe out a popular wooded area with a pond. That chain has a community relations problem in that town, and the PR professional's job is to find a favorable solution that will get the store built while preserving the store's goodwill with the citizens.
- ✔ **Government relations:** Community relations often involves relations with the local government, and PR people are often called upon to help companies improve their relationships with local, state, federal, and even foreign governments.
- ✔ **Internal relations:** Employees are the internal audience. With the unemployment rate at an all-time low, good employees are hard to find, and a good public relations program job can help improve loyalty and retain more of them.
- ✔ **Investor relations:** With the incredible stock market volatility of 2000, or more recently, the events of September 11, 2001, and the hurricanes in 2005, we've all seen how emotion and public perception have the power

to send stock prices soaring or plummeting. Investor relations is the aspect of PR that communicates the company story to stock analysts and other financial professionals.

- ✓ **Stakeholder relations:** A *stakeholder* is anyone or any organization that holds a stake in how well your company performs. A key vendor is a stakeholder; rumors that you are financially shaky may cause them to restrict your credit terms. Other key stakeholders can include top consultants, board members, your bank, suppliers, sales representatives, distributors, and industry gurus.
- ✓ **Charitable causes:** When a company gives to charity, it wants to help the cause, but it also wants to be recognized for its contribution. PR specialists can help you get maximum publicity and goodwill from the time, effort, and funds you donate.
- ✓ **Communications training:** In large corporations, PR specialists may spend a lot of time coaching senior executives in dealing with the media and other communications skills. The specialists may also advise the executives on strategy for day-to-day PR as well as PR crises.

What PR Is Not

Public relations is a business tool that often gets confused with marketing and advertising, two related but very distinct activities. In the following sections, I clear up the differences for you.

Marketing: The four Ps

Marketing is typically defined by the Four Ps — product, price, place (channels of distribution), and promotion.

- ✓ **Product** refers to the physical product and its packaging. With many products — fruit juice, for instance — the packaging is a key product differentiator: Juice boxes are a separate product category from frozen concentrate. Service can also be an integral part of a product. For example, L.L. Bean has gained widespread fame publicizing its lifetime guarantee on everything it sells.
- ✓ **Price** is what you charge for the product.
- ✓ **Place** refers to channels of distribution — in other words, where the product is sold. Do you sell at a retail store or on a Web site? Do customers buy the product directly from you or through an agent or distributor?
- ✓ **Promotion** consists of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, and, of course, public relations.

So as you can see, public relations is a part of promotion under the larger umbrella of marketing.

Paying for advertising while PR is (practically) free

Several characteristics separate public relations from advertising, but one fundamental difference is this: Advertising is paid; public relations is free. When you run an advertisement for your company, you pay for the space; when your press release prompts a newspaper to write an article about your company, you don't pay for that coverage.

Of course, PR is not absolutely free of cost. Your public relations staff member or your outside PR agency has to be paid for services. But compared to the megadollars of advertising campaigns, PR is quite a bargain. Many small- and medium-size businesses that can afford only limited advertising (with limited results) can do much more PR — and get better results — on a fraction of the budget they'd spend on paid advertising.

So the difference in cost is fundamental. But another distinction between PR and advertising gets less attention, though I think it's equally important: Advertising is clearly identified in the media as a paid promotion — readers and viewers know that it is a promotional message paid for by a sponsor. Publicity, by comparison, is not identified as a paid promotion. Even though a story about a product or organization may have resulted from a publicity campaign, the article or report never acknowledges that fact. (For instance, you almost never see an article in a newspaper or a magazine say, "According to a press release sent by the PR department of So-and-So Corporation. . . .")

Thanks for the lousy press coverage!

Clergymen across the United States denounced actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) as the "whore of Babylon," which, much to their dismay, generated massive attendance at her performances. After a Chicago bishop delivered a particularly critical speech against Bernhardt, which was widely reported in the press, the

actress sent him a \$200 check along with the following note, as recounted by Clifton Fadiman in *The Little Brown Book of Anecdotes*: "I am accustomed, when I bring an attraction to your town, to spend \$400 on advertising. As you have done half the advertising for me, I enclose \$200 for your parish."

Four other key differences between PR and advertising are

- ✓ Control
- ✓ Repetition
- ✓ Credibility
- ✓ Attractiveness

Sometimes these distinctions mean an advantage for PR, sometimes not. In the following sections, I go into more detail on each of these differences.

Control

When you advertise, you have almost total control over the content, format, timing, and size of your message. You specify how big your ad is and when it runs. You write the copy and design the layout, and your material appears exactly as you created it. With public relations, on the other hand, you have almost no control over the content, format, timing, and size of your message as it appears in the media. You can write whatever you want in your press release, but you can't dictate to the newspaper how it is printed or used, nor can you review or approve any changes made. You provide the press with written materials that they use (or don't use) in any way they see fit. Your press release may appear verbatim in one magazine but may be rewritten almost beyond recognition in another. One industry trade journal may write a cover story based on your material; another may not publish it at all.

Repetition

Advertising is repeatable; PR is not. The same advertisement can be repeated as many times as you want in a given publication; the same TV commercial can be broadcast night after night. With PR, a media source is going to run a given press release or cover a publicity event only *once*. To get covered again, you have to provide the media with a new story, or at least come up with a different angle or new spin on the old topic.

Credibility

Consumers are skeptical of advertising. They tend not to believe the claims made in advertising — at least that's what many consumers say. Many people believe that if your service or product is as good as you say it is, you don't need to advertise. On the other hand, people tend to take at face value what they hear on radio, see on TV, or read in the paper. They believe that if the newspaper printed it, it must be true. Because publicity is promotion in the guise of editorial, feature, or news material, people do not identify it as promotion and are, therefore, not skeptical of it; indeed, they believe it.

In many instances, media coverage of your event or story can appear to the public to be media endorsement of your organization or product — for example, a favorable story about your charity on the evening news or a good review of your software package in a computer magazine. What's more, comments or claims that would sound conceited, self-serving, and not credible if you said them about yourself in an ad seem complimentary, flattering, and impressive when the media say them about you.

Attractiveness

Publicity must have an *angle* — that is, a hook or theme that engages an editor's attention — in order for it to have a decent chance of being noticed, read, and used. Therefore, it must appeal to editors and program managers, as well as to the consumers (your sales prospects and the people who read the magazine or listen to the radio show).

An ad has to appeal to only one audience: your sales prospects. You don't care whether the media like or are interested in the ad, because they have already agreed to run it in exchange for a given amount of money.

Key Audiences PR Can Reach

How far does PR reach? Public relations can connect you with anyone who reads a publication, listens to radio, watches TV, or rides the Internet — in short, anyone who is exposed to the media, which in the United States means just about everyone.

PR, therefore, has the broadest reach of perhaps any element of the marketing mix. Web sites and banner ads reach only those people connected to the Internet, which amazingly is fewer than 5 percent of the world's population. Direct mail reaches only people whose names are on mailing lists, and in many countries, mailing lists are not available for rental.



But almost everyone, everywhere, reads a newspaper or magazine, or watches TV. That's why PR is effective at targeting both business and consumer audiences. The best publicity outlets for reaching consumers are radio, television, newspapers, and consumer magazines. For business, use these as well as business magazines, associations, and the Internet. If you want to appeal to a particular industry or profession, target the trade publications they read.

I like to hit a broad target, because you never know exactly what your prospect may be reading. Once, when I was with the CEO of a large corporation, I was amazed to see that when he had a copy of *USA Today*, he went to the Life section first and the Money section last — and often he never got around to

reading the Money section. I like to “surround” my prospect by being in all the media he is likely to see; that way, I have a better chance of getting my message to him with greater frequency and repetition.

Employees, of course, are a well-defined audience and reachable at any time. One of the best PR vehicles for employee communication is a company magazine or newsletter. Some large corporations even have in-house TV stations that broadcast the latest company news and information via closed-circuit TV.

Investors and members of the financial community are an important PR audience for publicly traded corporations, and press releases are the way to reach them, says *Business Week*. “Once a relatively mundane communication device, a press release now has the might to dramatically drive the price of a stock,” says the respected business magazine. (Underscoring the power of press releases, the Securities and Exchange Commission has even sued companies for posting fake press releases containing recommendations to buy their stock.)

Again, PR’s high credibility takes the credit. The financial community and potential buyers are much more apt to believe and act upon a column in the *Wall Street Journal* than yet another image advertisement by a dot-com company. And a survey by the Public Relations Society of America shows that investors rate a story in a financial or business newspaper as second only to a company’s own annual report (also a PR vehicle) when it comes to credibility.

The Changing Role of PR in the Marketing Mix Today

The public relations industry is evolving, driven by new market realities. PR is finally taking a step forward, stretching its capabilities and its role in the overall marketing mix that consists of PR, advertising, Internet marketing, direct marketing, and sales promotion.

From the day I started my PR firm in 1985, I have believed that public relations can play a greater role in clients’ good fortune than tradition dictates. The reason my agency has delivered so much media exposure to clients is that I’m not afraid to break the “rules” of traditional PR, which is more worried about churning out paper (for example, routine press releases such as “Joe Smith Appointed Product Manager”) than contributing to the bottom line. While other marketing genres have shown how to invent successful new ways to do business, many public relations professionals have seemed to care more about following rules. And let’s face it: Same-old same-old doesn’t get anyone’s audience excited.

Where public relations is routine, frankly, I blame PR professionals who are too willing to accept a back seat for the successes of their art. In fairness, I should say that some of them have it tough, receiving very little credit for anything good and all the blame for everything that goes wrong at a company. And that being the case, when PR executives grow averse to risk and creativity you can chalk it up to human nature. Going beyond status quo simply holds nothing for them. The bad part is they often give their outside PR counselors very little room to move, too.

But today, in the fast-paced e-commerce world — where online and offline clients must reach out to grab their target audiences and the investor community — public relations has risen in importance. With this new importance comes more freedom. All of a sudden, the value of creative public relations is apparent. The ability to use what I consider the most credible form of marketing in ways that extend way past the standard is now revered.

So, for the first time in a long time, PR practitioners who can do more than just communicate to an audience — people who can create an emotional effect that *motivates* an audience — are free to ply their craft to its fullest potential.

As you can see, I'm passionate about PR. You're using this book because — just maybe — you're passionate about public relations, too. My goal is to give you all the tools you need to turn that passion into results.

Assessing Your Situation: How to Tell When PR Is the Missing (Or Weak) Ingredient

What are the telltale signs that PR is the weak point in your company's marketing communications chain? Ask yourself the following questions, and if you answer yes to any of them, I highly recommend that you read through this book and focus for a bit on getting your PR department in shape.

- ✓ **Do your competitors seem to get all the exposure in newspapers, magazines, and the trade press? Are you consistently left out of industry roundups, product listings, and vendor resource guides?** Maybe the press omits you because they don't know about you. Maybe it's time to let them know. (See Chapter 6 for ideas about which tactics to use to get the word out.)

- ✔ **Do your mailings unleash a stampede of responses? Is your Web site choked with traffic?** PR works hand in hand with other kinds of promotions. The better your PR visibility, the more your other marketing communications efforts will pull in responses. Low response rates may not be the result of a bad ad or mailer. That deafening silence could mean that the people reading your ad or receiving your mailing have never heard of you. (See the overview of a PR plan in Chapter 2.)
- ✔ **Do your people in the field find it easy or hard to get deals done (or doors opened)? Do they hear “I’ve never heard of your company” from prospects?** Good PR establishes your firm as a player in the prospect’s mind before the salesperson calls. If you don’t have good PR, your people may meet with increased resistance. (Placing feature articles is great for wide exposure. Find out how in Chapter 9.)
- ✔ **Do your vendors list you as one of their customers?** If not, maybe they don’t think your name is big enough to impress other potential customers. That’s a sign you need to strengthen your corporate brand in the marketplace. (And public speaking will help you do that. Check out Chapter 10.)
- ✔ **If you’re a public company, do major brokerages follow your stock?** When you tell your company story to analysts, do they eagerly take notes or stare at you with blank looks? When Wall Street doesn’t understand the value in your company, the investor relations side of PR can help fix the problem. (See Chapter 11 for more ideas about getting your message out.)
- ✔ **Do audiences see your company the way you are today or the way you want to become tomorrow?** Or do they see you as you used to be? PR can help to change your image in the marketplace. (Using the newest media tools can bolster your image. You find out which ones to focus on in Chapter 17.)
- ✔ **Do headhunters try to woo you away to other companies?** Especially in high-tech industries, headhunters raid the hot companies first. You don’t want headhunters recruiting your employees (unless it’s you and the pay is fantastic!), but you do want to be considered a hot company, don’t you? (See Chapter 23.)

Cold-call classic

A classic McGraw-Hill ad shows a prospective customer sitting in a chair, staring straight at the camera and saying, “I don’t know you, I don’t know your company, I don’t know your product.

Now — what is it you wanted to sell me?” Better visibility through public relations can warm up cold prospects like this one, making the salesperson’s job much easier.

