

How, what, why: PR tips for start-ups and businesses

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With a wealth of experience in journalism, Tim has also held positions such as Editor of Metro, Editor of The Scottish Daily Mail and other roles at The Daily Mail such as Executive News Editor, Foreign Editor and Sports Editor.

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Tim now works with a wide range of sporting and corporate clients at The PHA Group, specialising in strategic communications and crisis management.

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In March 2016, as a result of his outstanding work and credibility across the industry, Nick won The 'Young Professional of the Year' award at the prestigious PR Moments award ceremony.

He has worked with brands such as Disney, GAME, BetVictor as well as The UFC, Happn and Purplebricks.com and has a particular focus on international clients and consumer technology.

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Tom Green

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Six PR Myths That Need To Be Debunked

Nick Braund

PR – one of the vital ingredients of the marketing mix, but also often the least understood. Most people – my family included – simply don't know what it is. And a reputation of 'spin' has not helped lift the mist.

Even businesses who have experience using PR can be led astray by common, and sometimes dangerously wrong, myths about the industry. To set the record straight, here are six of the most pertinent to beware.

1 | All Press Is Good Press

The oldest adage and perhaps the most infamous PR myth ever to have been uttered.

However, this myth still has importance when considering a PR strategy. It is often tempting to be daring and make a big splash with a shocking publicity stunt. We hear it time and time again. Whilst being innovative and creative is something you should demand from your PR effort it also pays to think through every eventuality.

Whilst it's obvious that an incident such as the United airlines debacle could never be 'good press' no matter how much attention it attracted to the company, what about a company such as Sega. Well established and no stranger to controversy, their decision to promote their new video game by laying severed limbs around London seemingly couldn't go wrong.

But it did.

So realistic were the severed limbs that they attracted calls to the police, hundreds of complaints and negative press stories everywhere.

2 | It's All Press Releases And Conferences

Don't get me wrong – these staples of the PR tool kit have their place, and can be effective if saved for the right occasion. But that's a big if. Unfortunately, many companies overuse them, and many PR consultants don't take the time to target their

approaches, leading to media fatigue.

It's important to consider the bigger picture – what implication does this announcement have for your industry? Why would anyone outside of your company be interested in reading / hearing about this? What's in it for them?

Nowadays, it's often more effective to send a concise, exclusive pitch to one key target title. Quality over quantity every time.

3 | My Product Will PR Itself

Nice try. But with fewer journalists to go around, and competition stiffer than ever before, even the most innovative product or service in the world needs help establishing their voice and proving to the masses why they're different.

One big PR hit isn't enough either. A viral video or news story that was picked up worldwide is brilliant, but if you don't maintain the momentum, your product will fall to the wayside as others vie for the column inches.

4 | SMEs Can't Compete With The Heavyweights

Simply not true. Whether it's data insights, a strong authoritative opinion or advice for others based on your experiences, regardless of your size, you will already be sitting on content that's of value to journalists. And where the multinationals will have layers of approvals to go through before they can comment on anything, you will be nimble

enough to be able to react quickly to changes in the news.

In a strange sense, time – of lack thereof – will be the great leveller and your ally in beating the heavyweights to the punch. Ultimately, journalists always need experts to qualify their stories, so if you can make yourself available at short notice to provide industry insight, you'll be the one reaping the rewards.

5 | PR Is A Cheaper Form Of Advertising

Why do you read the newspaper? Do you pick it up for the adverts? Thought not.

The modern-day consumer is sceptical at the best of times, and quick to discern an unapologetic plug for a business. The hard-sell will turn them off. The content PR produces must therefore be subtle and offer real insight. It must shed light on issues, and provide answers to important questions of the day. It's about the value a company can offer the reader and demonstrates your authority.

6 | PR Won't Impact My Bottom Line

A straightforward e-commerce website might be easily able to match a link click in an online article to a sale. However, this isn't the case for every business and PR is difficult to measure accurately. For higher price points or products with a longer-term commitment attached to them there may be more value

in recall, building trust and ensuring your business is front of mind when the consumer is ready to consider a purchase.

There's a myriad of challenges to navigate when dealing with the press, and a strong PR strategy will help you master them all if you take the time to understand what it can and can't do. You won't be on page 1 of the FT tomorrow, and you're unlikely to find journalists ready to sing your praises in the immediate future, but you'd be surprised how deep an impression you can leave when you start to take control.

10 Questions To Ask Your Prospective PR Agency

Stuart Skinner

Having spoken to clients about this numerous times, choosing the right PR agency can sometimes feel like finding a needle in a haystack.

A huge amount of time and energy is invested in sourcing an initial group of agencies with the right general qualifications, then whittling them down to a shortlist of three or four to pitch.

That's when it gets tricky. Agency 'beauty parades' are, by definition, rather artificial and unless you ask the right questions, you may end up in a world of confusion and conflict, leading to a poor appointment that sends you back to square one.

We have been asked thousands of questions by prospective clients over the years. The vast majority are generic, meaning that agencies have plenty of scope to prepare an answer that may sound good but cover up a multitude of sins. Remember, PR agencies are good at verbal window dressing, so it is important to prepare questions that give you real insight and allow you to experience what it would be like to work together properly.

Using our experience and sharing some secrets, we have identified TEN questions that you should always ask a prospective PR agency.

These are the questions that every agency must answer effectively and if they can't...well, make your own mind up.

It is time to make the pitching process easier and more transparent for clients, and to allow the good agencies to shine through. If you follow our list below, hopefully that will happen.

1 What do you know about us that we didn't know already?

A good way to cut through information sourced from Wikipedia, or avoid re-reading your brief. Has the agency bothered to conduct primary research, speak to people and understand your position in the market, using methods you may not have considered yourself? If they have, they really want to work with you. If not, sadly this may be just another pitch. Move on.

2 Who will be working on my account?

If the three most senior members of the agency you are hoping to work with turn up to pitch to you, this may seem ideal. By sending their senior members they are surely trying to show you that they take your business seriously, that they are making time for you and willing to put in their most experienced members of staff forward to work with you, right?

Not always.

If these senior members of staff are the ones that will be slaving away with you each day and have the requisite passion and appetite for the job, then fine – no problem. However, it's worth asking who you will actually be working with. Making sure that the team you will be interacting with on a daily basis are a good fit is beyond important. Ask to meet the people who will be delivering for you, not their heads of department, before you start work.

3 Are we going to get lost in the crowds of clients?

To avoid becoming a mere statistic, a commercial cog in the corporate wheel, ask agencies how they are structured. Get under the skin of their departments and understand the ratio of people to clients. If the numbers don't crunch, kick them to the curb.

4 What is the campaign you're most proud of?

Well if they can't answer this one...

5 How much of our time will you need?

An important consideration because you need an honest answer. If the agency says they will do it all and you will just read the results, they are lying. Any agency needs input, guidance and collaboration to ensure they are providing proper value. Look for a response somewhere between complacent independence and smothering neediness here.

6 How will you measure results?

If the agency suggests AVE as the sole measure of measurement, you are unlikely to be cut from the same cloth. You need real, tangible metrics that mean something to your business; tiered target

media, agreed messages and content that you own rather than latch onto. If an agency is not prepared to commit to that, they are giving their own team a vote of no confidence.

7 | What if you don't hit targets?

A curveball and always a tricky one to answer. PR doesn't always come with guarantees and agencies should steer clear of salesy platitudes. Instead, a pragmatic approach that agrees to regular reviews and measurement, rather than money back guarantees, should inspire confidence.

8 | How often will I hear from you?

This can vary dramatically from agency to agency so it's good to know where you are and how the suggestions fit your working schedule. Again, a balance between too much and too little is important, as is a clear structure of weekly reporting and diarised meetings / conference calls with focus.

9 | What are our biggest challenges in your view?

The agency is hopefully going to help you meet these challenges, so it's not an unreasonable question. It will sort the wheat from the chaff by demonstrating if they have given proper thought to your own objectives and market challenges, rather than simply holding up a mirror and admiring their own recommendations.

10 | What is your fee structure? How do you determine the level of fee?

A predictable question, you might think, but digging deeper pays off. Any agency can reel off a figure and there may be several that fit your budget – but what do you get for that and how are the fees allocated to allow sufficient expert resource to work on the account? Commercial rigour and transparency is the least you can expect from an agency partner you intend to trust.

How To Pick Your PR Agency

Tom Green

It's a big decision and one that shouldn't be taken lightly. Your PR agency should be an extension of your team and who you decide to go with can be as important as any internal hire you make.

How do you know if they will deliver what they promise? These five tips can help you take some of the uncertainty out of the decision-making process.

Flexibility

Business life is unpredictable; you won't always be launching a new product or have something interesting to talk about, yet you still need media to regularly write about you.

A good PR agency will be flexible and be able to deploy a range of tactics to keep you in the media. This can be anything from commenting on the latest trends, unearthing some insights from your internal data, creating thought leadership content, reacting to the news agenda, proactively driving a new campaign, and much more.

Flexibility is important when talking about contract length too - some agencies may try to sign you up for a one-year retainer but if this doesn't fit your needs then why not ask for a six-month contract with a break clause after three? After three months, you will know if you have made the right choice, and it's also a long enough time for an agency to show what they are capable of.

Hire specialists

They may be a reputable agency with big clients but are they the right agency for you? Have they proved themselves in the sector you're in?

You might be considering a range of agencies from global to boutique - there are advantages to both; the larger ones might attract the bigger clients but the boutique agencies are often more affordable and tend to operate in more specialist areas.

A boutique team within a larger agency is a good balance as they will have specialist experience but can quickly call upon the wider agency departments (such as Technology, Sport, Consumer, Public Affairs, Crisis Management, B2B, Digital) as and when is needed.

Start with the why

Your prospective agency will likely know what you do and how you do it, but do they know why you do it? In Simon Sinek's Ted Talk he talks about how 'People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.'

As the team in charge of how the public perceive your company, your prospective agency should either ask you this question, or know the answer to it. They need to be able to humanise your brand and tell your story in a way that is engaging to the public. To do this they need to understand 'the why'. This insight is crucial as it will inform all your communications and clearly differentiate you from your competition.

Awards

It's fairly obvious that if your prospective agency has won lots of industry awards you're on the right track. PR Week, SABRE, CIPR, PRCA, Cannes Lions and PR Moment awards are great accolades for any agency to have in their trophy cabinet.

Not only is it clear that if the agency is brimming with accolades (keep your eyes peeled for individual awards honouring their staff and employer of the year awards - a happy and fulfilled staff make for a effective team for you after all!) what is less obvious is the process that goes into procuring these awards in the first place.

Competition is extremely stiff for PR industry awards, with thousands of entries submitted for a limited amount of categories. So not only does their award mean that they have beaten off some of the best PR agencies in London, it also means that they are confident and proud of their campaigns to deem them award worthy.

It's also worth bearing in mind that an agency that has won lots of awards is well versed in how to create an award winning campaign for you. After all if they can't deliver for themselves how can you expect them to deliver for you?

Transparency

Transparency is one of the most important attributes to look for in your agency - you need to have an open and honest dialogue with them. They should be clear on what they will do for you and you should be clear on where you expect from them.

Establish what success looks like to you and then ask them to set measurable goals that you're both happy with. For example, if you want high levels of coverage then ask them to commit to a certain number of pieces a month (KPIs), or if you want to drive downloads of an app, ask them how many links to the app they expect to secure within coverage.

Granted, nothing is guaranteed in PR but a good agency will be able to manage your expectations so that there's no nasty surprises further down the line. Be wary of those that don't commit to anything, but also be wary of hiring a team of yes men or women. Generally speaking, the best agencies will under promise and over deliver.

One of the best ways of quickly gaining transparency with an agency is by asking the right questions – see [here](#) for a list of the best questions to ask your prospective agency before hiring them.

Should I take my PR in house?

Jasmin Prichard

The difference between in house PR and outsourcing to an agency has long been debated. It's easy to see why you might opt to hire your own committed member of staff. In some cases, it can seem like a no-brainer: a cheaper option that is easier to monitor and is dedicated entirely to your business.

With that in mind why would you opt to outsource to an agency?

The truth is that both options come with their benefits and it's up to you to weigh which one works best for your business.

AGENCY

Experience and Creativity

Often, for the price of one in house staff member, you may be given access to a number of people at the peak of their PR game. A good agency is an ideas factory that is constantly sharing expertise and cultivating new initiatives designed to get the best out of your business. Even if you work with a direct team of four, you can be sure that those individuals will have access to a breadth of talented individuals to bounce ideas off. With a whole agency behind you, you may find that you have experience at your fingertips far beyond what you can afford to employ in house.

Perspective

Whilst 'taking a step back' or 'looking at the wider picture' may sound like business jargon, there really is merit in employing an outside team who are able to give you an outside perspective on your business. An outside agency won't be clouded by internal politics and, coming in fresh, will often be able to provide a unique perspective that might completely change your PR strategy for the better.

If you employ an agency in the right way and give them all the necessary tools to work with, their outsider stance can be a huge benefit to your business, allowing you a second opinion on your approach. You might know your business inside and out but this in itself can make it hard to see any gaps or opportunities for growth.

Connections

Not only will an agency have a bursting contact book and connections with journalists that they have cultivated over years but they also may be able to introduce you to potential business partners, investors, distributors and customers. A good PR agency will work across a breadth of different businesses and it's a brilliant tool for you to harness.

Cost

Let's be clear: you get what you pay for when it comes to PR. But even the most cursory glance at PR job sites should tell you that in-house PR assistance does not come cheap. Especially if you want someone with experience and talent. Factor in national insurance, pension, perks and that number can increase quite rapidly.

In addition to this an in-house resource will require you to purchase all the tools necessary for them to do their job. Tools that a good PR agency will already have invested in. From monitoring services such as Cision, Pulsar and Factiva to media database tools like Gorkana and suddenly the cost of a PR agency can seem like a reasonable investment. That's before you take into consideration additional resources the agency might be able to provide: social media support, content production, analytics and reporting etc.

IN HOUSE

Company centric focus

It's undeniable that an in-house PR department will be able to give you their full and undivided attention. Whilst a good PR agency will most certainly do the same, they will also often have other clients that will require some of their focus throughout the week. An in-house department is employed to solely take care of your business, and therefore should have more time to give to the cause.

Ease of access

An in-house PR department may enjoy easier access to top level management. They are there every day, in the same

building and should be able to communicate much more easily with the decision makers in your business. That is not to say that an agency shouldn't be able to communicate with the same ease, it really is down to the business to grant them that access. Often agencies are not able to be as effective as they might be if they are unable to get speedy responses and face time with your senior team. Ultimately that comes down to the way that your business operates and if you can guarantee an agency the time it requires or if you need a more hands on solution within your four walls.

Context and knowledge

Whilst a PR agency might bring fresh perspective, an inhouse team may well be better placed to fully understand the inner workings of your business. As they spend each day imbued in the company culture they can become an extremely effective spokesperson for the business as a whole and individual members of the management team. This is something that a good external agency will strive to understand, however if you don't have the time to brief them or you feel your business would benefit from having a built-in resource, it might be worth considering going in house.

Using PR To Attract Investment

Nick Braund

The range of new businesses entering the UK market every day is incredibly exciting, and a sign of confidence in the UK's entrepreneurial opportunities. This has been led by British VC firms, angel investors and even the general public, through crowdfunding websites like CrowdCube and Seedrs. People are buying into up-and-coming technology businesses looking to become the next Improbable or ARM, both of whom recently sold for hundreds of millions of pounds.

To grow and develop into a successful business, they require investment to develop the tech, hire marketing support, drive sales and ultimately scale internationally. A key part of generating the interest required in any business comes down to the marketing – the more people who know about your business, the greater the chance of someone having the confidence to part with their own funds to support the idea. And this is where PR comes in. The ability to generate impartial, editorial coverage for your business is an incredible asset to any company wanting to be known for what they do or equally importantly, raising the required investment to stimulate growth.

Any business can claim to be brilliant, post on Twitter about recent activity or event pay for outdoor advertising proclaiming that their gadget/service/offering will make someone rich/beautiful/famous. However, a media interview, product feature, case study or expert thought leadership that has not been paid for carries the weight and significance that is much greater than anything bought.

Journalists are looking to write or talk about the latest and greatest innovations in any market, as a result, they want to be communicated with regarding exciting news. By discussing your product or business, it adds credibility that your company is doing well and creating an impact in its field. One of the best ways of doing this is to highlight a business leader or whole company as experts. By detailing your experience, it creates a narrative that the business is now or will be a success. As a result, investors are drawn to the company and want to share in the opportunity.

It is hardly a surprise that more and more money is being invested in the UK start-up scene - we've seen a dramatic increase in investment in the UK, highlighted by the recent Tech Nation report, that the UK leads Europe after attracting £28bn of investments since 2011, compared with £11bn in France and £9.3bn in Germany. One of the reasons for this is simple. The UK's digital economy is growing at twice the rate of the wider economy, and now contributes circa £97bn a year, up 30% in just five years.

As an agency that works with start-ups to help them grow and importantly, raise their heads in the investment parapet, a question we are often asked is: 'When should I start marketing / PR activity – before or as we launch the fundraise?' This is especially prevalent with crowdfunding as awareness is key to success.

The answer is that both work well but quite simply, the more time that is available, the more coverage that can be generated and therefore the greater the potential of future investors being aware of you. As a result, we always recommend starting PR a month before you're looking to launch crowdfunding efforts if possible.

How To Measure The Success Of PR: Setting KPI's And Measuring Impact

Sophie Wilson

“How does PR show return on investment?” is the question often posed by a client at the beginnings of a formal relationship with an agency. And rightly so. Gone are the days when companies have a budget line for meaningless ‘fluff’. Since the recession hit in 2008, marketing has been under scrutiny like never before. CFOs increasingly control the purse strings, meaning there are higher expectations for spend to be accountable and prove ROI. Marry this with the increase in marketing platforms that can and do offer inbuilt measurement capability and PR has a fight on its hands to ensure its preserve as a vital part of the marketing mix.

PR Measurement: A Brief History

Back in the dark ages, the way of measuring PR was rudimentary – all it required was a ruler and a calculator. A PR would sit and literally measure the column space in a newspaper in which they had secured their client a mention and then calculate what the corresponding space would have cost in advertising dollar. Moving forward, AVE or Advertising Value Equivalent became widely adopted and favoured by agencies as a metric because, simply, the figures made our industry (and our clients) look great in front of the bigwigs.

However, as far back as the early noughties, the efficacy of AVE was being questioned as a truthful and realistic reflection of PR. Although AVE makes it simpler for those outside of the media and communications to understand the value of PR, many have argued that it is a clumsy and inaccurate comparison, with ad agencies not looking to the PR industry for comparison of their own success and failure.

The Barcelona Principles

In 2010, AMEC (the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication) convened a summit which brought together 33 PR practitioners to establish a set of guidelines for the industry. The result was the seven 'Barcelona Principles' that have widely become hailed as the standards of best practice for PR measurement.

The main thrust of the Barcelona Principles focused on measuring outcomes as opposed to outputs as well as recognising the increasing value of social media in comms. They encouraged the jettisoning of the AVE metric altogether; a move that has since been echoed by other industry bodies, for example, the criteria for most awards bodies no longer recognises AVE as proof of campaign success and indeed excludes entries that use them.

The Principles were updated in 2015 to further refine and develop their definitions to now read as follows:

1. Goal Setting and Measurement are Fundamental to Communication and Public Relations
2. Measuring Communication Outcomes is Recommended Versus Only Measuring Outputs
3. The Effect on Organizational Performance Can and Should Be Measured Where Possible
4. Measurement and Evaluation Require Both Qualitative and Quantitative Methods
5. AVEs are not the Value of Communications
6. Social Media Can and Should be Measured Consistently with Other Media Channels
7. Measurement and Evaluation Should be Transparent, Consistent and Valid

These guidelines now offer both PRs and clients a useful reference point to hold in mind when setting a framework for the measurement of their success.

Applying Measurement In Practice

Although AVES are a dying breed, some of our clients do still request them and we reluctantly accommodate them. Where possible, however, we encourage them to hold us to account with meaningful metrics. The first question to ask at the outset of any campaign is **what is your objective and who are you trying to reach?** Without clarity on this in the initial brief, it is very difficult to put together a strategic PR campaign. You would be surprised how many clients come to engage PR as a 'nice to have' without having fully thought this through. The more information about your business goals the better. Once this has been established, we work with you to create a plan for where to target those relevant demographics, at which watering holes.

Some of the other metrics we use might include: target publications, number of pieces of coverage and prominence of coverage. Although a note of caution on coverage numbers: the news agenda can be subject to force majeure, for example terrorist attacks or global events can dominate news headlines, giving your story less prominence. Do you want to be seen as an authority in your field and some corresponding thought leadership content to prove that? In which case, collateral output and thought leadership press and broadcast opportunities in specific outlets might be appropriate. If your objective is attracting signups to an event that you are hosting, our activity would be based around attracting a certain number of attendees. You may wish to educate the media about your new product, in which case we can set down KPIs for number of journalist meetings organised. Or SEO may be at the top of your mind and so we might be targeted on linkbacks. It all comes down to strategy and your business objectives.

Social media campaigns, content marketing and SEO provide many more metrics such as impressions, engagement, increase in followers, prominence, share of voice and positive sentiment. The best kinds of campaigns interface with an analytical element to help to track the performance of the PR, for example setting up dedicated microsites for campaigns and measuring visitors to site and conversions.

How does PR impact Sales Conversion?

Another question that I often get asked is “how can your PR impact my bottom line?” I always have the same answer to this question. Whilst PR is responsible for taking the proverbial horse to water, we cannot make it drink. Once we have raised awareness and brought the eyeballs to your brand, conversion is within your purview. Once visitors have been attracted through PR, it is your responsibility to make sure that your ecommerce system is working, that your site is user friendly and that your sales team is tenacious to close the deals down.

Although we can't, therefore, guarantee sales as an outcome, we have many examples where we can prove a direct correlation between our activity and business impact. We find that the most effective relationships are where we work in partnership with clients to ensure transparency and fluidity of reporting. And we love to share in your success and see the fruits of our labour translate into increased exposure, sales and impact on your bottom line.

Real World Examples

Although we can provide metrics and KPIs, it is hard to project business impact upfront. However, here are a few examples that we're proud of that demonstrate the massive impact our coverage has had for our clients:

- One pioneering tech firm gave us the brief to use PR to attract investment. 18 months after beginning life as a bootstrapped start-up they floated on AIM for £250m.
- When we secured one business founder a slot on the Jeremy Vine show on BBC Radio 2, his autobiography sold out on Amazon that afternoon. After being restocked the next day, the interview clip was shared on the BBC homepage and sold out again that day.
- One article that we secured on the Mail online led to 800 people registering on a new food fitness start-up website. Before the article the total number of people registered was 200.
- A start-up property tech company engaged us to help them produce authoritative content for their website. Within one month of starting, our content had generated a 29% increase in conversion of website traffic.

Still need convincing about the power of PR to transform your business?

10 Common Mistakes To Avoid When Hiring A PR Agency

Tim Jotischky

Now you've read our e-book you can disregard the myths surrounding PR; you know how to find the right agency for you, the questions to ask them and how to write a brief; you know how to agree a reasonable fee and how to measure success. What can possibly go wrong?

Having chosen a PR agency to work with, it's not enough simply to sit back and let them get on with it, expecting they will achieve stellar results without any input from you. The success of the campaign is dependent on your level of commitment too.

Here are 10 common mistakes companies make, which can make a difference between the success or failure of a campaign:

1 | Not sparing enough time

This is the biggest single mistake start-ups and small companies make. We appreciate you don't have infinite time to devote to PR and that's why you've hired an agency. An agency's job is to make your life as simple and painless as possible while securing the coverage you need to raise your profile. However, in return an agency needs a minimum time commitment from you. Difficulties arise when there is a bottleneck, with only one person in the company able to take on media interviews and other commitments. If your agency has set up a press day and arranged for you to meet half-a-dozen journalists it's not acceptable to cancel it at the last minute because something has come up and you're too busy. If your agency has secured you a slot on Sky News as an expert commentator, remember the chance may not come again if you pull out an hour before. Good PR is an extension of your marketing – don't make the mistake of thinking it's an optional extra.

2 | Not finding the right spokespeople

This follows on from finding enough time to make your campaign work. To avoid a bottleneck, it's best to have a minimum of three people who can handle media interviews or put their name to thought leadership pieces, rather than just one. But it's equally important to find the right people. You may have a keen-as-mustard marketing director in your company who thinks they should be its public face when, in

fact, they have a perfect face for radio. Conversely, the shy, retiring CTO might not be the right person to put forward for broadcast interviews, but can write with great authority and is a natural thought leader.

3 | Not investing in media training

However slick and polished you may be as a communicator and no matter how good you are in presentations, pitches and public speaking, it's not the same as conducting a three-minute live TV interview. You need to know how to convey messages succinctly and engagingly. You need to learn how to deal with tricky questions. These techniques can be taught; live interviews are not a time for original thought. A day's media training will give you confidence to deliver your key messages effectively and will also help you prepare for any crisis scenario that might unfold.

4 | Not setting clear objectives

There needs to be an understanding between you and your agency about what you're trying to achieve. You need to agree a clear vision, a set of messages and the audiences you are trying to reach. You need to be consistent in your messaging; don't think you can make up as you go along. If you don't feel confident that your messaging is strong enough, go back to the drawing board and ask your agency to hold a messaging session.

5 | Not sharing your stories

It's your agency's job to tease out angles and storylines that will interest the media, but even the best PR's are not telepathic. You'd be amazed how often clients sit on information, whether it's a new round of fund-raising, a significant staff hire or a set of customer data, any of which are potential stories. Throw too much information at your agency rather than too little; put in place a system for exchanging information, whether it's a weekly call or a fortnightly catch-up meeting.

6 | Thinking too narrowly

a common mistake made by some companies is having a pre-conceived idea of how to reach a target audience. It's fine to have an audience in mind – it might be High Net Worth's, for example – but there are different ways of reaching it. For example, Mail Online might not be an obvious means of talking to HNWs but it's the biggest newspaper website in the world and that means it reaches many different audiences... whether as a guilty pleasure or serious reading.

7 | Being unrealistic about your budget

It's important to be transparent at the outset about what you can afford. Most agencies are prepared to be flexible about the services they offer, but once you have agreed a fee and the scope of the campaign you need to stick to it. Nothing infuriates agencies more than mission creep, where they are consistently being asked to go far beyond the agreed level

of activity in terms of time and resources. It's better to re-negotiate, agreeing a fee increase in return for adding extra elements, rather than trying to get it on the cheap and finding it sours your relationship.

8 | Expecting instant results

Sometimes you'll see an instant return on our investment, particularly if you have a new product to launch or you're staging a significant event, but that's not always the case. It can take time to get cut-through with journalists and you may need to be patient. In particular, glossy magazines have long-lead times and your agency will need at least three months advance notice to pitch an idea to them – it's no good saying you want to be in GQ or Harper's Bazaar and expecting it will happen tomorrow.

9 | Great expectations

Don't think too narrowly about what constitutes success. Of course, you want to see a tangible return on your investment and any good agency will deliver it, but if you set your KPIs too narrowly – on sales figures alone, for example – you are under-estimating the potential of PR to transform your brand. Good PR also brings you prestige, profile and authority; it opens new doors and gives you access to networks and connections you didn't previously have. That has a value too.

10 | Not listening to advice

If you are prepared to pay for a PR agency, have confidence in your account director. You know your business better than anyone, but that doesn't mean you are best-placed to devise a communications strategy or know how to manage the media. Trust your instincts by all means but hiring someone to do a job and then deciding, every time a big decision needs to be made, that you know better doesn't make sense. You'd be surprised how often it happens.

**Want to talk about managing
your communications strategy?**

**Get in touch, we'd love to
hear from you!**

