

Public Relations Consultants: A Perfect Fit for Small Businesses

Small business owners work so hard to establish and grow their businesses wearing every hat: accountant, office manager, operations, customer service, inventory management, that a critical element of success - public relations - can be neglected until it creates a problem.

Public Relations – or the managing of reputation with clients and community – can make or break a company. Good public relations management leads to increased business, happier customers, and overall community acceptance and awareness. Conversely, eliminating PR, which is often thought of as an unnecessary budget item, can leave you looking for a business opportunity elsewhere.

With that in mind, choosing the right professional(s) to administer your PR campaign is key. For small businesses, hiring an in-house person to handle public relations is often not a feasible option, especially for businesses with less than 10 people. Choosing a large agency is also often out of the question as there are usually increased costs associated with them. Independent public relations consultants (also commonly called “freelancers” or “independent practitioners”) are the perfect fit for small businesses for a number of reasons.

First, independent consultants provide a more affordable solution to the hiring of an on-staff PR practitioner or to working with a large agency, while providing the same level of expertise. Second, they can form an intimate relationship with a small business owner as their number/types of clients is more focused. And lastly, many consultants specialize in certain areas of public relations and selected fields of business. The

consultant can therefore make recommendations based on knowledge and experience in a particular field and market.

Although the product or service a small business owner might provide may seem indispensable and able to thrive on its own merits, a growing number of start-up-business owners agree and believe public relations campaigns make increased growth and profits possible for their companies.

Following are some situations in which public relations can aid your business:

1. If a competitor appears to be stealing your share of the market,
2. If your company has recently suffered negative publicity and consumers are questioning your product or customer service,
3. If your company is launching a new product or announcing changes regarding a product or the company itself, and
4. If you're interested in building new or strengthening existing relationships with customers/clients, vendors, referral sources, etc.

Public relations consultants can provide a wide-range of communications assistance. Sometimes one-time efforts are needed, such as creating a logo, producing a product/service brochure or writing a press release to announce a product. The development of a relationship with your customers or community, such as creating and implementing a complete pr/advertising campaign or discovering specific opportunities to showcase your product/service and everything in between, is recommended for best results. Just as a business takes time to succeed with kinks to iron out, effective public relations also has to be accomplished over time.

A small business owner should evaluate its own company's needs and budget to determine what type of public relations services it wants and can afford. Then seek referrals from your lawyer, accountant, trade associations, friends and family members to locate a consultant that can meet your needs and work well with you personally.

When deciding to hire a PR professional, be sure to evaluate their experience and personality fit with your company, fee structure, and credentials or associations to which they belong. Keep the lines of communication open with your practitioner and before too long, you will be on the way to total small business success.