



WHY DOES PR TAKE SO LONG?

The Path to Tangible Results and Impact

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Forte

February 2024

THE PATH TO TANGIBLE RESULTS AND IMPACT



According to the internet, Abraham Lincoln said, “Good things come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle.” Of course, the 16th U.S. President is also credited with saying, “The problem with internet quotes is that you cannot always depend on their accuracy,” so take them with a grain of salt. But this you can take as gospel: Good things come to clients who wait, but only clients who have PR firms that hustle.

PR, or public relations, is the strategic communication discipline designed to build and nurture mutually beneficial relationships between organizations (or people) and the people who matter to them -- those organizations’ publics. PR propels, increases and protects your business by sharing your story with and engaging with the right people at the right time and in the right way so those people notice, hear and understand it. And the work and impact of public relations takes a long time – both to execute and to reap the rewards.

The role of public relations is the long-term awareness and understanding of a message - it’s a reputation builder. The role of marketing is building a short-term sales pipeline. Marketing efforts are ALWAYS more effective when a strong positive reputation exists. Reputation is the work of time, trust and evidence. It is what OTHER people think.

The questions we regularly hear from clients, and especially prospects, are why do public relations, and specifically media relations take so long? How long until we see tangible results? The answer is, of course, it depends, as success is predicated on a number of different factors, most of which aren’t controllable by the company. So, let’s break down:

- Why PR and media relations takes time
- Typical time frames for seeing results
- Factors impacting the timeframe
- Why PR is not just worth it; it’s critical to business success

Why PR Takes Time

The urgent desire to get results -- to see that your message is understood widely and propagated among the relevant audiences—is often thwarted by the fact that there’s really no urgent reason for other people to understand you **right now**. Think of the front page of a news website, what qualifies as “breaking news” on a TV news or financial show, the front page of a newspaper, the traffic report in a big city. These are the pieces that will impact many people or markets now or soon. In the realm of corporate information, particularly private company information, very little qualifies as urgent news.

As such, it’s essential to understand the nature of public relations. PR is not a one-size-fits-all solution; it involves a strategic blend of communication, relationship-building, and reputation management. Communications and public relations practitioners create, protect and amplify the images of organizations, products, and people by:

1. Communicating with the publics required for success - employees, former employees, customers, consumers or users, partners, distributors
2. Then, via the people who influence and inform those publics - the media, analysts, social media influencers, policy makers, and other people in different communities, industries or demographics.

Unlike advertising, which allows someone to buy a vehicle - a billboard, TV commercial, space in a publication- and then place a specific message they craft to be broadcast, PR is about influence, persuasion and negotiation. Advertising is paid for; PR in all of its forms is earned. Earned, because the result, understanding, engagement, an article, post, newsletter, interview on TV, radio, or podcast, unpaid social media post, requires someone else to carry your message and understand your message.

Communications/public relations professionals are storytellers. As [Harvard Business Review](#) describes them, stories are a, “much more powerful way,” to persuade people than using conventional rhetoric because, “stories unite an idea with emotion.” We create and tell the stories that help people understand a company, a purpose, a leader, a product, a service, a plan, a change, a partnership. These stories help people connect to an organization, inspire confidence and trust, and take actions such as purchase, trial, referral, partnership, testimonial, donation, and support.

PR can take the shape of newsletters, media relations to place a story in a newspaper or new site, TV show or Radio show, in person and online events big and small, blogs and websites, speeches and industry panels, emails, press releases, Op-Eds, bylined articles, social media channels’ posts, videos, and graphics, influencer relations, analyst relations, and even snail mail -- all activities designed to meaningfully connect, inform, and engage companies and the people who matter to those companies.



And yes, in case you were wondering, social media is public relations. Social media has transformed the landscape of public relations by reshaping how information is disseminated, consumed, and interacted with, not just by consumers, but by the media. It has decentralized information. Companies can now share information, updates, and announcements directly with their followers, reducing reliance on traditional media intermediaries.

Furthermore, social media encourages the creation of user-generated content (USG), enabling individuals to share their experiences and opinions about products, services, and brands. This UGC can influence public perception and serve as a powerful PR tool. Traditional media outlets and journalists use social media platforms to share their stories, articles, and news updates. This shift means that individuals can access news directly from the source, breaking down the barriers between traditional media and the public.

Typical Time Frames for Seeing Results

To understand the time it takes to see results in media relations, let's break down the process.

Research and Planning (Months 1-2): The initial phase of any communications and media relations program should include in-depth research and planning. PR professionals need to understand the organization, its target audience, and the broader industry landscape. Yes, developing a solid plan takes time, but it lays the foundation for future success. A plan allows a fly wheel to happen.

Implementation (Months 3-6): Once the strategy is in place, the implementation phase begins. This involves executing planned activities such as media outreach, content creation, and relationship-building. During this period, organizations may start to see some initial traction, but substantial results may still be a few months out.

Monitoring and Adjustments (Ongoing): public relations is a process, a negotiation, and it needs to be monitored and adjusted. PR professionals analyze data, assess the effectiveness of strategies, and make necessary adjustments as needed. This ensures the campaign is aligned with changing circumstances.

Long-Term Relationship Building (Months 6 and Beyond): Building strong and lasting relationships with any target audience takes time. Consistency in messaging and positive interactions contribute to trust and credibility.



Factors Impacting the Timeframe

Several factors contribute to the varying timelines for Media Relations success:

Industry and Complexity: The industry in which an organization operates can significantly impact the timeline to results. Industries with complex regulations, such as finance, healthcare, and even wine, might experience a more prolonged process due to the intricacies involved in communicating certain messages to meet compliance rules.

Campaign Objectives: The specific objectives of a PR campaign play a role in determining the time required for results. Short-term objectives, such as handling a crisis, might yield quicker results, while long-term objectives, such as building brand loyalty, can take a much longer time.

Media Landscape: It's no secret that the media industry has undergone significant change over the past few years. Even pre-Covid, newsrooms and traditional media outlets had become increasingly understaffed, leading to the demise of beat reporters and insufficient time for those who remained on staff to properly research stories. During and post-Covid, the challenges persisted with journalists working from home or new geographical locations, causing further decentralized teams. So, while in the age of digital media, information travels faster than ever before, navigating the digital landscape requires a strategic approach to ensure the right messages reach the intended audience.

So, forget about picking up the phone. Email is the primary form of correspondence. Also, sending samples to reporters to try and test your products is now much trickier. Given that many mail rooms have been closed and so many reporters and freelancers need to receive things at home, PR pros now track a new KPI - willingness to receive a sample.

Also, gone are the days of siloed “beat” reporting, making genuine media relationships more important than ever. We are no longer seeing journalists exclusively covering a certain “beat” like we did a few years ago. With smaller staffs and less resources, we’re seeing a more “all hands on deck” approach among journalistic teams. Whoever has the bandwidth is given the assignment. This too makes our jobs as PR experts more challenging than ever because writers we normally work with on specific topics are not necessarily the “right” person any longer. Building relationships with writers is imperative to being kept in the loop on what they’re working on and how the workload is shifting amongst their team. Doing this well is less of a science and more of an art form. One that takes ongoing patience, **time** and care. As a result, we can’t rely on our relationships alone to make a story happen. We need to unearth who’s assigned what story and what freelancers are on the bench for each target publication.



Client Readiness and Availability: Clients can also greatly impact a PR plan. Successful PR programs require clients who are engaged, available, and prepared. That means they know their goals; they have a clear message, and their products or services are ready for primetime.

Why PR Is Not Just Worth it; It's Critical to Business Success

PR's impact extends beyond what can be achieved through paid media. Why?

A strong communications program focuses on building, and maintaining, relationships with the public. When information comes from a third party, such as a news outlet or through earned media coverage, it tends to be viewed as more credible and trustworthy than paid content. Trust takes time to establish, but once built, it can have a lasting impact.

Public Relations is designed to protect an organization's reputation long-term. While paid media may provide quick visibility, PR shapes and sustains a positive image over time. Reputation is an invaluable asset, and PR enhances and protects it in the eyes of the public.

When a media outlet features a story about an organization or product, it is more influential than paid advertisements, as it implies that the information is newsworthy and has been independently verified. So, while PR may take time to yield results, it is usually more cost-effective, and is absolutely more credible in the long run compared to paid media campaigns.

The key factor in a public relations program timeline is the *relations*. True relationships take time. They are built on trust and trust is not transactional.

Public Relations – building and nurturing mutually beneficial relationships between organizations (or people) and the people who matter to them -- takes time.



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