



## **Public Relations – It’s more than just a press release**

**By Jodi Horton, APR, Fellow PRSA**

Although my client list is composed primarily of people with whom I’ve had long-standing relationships – partnerships that have grown more productive over a period of months and years – from time to time, I receive a call from a local businessperson who is looking for “some PR.”

Typically, what these callers really want is publicity, one-shot exposure for a sales event or a special company anniversary. There’s nothing wrong with that – nothing at all – but I’m here to tell you that you can expect a good deal more than a press release from a public relations professional.

So, what *can* you expect for your money?

At the first session, a seasoned public relations counselor will listen carefully to the outcome you expect from the project. She will sit with you in your place of business and take a 360-degree mental snapshot of what you do and how you do it. She’ll look at how your product or service fits into the local economy and into the community, what people see when they come to your office or showroom, what kind of communications you’ve sent out in the past and what your communications needs will be in the foreseeable future. He may look at your website and other electronic interactions, what you tell your employees about your business and how you tell them.

In short, public relations is about examining everything you do when you interact with others and the visual and verbal messages you are sending – sometimes without even thinking about it – and then tweaking things here and there so you are, in fact, walking the talk before that press release you wanted is even out the door.

Public relations folks are a really creative lot. We know that there are plenty of ways to get the word out about your business that don’t cost a fortune. For example, we can guide you to clubs and organizations where your target customers may be found, groups that would probably be delighted to have you speak at a meeting. You have the knowledge to do that – and we can train you to do it really well. You might also consider adopting a company-wide charitable endeavor, volunteering for a good cause or serving as a drop-off point for gently used eyeglasses or new toys or small items of durable medical equipment targeted for Tucson’s less fortunate residents. We can help spread the word about those activities, let people know how much you care about the community in which you live and work and inspire others to follow your example.

Is this the year you'll be ready for a complete communications overhaul – a new look, fresh new copy – or some crisis planning for your company? Public relations professionals stand ready to direct those efforts, too. Public relations pros are trained to write and edit, to create and manage events, to work with graphic designers and printers and other third-party providers on your behalf, and also to strategize about the best way to use the time and money you've budgeted to reach your audiences. Some of us have niche practices and some like to do it all, so that's a question you'll always want to ask during the selection process.

How do you find a public relations professional? One way is to visit the website of the Public Relations Society of America's Southern Arizona Chapter and review the membership directory. That "APR" after some names indicates that those individuals have been accredited by the Society after a period of study and testing to ensure their familiarity with best practices in the field and their ability to apply their knowledge to real-world situations. However, all members of the Society subscribe to a code of ethical conduct and their presence on the member list indicates a wish to grow in the profession and stay abreast of new ways, tools and tactics to serve clients ever better.

Does all this sound too good to be true? In the interest of full disclosure, here's the flip side: A public relations professional will never, ever lie to you, or to anyone else on your behalf. Not even one sweet little fib. If your ad is not as effective as it might be or the ambience in your showroom isn't living up to the image you want to project, we'll tell you. If your logo is old fashioned and the type style you've selected is too in-your-face, you'll hear it from us. Because the two things PR people do best are to act as your advocate and to ensure that you have something that's truly worth advocating for.

Those of us who are lucky enough to make our living in the professional practice of public relations truly enjoy helping others to be the best they can be. If you are ready to take your business to the next level or simply want to polish up your image, hiring a PR pro just might be the best investment you could make!

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