

*As seen in "Leadership Exchange" – the magazine of the
Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators
April 2003, Volume 1, Issue 1*

Experiencing the Benefits of Public Relations

By

Robert N. Kohn and Lawrence M. Kohn

Too often professionals fail to include public relations in their marketing plans. And that's a big mistake because public relations is a remarkably practical and undeniably powerful tool that, if properly implemented, will dramatically enhance marketing success. The purpose of this article is to provide a greater understanding of the benefits of public relations and the key characteristics to look for in a potential public relations professional.

A major aspect of public relations is the process of contacting publishers, producers, reporters, editors and program chairs to arrange interviews, profiles quotes, articles, and speeches.

There are many obstacles that interfere with the pursuit of public relations. One obstacle is **limited awareness** of all of the opportunities that exist. People tend to think of media exposure as major exposure such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Barons*, or *Forbes*. This perception makes media exposure feel out of reach. Although some major media outlets may be long shots, there are a variety of accessible, well- targeted media opportunities eager for new names and ideas.

Another media myth is a **lack of confidence** in identifying topics of interest to the public. This is remarkably unjustified. Professionals are in the business of solving problems. The problems they solve for their clients are examples of problems that others may face now or in the future. **Every problem** holds the seed of a public relations effort. Also, it is important to remember that the strategy is to get exposure to specific audiences. Therefore, a subject does not need to be interesting to everyone - just the targets.

One more media-related obstacle is the concern that media exposure **requires divulging confidential information** about clients. While some media outlets do like to get into the specifics, most outlets don't require confidential information. They are simply looking to bring value to their audience.

The most significant obstacle to public relations is that people **don't appreciate the profound impact** it has on their ability to create - and keep - quality clients. The benefits are sometimes hidden because of the concern that the results of public relations cannot be measured. The truth is that you **can** measure many public relations activities such as the attendance at seminars, the number of articles published, the number of speeches implemented, the calls that come in from media exposure, etc.

While there *are* aspects of public relations that are difficult to measure, measuring results is not necessarily the best way to make a decision about an investment in your practice. For example, you can't measure the value of your knowledge. That does not mean you shouldn't invest in learning! There are several profound benefits of public relations that may be difficult-to-measure but still offer immeasurable value. Following are some of the benefits of public relations that will bring significant value to any business

The Benefits of Public Relations

Public relations provides “Reach”

Marketing is a numbers game. The greater the reach to quality targets, the greater the results. Public relations is effective because it can reach large numbers. And, since the content of public relations is often perceived as news or valuable information, a large percentage of those who are targeted will actually notice and pay attention to the message. This is very important because outreach without actually **getting through** has no value. Imagine if you were able to have your own column in the trade journal of your target industry. You could possibly reach **every** decision-maker in your target market. Similarly, when you give a speech, most members of the audience will receive your message.

Public relations provides “Frequency”

A single communication with a target is not enough to make a lasting impression. A consistent public relations campaign keeps your name in front of your targets. And, since public relations consists of so many different venues and communications techniques, it gives you the ability to have a ubiquitous presence that is always fresh and meaningful.

Public relations provides credibility

Before anyone will hire a professional, they have to develop trust. Building trust is complex and requires the development of many thoughts and feelings. Exposure through public relations undeniably increases your image of safety, leadership, authority, knowledge and (possibly most important) **prestige**. This is particularly evident in media exposure. Part of the magic of the media is that it is absolutely perceived as a **filter that selects credible experts**. Public relations builds a foundation of credibility so, when you meet a prospect who is familiar with your public image, the likelihood of bonding is substantially increased.

Public relations reinforces loyalty

Strangers aren't the only targets of public relations. When existing business allies experience positive public relations about you, they feel a sense of pride. The wisdom of their connection with you is supported by public relations.

Public relations is self-perpetuating

Publishers ask for another article. Reporters come back to quote you on other issues. Program chairs invite you back for another speech. Audience members invite you to speak at other organizations.

Public relations is delegable

One of the great obstacles to marketing yourself is that it requires so much of your time. And you're already too busy. Delegating the responsibility of contacting media outlets, arranging for speaking opportunities, and preparing articles makes public relations easy. Of course, the effectiveness of your results is directly related to your ability to hire a quality PR professional.

The Key Characteristics of a Quality Public Relations Professional

When considering the important characteristics of a public relations professional, a typical consideration is whether or not they have existing contacts within a particular market. Of course, if a public relations professional has close existing relationships, the ability to contact and influence those sources is increased. However, lack of relationships in a market does not necessarily result in an inferior public relations professional. Public relations has many facets, and quality professionals have many other characteristics besides contacts that help to fulfill all of the responsibilities of a quality campaign.

* **Creativity** PR professionals should help you develop an angle. Gatekeepers of the media want topics that are thought-provoking, educational and controversial. A quality publicist can help you look at what appear to be every day issues and identify the spark that will ignite a gatekeeper's enthusiasm. Creativity is also important in helping you identify those aspects of your practice that make you unique. Your ability to stand out from your competition will not only help you obtain exposure, it will help you motivate your prospects to retain you.

* **Thoroughness** PR professionals should be effective in identifying all of the appropriate outlets to reach your targets.

* **Writing Skills** PR professionals should have good writing skills. They must be able to write attention-grabbing press releases. They may also edit articles with language too sophisticated (or content too complex) for the intended audience. Publicists should also be able to interview you and write articles on your behalf.

* **Persistence** PR professionals should be methodical and consistent. For example, once an article opportunity has been identified, a publicist should persistently motivate you to make sure it is written. The publicist should be persistent in submitting it to appropriate outlets and tenacious in following up until it is accepted and finally published.

* **Openness** PR professionals should be willing to reveal the names of their sources. It's old-school thinking not to divulge this information.

* **Attentiveness** PR professionals should be willing to provide you with a weekly update and a monthly progress report. Even though there may be a lull in the activity, the reporting should be regular.

* **Vigilance** PR professionals should constantly be on the lookout for new opportunities that arise as a result of changes in your life and/or the marketplace.

* **Confidence** PR professionals should not require that you enter into a long-term contract. They should be confident in their ability to provide on-going value.

Public relations is an exciting component in any marketing plan. Well conceived and properly implemented, it is cost effective. And, as you invest in public relations, you'll discover that the process of building your reputation is both fun and financially rewarding.

Robert N. Kohn and Lawrence M. Kohn are principals in Kohn Communications, a Los Angeles-based marketing and management consulting firm which offers public relations services. They can be reached at www.KohnCommunications.com or (310) 652-1442.