

# How to use real people in your PR campaign

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Building a strong PR campaign around a weight management brand usually starts with a proven product or service, and a series of emotive, relatable stories. However out of all your PR tactics, it's the human interest aspect of a campaign that generally receives the most cut-through, as it provides consumers with something they can connect with as individuals. You only have to look at some of the Body Coach testimonials to know that demonstrating evidence of results is what really inspires people who want to get fit and healthy.

In an age where media consumption is at an all-time high, it's important to constantly look for new ways to relate to potential customers and clients. Recently, the drive for authenticity and the use of real people within both PR and marketing campaigns has gained momentum across a number of sectors, particularly in the weight management space.

Although established brands may have the edge in terms of presence, it's those who channel the real-life stories of their own customers and promote a realistic, healthy body-image who are likely to build a strong identity with consumers and stand the test of time in the market place.

While it is clear that weight management brands should be tapping into their own resources when it comes to working with real people, it can be difficult to understand how to manage this and ensure the results for all parties are positive and beneficial. With this in mind, we have put together our tried and tested method to creating a successful case study campaign below.

### Case Study Recruitment

In terms of recruiting real people for use within PR and marketing communications, a great starting place is to look within your own direct to consumer channels. This includes customer databases, data capture collated from competitions/website sign ups and even social media channels.

If there are no direct channels to draw from, offering consumers product trials in exchange for sharing their experiences can often help to build your database of potential case studies- though the wait for results can be lengthy. Many weight management brands offer this option on their websites, or through advertising. Some things to keep in mind throughout the recruitment process:

- Target those who have had clear success with your product or service and are already advocates of your brand, happily sharing their experiences with you directly and their own friends and family on social media.
- Contact them to ask if they would mind sharing their experience with a wider audience; would they be happy to provide a testimonial for your website? Or perhaps talk to a publication about their success story?
- Incentivise: Don't expect people to offer their time and story for free. Weight management stories require pictures, and should be treated with the same degree of sensitivity as any other real-life story. Offering a small incentive (which they receive on publication of their story) can help to build the relationship with your case study.
- If you have recruited your case study from a standing start, encourage them to document their journey in a diary and to keep with images. These will all become valuable assets when you come to tell their stories.

## Building the Story

Once you have collated a bank of customers who have given their consent to share stories with the media, you can start to work out where to place them. A good rule of thumb is to look at the following:

- The story itself – look at the reasons why someone was inspired to embark on a healthier lifestyle, was their journey an emotive one? How was their life improved because of the help they received from your brand? If you read their story and feel inspired yourself, the chances are the story will resonate well with other consumers.
- Images – a huge part of any real life story are the images of the individual as these are what really bring the feature to life. Pictures that document a person's journey, particularly if their body shape has changed positively and dramatically, can help readers visualise what your brand might also be able to do for them.
- Time – if being used for PR, your case studies must be able to dedicate time to this process; for example; answering an initial Q&A, supplying high-res images of themselves, briefing sessions, and then spending time talking to journalists on the phone for interview.

Brands such as Lighter Life pave the way when it comes to accessing their own case study resources, with regular and effective use of real life case studies appearing in the media. Their case studies convey important and meaningful key messages and calls to action to readers, which is like a sprinkling of gold dust for your brand.

### Responsibility and Credibility

Using real people in any PR campaign has its roots in ensuring any communications both protect and build brand credibility.

As part of this strategy, clearly conveying healthy and positive messages to your target audiences should be at the very core of any weight management brand's communications campaign.

For example, The Body Coach (Joe Wicks), has mastered the art of inspiring people to get fitter and healthier through nutrition and exercise by regularly encouraging his customers personally through his social media channels – providing recipes, tips, and affirmation when they do well, and likewise when they 'fall off the wagon'.

The key to the success of this brand is that everything The Body Coach communicates to his audience is both inspirational and aspirational and he uses the results of real-people to demonstrate the success of his method to keep others motivated.



## Real-Life Experts

If your brand is a weight management product as opposed to service, recruiting credible real-world experts such as a personal trainer, media doctor, or nutritionist can ensure you are offering expert advice to consumers which carries through those healthy, positive messages.

As part of positioning your weight management brand as a responsible leader in the market, experts can also consult with any potential real-life case studies to ensure they are using your products alongside a healthy eating plan and exercise regimen

A panel of brand experts can also offer tips and advice such as recipes, tips for healthy weight loss, and work out programmes for media communication, as well as providing well-rounded messaging across any direct to consumer marketing channels.

As an example, during their recent PR drive, weight management brand LighterLife secured Dr Hilary Jones as a medical adviser to the programme who was able to explain the weight loss programme in simple, engaging terms to consumers across the media and via LighterLife's social media platforms.

### How not to do it

When brands get it wrong it can be a stiff climb back to the top of the peak, and weight management company Protein World, had a bitter taste of this when they were criticised in the UK after their distinctive yellow adverts appeared on the London Underground in April.

A far cry from using real-people in their PR and advertising communication methods, Protein World featured a model in their campaign which led to more than 70,000 people signing a petition calling for the posters to be removed on the grounds that they were 'sexist' and promoted 'unrealistic body image'.

Despite the fact that the ASA ruled that the ad was not irresponsible at the time, you have to wonder about the fine line between being controversial, and ill-considered. While we all may now know about Protein World – how do consumers now perceive them as a brand?

## To summarise....

In summary, here are the key points to consider when building your real-people weight management campaign:

- Demonstrating evidence of results is what really inspires people who want to get fit and healthy – show consumers your brand works by sharing the success stories of real-people and you'll start to see the cut-through.
- When recruiting case studies, target those who have had clear success with your product or service and who are already advocates of your brand; word of mouth really is as important as people say it is.
- Clearly convey healthy, and positive messages to your target audiences – ensure your communication is the perfect mix of responsible, inspirational, and aspirational!

If you'd like to talk through some ways The PHA Group can help to support your weight management brand, or for advice on using real-people in your PR campaign please give one of the PHA team a call on 0207 0251 350