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Good public relations can boost brand recognition

Washington Business Journal - by [Joyce Bosc](#)

In any market, public relations comes down to this: mastering communications between an organization and its key publics to build, manage and sustain an accurate image. Often, media outlets are used to channel these communications to large numbers of people efficiently and cost-effectively. PR activities must be both proactive and ongoing to be truly successful at building the desired levels of credibility and trust. When done well, PR programs can increase visibility, awareness and, ultimately, brand equity.

Though some view PR more as a luxury than a necessity, I view PR as an important complement to your ongoing business development. And so do our clients. They tell us all the time how their potential customers acknowledge reading articles in which our clients are quoted. Some readers have even contacted the editors after reading a client's bylined article to request more information.

That, my friends, is the power of PR.

If you're selling to the government, you're competing against thousands of other companies for the same government dollars. And buyers tend to go with what makes them comfortable -- a familiar name. If they've heard of you, chances are the door will open faster. PR gets your name out in the market and establishes familiarity with your target audiences, giving prospects the chance to get to know you a little better.

Hiring announcements and contract wins show movement within your company. Contract win announcements are easy ways to advertise that a government or military agency believes in you and your services. Hiring announcements can show the community that you're going after certain government programs and that you're dedicating someone to build that business. Trust me, people pay attention to these types of announcements.

If you have the budget, advertising is a nice way to get the word out about your company. However, if you don't have the luxury of an advertising budget, PR is a very inexpensive -- yet powerfully effective -- way to share your news. If people read stories about your contract wins, hiring announcements and teaming arrangements in industry publications, this validates in their minds that your company is a player. Additionally, when reporters see your hiring announcements and contract wins, it positions you and your company as a possible thought leader for future issue-based and trend-based stories.

Okay, you followed through on your PR, and now you have a stack of press clippings. They're great to have, but what can you do with them once the articles have run? Here are some ideas:

Include press coverage in your corporate capabilities packet. You will need to get reprint permission from the publications, but the articles make a nice addition to your case studies and reference letters.

Reprints can also be used as mailers, but be careful. Mailing within the government is now an exact science; it can be very tricky (and expensive) if done incorrectly. There are a number of direct mail companies that know the tricks of the trade.

Articles may be e-mailed to potential customers and partners. It's a smart move to send your targets a link to stories that highlight your recent successes.

If substantial enough, articles can be used as stand-alone collateral to hand out at trade shows and similar events. You can never have too much material that highlights your credibility.

You just put down the column, leaned back in your chair, sipped your coffee and thought to yourself, "This is all nice, Joyce. However, I have neither the budget nor the time for a PR campaign."

Well, try finding someone in the company to write the release for you. If you don't have a dedicated marketing person, try using the person who's in charge of writing your responses. Press releases must tell a story, and to get the story out, a good format is the tried and true PR idiom of "What? Who? Where? When? And So What?"

Create a style sheet for your team to fill out when they win contract announcements, solidify teaming arrangements or hire

new talent. The style sheet should include the "four W's and the S." Target the publications that reach the community you want to reach. Also, look into news release distribution companies that can reach your markets. They are affordable enough for you to pursue that route as well.

Before hitting the send button to disseminate the news release, remember to proofread carefully and avoid typos. Misspelled words and bad grammar are not good for your brand.

Don't forget to get express written approval from your customers before issuing a news release about your work for them. I've known companies that lost contracts because they did not follow this simple process.

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