

THE MARKETING
TOOLKITS SERIES



Perfect PR

DISK INCLUDED

FREE DISK
INCLUDED
WITH A FULL
SET OF
TEMPLATES
FOR
PERFECT PR

Iain Maitland



Marketing Toolkits Series

Perfect PR

■ Iain Maitland



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Perfect PR

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Diskette

The diskette accompanying this title features 30 forms to help you plan and run your PR campaign. All the forms are set up as Microsoft Word 6.0 documents to allow you to customize each form to suit the needs of your company. All the documents can be opened through the File Manager in Windows. The document titles and respective page references are given below. Each document is saved in a separate file and they are labelled from tab01.doc to tab30.doc.

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Introduction

Perfect PR is written for you – the owner or manager of a prospective, new or existing business who intends to conduct a public relations campaign, perhaps for the first time. Here's what it includes:

- **Planning PR Activities**

Chapter 1 shows you how to assess all aspects of your firm to ensure you have the information you need to make a success of a campaign. It goes on to look at the main PR tactics that you will employ – press releases, interviews and press conferences. It investigates the media too – the press, radio and television. And it highlights the importance of knowing your audiences and explains how to plan and schedule PR activities for the coming months.

- **Issuing Press Releases**

Chapter 2 covers compiling a press list, deciding what to say in your press releases and details the nitty-gritty details of actually writing press releases yourself – paper, colour and typefaces, layout, contents and plain English, photographs, captions and other material; all the ingredients for success. It also outlines how to circulate press releases most effectively, handle responses and follow through to increase your chances of coverage within the media.

- **Managing Interviews**

Chapter 3 sets out the main do's and don'ts of interviewing; whether with journalists, radio or television presenters. It considers the

additional core skills that you need to succeed in press, radio and television interviews. As significant, it spells out the crisis management tactics that you should employ if the media come knocking on your door to ask about a faulty product or some other problem. And it tells you how to follow up interviews to ensure media coverage.

■ **Organizing Press Conferences**

Chapter 4 guides you carefully through planning a conference for the first time and choosing the right venue, speakers and invited audience. It details how to speak successfully in public and manage the press conference well. As important, it explains how to follow up the event to maximize your chances of further publicity in the media.

■ **Running Your PR Campaign**

Chapter 5 pulls together everything covered so far; and tells you how to assess a trial run and monitor responses to your initial PR activities. It explains how to bring in experts to assist you with your planning, and how to continue with your campaign and make a huge success of it.

The book is also packed full of action checklists and real examples of the key documents used in PR activities, plus the names and details of useful contacts, books, magazines and directories for further reading, and a helpful glossary of terms – all combining to make *Perfect PR* an essential, hands-on manual throughout each and every PR campaign, now and in the future.

1

Planning PR Activities

■ 'PR' is – or certainly should be – a very simple activity. It involves putting across a positive message through suitable media to the right audience at an appropriate place and time; in order to establish and maintain a first-class relationship with your customers and any other people and organizations that come into contact with your firm. If they feel good about you and your products and services, they are more likely to do business with you! To make a success of planning PR activities, you need to look closely at:

- your firm
- PR tactics
- the media
- your audience
- PR activities

Your firm

Start by analyzing your business; both internally and externally – you need a full and complete understanding of what's going on around you if you're to go on to publicize yourself successfully. Not least, you want to know what it is you should promote to the outside world; and what you want to keep to yourself! Look at the workings of your business, your products and services, your competitors and the marketplace and carry out additional research if necessary.

The business



Conduct a wide-ranging, in-depth assessment of your firm; taking account of its organization, structure and operations. Consider its location too. Is it well sited for customers, for example? Can it be accessed easily on foot and/or by car? If so, perhaps this is something that you'll want to publicize to your customer base. Think about its premises; size, facilities, image and so on. Visit each department in turn, talking to colleagues and employees about how the firm operates in practice. What aspects are worth publicizing – or not? You should find that this assessment will enable you to identify positive features that you weren't aware of; and can incorporate within your PR activities. Likewise, it should highlight negative features that should not be mentioned in your campaign; and that need to be resolved in the near future.

List your firm's strengths – as your customers see them. This is the information that you will want to put across in any PR activities. One small business trader – the owner of a tyre and exhaust fitting centre – sketched out notes which included the comments, 'My premises are spacious and roomy which enables me to set aside a waiting room for customers; with tea and coffee available for them to drink.' Another business person – a director of a mail order firm – put 'I employ a friendly and knowledgeable team who handle enquiries in an engaging manner; all complaints are dealt with on the spot, and followed up by the employee concerned to guarantee customer satisfaction.'

Make a note of your firm's shortcomings too; again from your customers' viewpoint. You'll want to work out how to remedy these – but until then, you'll almost certainly want to avoid drawing attention to them in any PR campaign. The owner of a computer centre drafted notes which incorporated this statement, 'As a small shopkeeper, I don't have the financial resources to buy in bulk, so I can't compete on price.' In 1997, she avoided referring to prices in any of her PR activities. You may find that completing *Assessing your firm: an action checklist* (Figure 1.1) is helpful here. Do it thoroughly – you'll find that these notes will prove invaluable to you later on when you launch your PR campaign.

Products and services

Examine whatever you offer (or are planning to offer) to your customers. You know your product or service range best, but it's probably a good idea to look at each item and activity with specific regard to their ages, varieties, quality, uses, safety, reliability, availability, packaging, prices, guarantees and after-sales service; as relevant in your circumstances. Your goods and services are of critical importance as they will probably be the central focus of most of your PR activities. They have to be first-rate – meeting customers' needs, doing the job properly, being readily available, well-priced and so forth. However impressive your PR may be, you will not be able to sell unwanted or sub-standard goods; or at least not more than once (and most businesses rely on repeat sales for long-term success).

Separate each product's characteristics into positive and negative features. The positive ones should form the basis of your PR activities. What is it about your products and services that make them so good? As an example, you may note down that your most popular product is sold in the largest number of versions in your trade or industry, so customers have the widest choice. As with your business appraisal, it is important that you see things from the customer's viewpoint, not your own. What else? Perhaps it has passed all UK and European safety standards and recommendations, so customers know they are buying something that is totally safe.

The negative ones need to be listed as well. What is it about each product and service that may dissuade customers from purchasing it? A common problem faced by many businesses at one time or another is that they are selling 'old' stock; typically, new models have been launched before the older versions have been cleared out. So – even though these versions are often

ACTION CHECKLIST		
THE BUSINESS:	ASSESSED BY:	DATE:
ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	BUSINESS STRENGTHS	BUSINESS WEAKNESSES
ORGANIZATION		
STRUCTURE		
LOCATION		
PREMISES		
DEPARTMENTS		
EMPLOYEES		
POLICIES		
WORK METHODS		
OTHER		
OTHER		

Figure 1.1 Assessing your firm: an action checklist

ACTION CHECKLIST		
PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:	APPRAISED BY:	DATE:
APPRAISAL CRITERIA	POSITIVE FEATURES	NEGATIVE FEATURES
AGE		
VARIETIES		
QUALITY		
USES		
SAFETY		
RELIABILITY		
AVAILABILITY		
PACKAGING		
PRICINGS		
GUARANTEES		
AFTER-SALES SERVICE		
OTHER		

Figure 1.2 Appraising your product range: an action checklist

just as good and have been replaced only with new patterns, colours or whatever – customers don't want them. Filling in *Appraising your product range: an action checklist* (Figure 1.2) may be beneficial at this point.

The competition

Do consider your rivals – this information can prove invaluable to you during your PR activities. View their businesses in the same way that you assessed your own – organization, structure, operations, location, premises and so on. Try to recognize their strengths and weaknesses so far as customers are concerned; and how you can use these to your advantage. As examples, you may not want to publicize your location if you know that a rival can offer easier access, and free parking. But if your premises are large and enable you to carry more stock than your competitors – and therefore provide greater choice for your mutual customers – you may want to promote this aspect of the business.

Similarly, appraise their goods and services in the same, detailed manner that you looked at your own range – age, varieties, quality, uses, safety, reliability, availability, packaging, prices, guarantees, after-sales service and so forth. Ideally, you will be able to identify weaknesses in their product and service range, and can use this to promote the relative strengths of your own goods. But be careful not to get involved in direct 'knocking' of your competitors though. You need to be absolutely sure of all of your facts to be able to do this without fear of legal reprisals. You also need to be better than them in all respects to avoid a PR backlash from that company. And remember the expression, 'all publicity is good publicity'. It's not actually true – but the implication that you don't want to attract attention to your rivals is a valid one. Don't do any PR for them!

Consider your competitors' marketing activities in particular; and more specifically, any advertising that they do in the media. Perhaps they advertise heavily in a certain publication; the trade paper, for example. You may find that it will be less receptive to your PR advances in due course. Money talks unfortunately – that paper is not going to risk losing valuable revenue by promoting your firm against one of its main advertisers. Many publications are as dependent on their advertising revenue for their continued existence as they are on sales income. Study your rivals' PR tactics too; they may be very good at publicizing themselves; and you can learn from their activities. *Evaluating your competitors: an action checklist* (Figure 1.3) is worth completing now.