

The Power Of PR

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company he could not name. “This was not about teaching how to pitch the *Wall Street Journal*, but how you can be a brand within your company, ways in which to break out and grow and any possible threats to the business.”

Cody was careful not to fall into PR-speak and was also quick to point out that Peppercom has partnerships with a northern California-based sales training company (**Harte Associates**) and a Florida-based security-consulting firm (**Tequest**). “You’re going to get a lot of pushback if you’re just talking about PR,” he says. “Showing you work directly with other business disciplines disarms executives, who then feel, ‘I’m not just listening to PR spiel, but someone who understands sales.’” (*For tips on selling PR, see sidebar.*)

By branching out Peppercom has been able to show these clients how PR isn’t just necessarily about banging about press releases, babysitting pampered executives who are suspicious of the media or putting out fires (after the damage has been done).

Similar opportunities abound for PR execs to demonstrate the power of PR, but they first have to fundamentally alter their thinking. “This is not media by the pound,” Cody says, “but connecting PR to a higher level and making it more relevant. For smart firms comfortable working in a non-media environment, there are a lot of areas to exploit.”

Michael Kempner, president-CEO of **MWW Group** (East Rutherford, N.J.), says part of the problem in selling PR is that many firms obsess on tactics without first understanding the client’s ultimate business goals.

Another stumbling block: being able to distinguish PR from advertising, which offers

much more of a comfort zone for C-level execs. “In advertising you can guarantee a placement but you can’t guarantee success, you can control the message but can’t control consumer response,” Kempner says. “In PR, you don’t necessarily control the message, but there’s much more control than people believe.”

He adds: “PR people are notoriously bad in merchandising their success. It’s a matter of making sure the CEO or COO understand what happened — and its value and doing so immediately. The CMO knows immediately if an ad hit; he shouldn’t have to wait a week to find out if he got exposure through PR. We can either leave them in the dark or better sell the value.”

Farm9, (Emeryville, Calif.), a small company that provides computer security for 5% of community banks in the Western region, was looking to make inroads in the market but wasn’t getting its message out through traditional advertising.

Elizabeth Breslin, vp/sales and marketing, was able to convince her CEO about the value of hiring a PR firm rather than sticking with ads. After a brief Marian Rosales, principal and founder of **Activa PR** (San Francisco), who Breslin had worked with before joining farm9, eventually won the business.

“The key element was that she brought an understanding of the business,” Breslin says. “We’re in a very unusual space, which is monitoring computer services, which she able to express the marketplace.”

PR had such a positive effect on farm9’s media presence — via gaining more coverage in the trades vis-à-vis rivals — that the company has shifted practically its entire marketing budget to PR from advertising and

PARTNERING PR STRATEGICALLY: THINK BIG, ACT SMALL

By John Baldoni/Baldoni Consulting LLC



PR can and should play a tactical role in product launches and customer-relationship management, of course, but those tactics must be rooted in the larger goals of what the enterprise wants to accomplish, e.g., increased revenues, improved margins and greater market share. When you know and act in the big picture, you can make informed decisions about how involved to become in specific tactics. You then spend PR funds wisely and cooperatively across business functions. Here are some things to consider:

- **Think big.** Ask the big question: Where is the company headed and how can communications help it get there? For example, if the company wants to position itself as the leader in its field, communications around products, people and performance must communicate leadership. Look for ways your company to blaze the trail others in the industry want to follow.
- **Act small.** As important as it is to think strategically, PR generates results through its tactics, e.g., the creation of campaigns and events. You want to touch people where they live, work with information that is credible and actionable, and create events that are tangible and enjoyable. Above all, PR must strengthen the brand by raising awareness and reinforcing equity.
- **Be creative.** Edward Bernays taught us to think out of the box. While many in our profession grew up in journalism, many of our next-generation practitioners did not. Their world has been shaped by all forms of electronic media. While they use it, they also are skeptical of it. Therefore, they value an experience more than just simple media. For this reason, you want to create events where people can test a product, use a service or talk to people like themselves who have.

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traditional marketing. “In terms of ROI, PR has given a much more tangible results,” Breslin says. “I can take an article and send to a potential client or existing client and they’ll know we’re in business and moving forward. That’s more than 100 ads could ever do.”

Rosales says PR has to sell more on value and not just products and services. “You need to think like a manager and what keeps them up at night,” she says. “It’s also an educational process, because

a lot of people think PR is just hype.” **PRN**

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