

Is there an easy way of getting articles about your company into the education press?

Actually there is.

Running a successful PR operation so that your company is regularly in the news is not, of itself, hard. It is just very time consuming.

The problem is not just finding the time to write the stories; you also need to be up-to-date with what's going on in the industry, you need to find news stories and then you need to link your product or service into that.

Put another way, the press release, ***"ABC Ltd is proud to announce the launch of version 5.1 of its award winning Pheber Xon software"*** is not going to get much coverage in the press. However ***"Home Office announces rapid increase in school break-ins"*** is a headline that will get noticed, and if you can then link your product into that (or any other) story you are on.

So your story runs the Home Office headline and then in paragraph three you say, *"Pheber Xon is one company that is tackling this problem – through a new software development that alerts the authorities to any unexpected movement within the school grounds...."*

Then all you have to do is write the piece, get it to the 100 or so journalists who regularly write copy about education, and then follow up on the phone.

And that's it. It takes time, but if you really work at it and have a spot of talent as a writer of snappy journalistic pieces, you can do it, month after month.

However, although you'll be thrilled with the press coverage that results, there is a good reason to suggest that just doing this is not quite enough. For I believe the best results come from combining this approach with direct mail in a specific way. Having done the press release, you then re-write it as a sales letter and mail it out (perhaps with a catalogue) at the same time to a few hundred schools, colleges, or whoever your potential customers are.

So following on from my example, you might evolve the headline,

Is there a simple way to stop school break-ins, before they are even attempted?

This piece then continues by pointing out that catching the thieves is ok, but by then they have broken windows and locks getting into the school. If only you could stop them before they even get that far...

If that then brings in the replies you need, you then go for the national campaign, which should hit just about the same time as the PR campaign. So

people get a mail shot and think, "oh there was something about this in the Guardian last week", or they read the ad, and then see the article later – either way there is a double impact.

The point about this approach (which I have given the exciting name **PR Plus**, or **PR+** to give it its snappy journalistic title), is that it maximises the use of the most expensive (or most time-consuming) bit of the process - the copywriting. Once the copy is written for the press release it is not too difficult to transform it into a mailshot. Doing a trial run to 200 schools costs around £100 at most, and this gives you that most valuable piece of information - the knowledge of whether this campaign will work.

(OK - if you only need one sale in every 200 schools mailed, it is better to do a 500 trial run mailshot, just to ensure the result is valid - but you see what I mean here).

So why don't more firms do this? One reason, I suppose, is that it takes time. To give an example, the press release I wrote last week for a building company involved me in trying to find out what happened to a particular government policy that was launched four years ago and seemed to have died, so I could link my client's building work to this policy. That involved printing out and reading about 20 web pages, and four phone calls to government agencies and pressure groups. Then I had to marshal my thoughts, and write. Total time about 4 hours, and I am a fairly experienced writer with a fair amount of educational knowledge. And that's before we even start sending out the press release.

In my experience people intend to do more of this work, but don't. Or maybe they do it in April but not in May. And then having done it they don't do the direct mail follow up.

Which is a shame because there is another unexpected bonus with this approach - trawling through websites looking for a link in a story is also a great way of coming across links you didn't know about - doing my research last week I found a forthcoming week designated to building design, which neither I nor my client knew about before. In fact hardly anyone knows about it because there are only two web pages that mention it. And I also came across an interesting campaign by a competitor to my client that helped inform my client as to what his future ads should look like.

So that is the essence of PR Plus - an integrated press and direct mail campaign. If you are interested in talking about this with me, please do ring 01536 399 000. Obviously this article is not totally altruistic since Hamilton House Public Relations does exactly what I have been outlining here - but as always, we're quite happy to talk about what we do and how we do it, without any cost or obligation. (We're awfully nice that way).

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