

PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR) STRATEGY



PR should be an integral part of any business's overall marketing plan. Some businesses think that social media and PR are the same thing but social media is a channel through which to broadcast your PR message.

Every business should have a PR strategy, even if that business already has a regular stream of customers. Every business has a story to tell, so how are you going to get that message across? Be clear about what it is that you want from your PR - do you want more business, increased visibility in your marketplace or to educate the market about a new product or service?

Take a close look at your marketing plan and how you need to communicate with existing and potential customers to increase your firm's profile. For example, does your marketing plan include events that you're planning to host or attend? How were you planning to promote them? By planning to run your marketing campaign alongside your PR campaign, you will increase the reach of your message without necessarily increasing the cost. Develop a realistic timeframe in advance for gathering content, making pitches to publications, etc.

Many business owners rely too much on social media which is a great tool and an essential part of the jigsaw, but there are still many people who don't use social media regularly. By solely marketing in this way you're excluding potential customers. Therefore consider more traditional PR channels such as trade press, magazines, newspapers and radio interviews.

In smaller businesses, owners and managers may be too busy working *in* the business to work *on* the business. As such, PR falls to the bottom of the list. In this case, it may be worth considering outsourcing your PR to an agency who will have journalist and media contacts and should have a working knowledge of the industry your business operates in.

Outsourcing isn't expensive and is more cost effective than adding someone to your payroll.

The goal with any PR strategy is to do the hard work in advance. Having a good solid strategy is key to realising PR success.



VIRTUAL OFFICE SPACE

Most businesses consider the office environment to be the conventional way of working. With the rising costs of office space, many businesses are starting to look for other ways of working to reduce costs and the concept of flexible working is gaining popularity. This is facilitated through technology and more progressive management strategies. Virtual offices let employees work remotely from a location they choose such as their home, a café or a park where they can use the internet.

The main reason for choosing a virtual office is price; it's cheaper to work virtually than renting space in a city. This is often the driving factor for start-ups and small businesses opting for virtual space. This option is no longer frowned upon and is instead considered a lifestyle choice. Employees may prefer this option when they relocate or have children. Some businesses prefer to work virtually initially, changing to a physical space when they break even. Employees can also benefit from virtual working to reduce travel costs.

Some businesses may be geographically spread across many countries. In such cases, a permanent office space does not make sense and a virtual office setup is a perfect solution.

Every business strives to make its employees happy. Allowing employees to work virtually means they get to spend more time with their family. This flexibility makes an employee happier and more productive. They no longer arrive at work after a stressful, train or bus journey. Instead they can simply work while feeling relaxed and happy. A virtual working style is ideal for people who wish to work as consultants or in desk-based roles, or for people who do not wish to relocate. This is a win-win situation for employers and employees. A physical office may be a geographical constraint for a prospective employee but when allowed to work virtually, this allows the business to hire better talent without having to force them to relocate.

Working virtually is also an advantage for people with disabilities who can work from home with all necessary help and support.

Ultimately IT is key to running a virtual office effectively. Employees need good broadband connections, secure computers provided by their employer and a proper desk, and chair. The culture of the firm is also important - a strong work ethic and adoption of practices such as video conferencing is necessary to have a productive virtual office.



STRATEGIC HR PLANNING

If your company is forecasting growth, downsizing or even staying at the same level, a strategic HR plan can help to support the objectives of the business. Such a plan can help your firm to prepare for its HR needs based on current versus expected future performance. The HR department must have a plan to ensure that the staffing needs of the company are appropriate and that staff are qualified to assist in meeting the company's overall business objectives. Some areas to review and include in the plan are as follows:

Current Workforce

Review staffing levels to decide if changes need to be made. Changes could include provisions for reducing the current workforce, reassigning employees to different areas, making promotions or demotions, and altering current rates of pay for those being promoted or demoted. Working with department managers to create a skills inventory of existing employees can give a good picture of which employees may be willing and ready to take on more responsibility or a possible reassignment, as well as whether career development and succession opportunities exist.

Training

Consider whether you need to revamp current training for current and new employees. This is especially important if existing training is outdated or doesn't use all available tools. While HR doesn't necessarily have to take charge of updating the training, it should be budgeted through the workforce plan and projections. Additional training plans should include industry-required training for employees moving into a new department, employees moving up in their department or those taking on additional responsibilities.

Forecasting Staffing levels

There is a large cost associated with recruiting and training new employees. Reassigning and retaining current employees is the most cost-effective method but is not always realistic, especially with turnover and company growth. Planning in advance is the best way to ensure that all costs are accounted for within the HR budget. Determining future workforce needs will require forecasting the strategic needs of the business to determine how many and what positions will need to be filled, what timeframe these positions need to be filled in, and what skill set and training the new employees will need.

Implementation

Many businesses put plans in place but have a difficult time implementing them. Sometimes plans change but the strategic plan isn't updated properly. Follow-through, whether on the original plan or a revised strategic plan, is imperative for the business to continue to move forward.

HR is there to support the rest of the business in the achievement of its objectives. As such, a thorough, flexible and strategic HR plan is of huge importance.

Please contact a member of our team if you would like to discuss any of the issues raised.

IMPLEMENTING YOUR BUSINESS PLAN

Many are familiar or have maybe even worked with teams who set strategic goals for the organisation, but fail to create an operational process to achieve them. A disproportionate amount of time is spent on the strategy compared to the detailed plan of implementing and executing that strategy. All too often, managers attempt to point their team towards the strategic end game, but provide little guidance on the step-by-step tactics to get there. Here are a few tips to help you to implement your business plan successfully:

Set Objectives

Strategic business plans should provide financial targets, initiatives to reach those targets and an overarching philosophy in which the company operates. Writing the objectives is the easy part – it is the implementation of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely (SMART) objectives that is key to the success of any business plan.

Support the strategy with tactics

A business plan that hits the mark not only identifies the strategic direction of the company, but also maps out the tactical elements that enable the company to execute the plan. This is where most companies fail to operationalise their strategic plan into tactical initiatives. Why are these strategies going to deliver the greatest return on investment and effort? How are they going to complete and deliver on their strategic plan? Who is responsible for all of the steps required to execute?

Cascade the Objectives

A strategic plan generally comes from the top. It is up to each of the department heads to internalise the plan and cascade the various tasks throughout their teams. Your firm's managers should set the benchmark, help the team lay out the necessary tasks and then hold their time accountable to achieving those milestones.

Monitor Regularly

Achieving strategic success is one part execution and one part inspiration. Hitting milestones on a regular basis provides the ongoing desire to see the plan through to its full fruition. Setting milestones and monitoring not only keeps the firm on plan, but also allows for management to communicate these successes to the wider team. Strategic targets can be daunting at the outset, but breaking them down into chunks makes achieving them more manageable.

