

Public Relations at a Trade Show: A Little Effort Goes a Long Way

By Barry Siskind

Is public relations just for big companies at large shows that have a dedicated Public Relations consultant?

When Steve Jobs or Bill Gates speaks, everyone listens, but don't let the size of their budget discourage you. The media is constantly on the look-out for interesting stories, and not just the ones everyone else is covering. So, being big is not the panacea to PR; being prepared with a well thought-out plan is.

Trade shows are a great place to initiate a PR campaign. Whether it is the major news outlets that will attend large international shows or regional publications, cable, or local media at a regional or community show, the media will be there.

One word of caution; there are no guarantees with the media. The best-made plans and promises can be easily derailed when an earth-shattering global issue suddenly materializes and captures the headlines. But, with a little planning and execution, your chances of landing valuable PR will rise dramatically.

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines public relations as “the practice of managing communication between an organization and its public.” PR, therefore, provides corporations and associations an opportunity to build and maintain rapport with various stakeholders including employees, customers, investors, voters, and the general public. There's a lot at stake. Follow these steps to set your PR efforts on the right path.

1. **Piggyback onto the PR that your show organizer is arranging.** At some large shows, there might be a media room where the media meets and browses corporate literature. At smaller shows, the media may be invited to participate in a press conference, opening ceremonies, or hospitality breaks. Whatever the case, talking to your show organizer to learn their media plans will give you insights into ideas that can be initiated in conjunction with the show organizer or on your own.
2. **Massage your message.** The media is not interested in spending hours leafing through all of your corporate literature. You need to focus on issues that their readers/viewers will be most interested in learning about. Each media contact may appeal to a different audience, so it's important to ensure your message is appropriate to the media person you are sending it to. Often, they are simply interested in reporting a new product or service.
3. **Create a news release.** This one page (typed, double-spaced) document is what the media will read first. If your news release captures their attention, they might be motivated to learn more; if your news release falls flat, it will be discarded.

Your news release should be structured to include the following:

- a. *The headline.* This one line statement should get to the point quickly and stand out from the rest of the copy.
 - b. *Answer the questions: who, what, where, when and why in the first few paragraphs.* Don't try to write the story for the journalist; rather, give him or her enough information to make an informed decision as to whether or not your story is worth telling.
 - c. Include a *photo* when possible.
 - d. *Don't forget to include contact information.* They need to know who to speak to and where you will be situated in the show.
4. **Create a media kit.** This kit will include your news release as well as photographs, company literature, and detailed product information. The completed kit can be sent ahead of time to specific journalists and placed in the media room at the show. Keep a supply at your booth as well.
 5. **Focus your media contacts.** If you can obtain a media list from your show organizer or have developed one on your own, pick the journals, websites, newsletters, magazines, etc., that attract your specific audience.
 6. **Personalize your approach.** There's nothing wrong with calling first to let the contact know that you will be sending some information about a new product or service and that you will be participating in an upcoming show. Then, after you have sent information, follow-up to make sure it was received and to see if you can gain a commitment from the contact to stop by your booth.
 7. **Develop a relationship with the media.** Media personnel are like everyone else; they don't want to be pressured or hassled, so walk that fine line between good follow-up and harassment carefully. The other issue is to become a source of information. They may ask you questions or for contacts that may have nothing to do with your PR objective. If you can become a source of information, you may not have achieved your short-term goal, but a solid relationship has excellent long-term benefits.
 8. **Keep vigilant.** Train your booth staff to be on the look-out for media as they pass your booth. They will be wearing a designated media badge.

A Public Relations campaign is an important tool for most companies and organizations. Trade shows offer an amazing opportunity to sharpen your PR skills and develop

relationships with the media. The investment in developing a PR approach is relatively small and the pay-off can be huge.

Barry Siskind, President and Founder of [ITMC](#), is a trade show consultant, trainer, speaker, and an internationally recognized expert in trade and consumer shows. Each year, he addresses numerous conferences and association meetings around the globe. Over the past twenty-five years, Barry has traveled throughout the world working with thousands of public and private sector clients in virtually all industry groups. He creates, facilitates and delivers a wide range of services to companies involved in exhibit marketing. Barry is also a best-selling author of trade show business books: *The Successful Exhibitor*, *The Power of Exhibit Marketing*, *Making Contact*, *Bumblebees Can't Fly*, *Eagles Must Soar*, and his latest book *Powerful Exhibit Marketing*.