



## **Managing your message – how to promote your new franchise**

You could have the best business in the world but if you don't tell people about it no-one will ever know.

When you buy a franchise, part of what you are buying is an established and well-known brand, perhaps even a household name franchise. This offers a huge advantage when you launch your business because potential customers are likely to recognise the name and logo and should understand the values that these represent.

But however familiar the product or service you are selling, you will still need to market your business with energy and great enthusiasm. Of course, your success in persuading someone to buy from you depends on applying the skills you have been taught on the franchise training course and you living up to the brand you represent.

When you are researching the franchise market place and considering the relative merits of the franchises on your short-list of companies, you will almost certainly have a list of questions to ask them. Remember to add one about help and on-going promotional support to launch your franchise and beyond.

Is marketing included in the franchise training programme? Is it exclusively sales-orientated or does it include other elements of promotion such as direct mail, advertising, internet promotion and PR?

Advertising, direct mail and e-marketing all have their place but good PR can enable you to reach the parts that others don't! Potentially, you can communicate with a much larger audience than by using advertising alone and you can achieve this very cost-effectively. Not only that, editorial is more credible than advertising because it appears to be an independent endorsement by the journalist.

Franchisors' provision of PR programmes for franchisees varies greatly. Many provide local media launch campaigns for new franchisees as part of the start-up package and some offer on-going support via their appointed (corporate) PR company to write and distribute news stories for franchisees.

Some franchisee associations of larger networks appoint their own PR companies to run campaigns exclusively for franchisees' benefit but usually in association with their franchisor.

So, if you've ever wondered why some companies seem to be in the news constantly and others are not, it's probably because they understand the value and importance of continuous proactive PR. It is a very cost-effective way to manage your message and you can do it yourself - if you know how and are prepared to devote enough time to do it properly, something that many business advisors overlook.

I compare PR to doing book-keeping. Of course you can do it, even complete your VAT return using clever software, but if it takes you many times longer than a professional book-keeper and stops you getting on with developing your business, is it a good use of your time?

Many people think PR is "free" advertising or spin, especially after reading about how the government and other public bodies manipulate the media and the growing tendency to 'bury' bad news.

Effective PR is achieved by getting the *right* message to the *right* people in the *right* format at the *right* time.

In other words, PR is about effective management of key messages by understanding how the media works, what journalists need and when, as well as what makes a good story. It's important to remember that editors and journalists are always very busy and work to strict deadlines. Competition for editorial attention is intense and stories are ruthlessly rejected, so the more you can do to make journalists' lives easier by providing relevant and interesting material in a readily useable form, the more likely it is to be used.

To succeed with DIY PR you must move PR up your list of business priorities because it requires time and attention to detail. Even the most charismatic PR naturals like Richard Branson, Boris Johnson or Stelios Haji-Ioannou and celebrities like the Beckhams have teams of professionals to advise and guide them – and do all the legwork.

Topics your local press love are awards, successes and achievements, particularly against the odds, businesses that create new employment opportunities, all types of events from business open days to Christmas bazaars, regeneration of neglected areas, human

interest stories about the very young, the very old, animals, community-interest and local charities.

When you think you have an interesting and important story worthy of publication, contact the local media. Almost invariably, the person you speak at each publication will ask you to 'send something over' so it's helpful to have prepared the words in advance to send by email while the journalist is still interested and remembers who you are.

There are a few rules that will help you to achieve the kind of coverage you want:

1. Research all relevant local media and make a list of contact names, phone numbers and email addresses
2. Write your story in plain, concise and simple English and with your contact details at the end
3. Ring media to 'sell in' your story and follow this up with a written version
4. Keep a note of the name of each person you spoke to, the time and date, as well as their reaction and what action you took
- 8 Attach photograph/email image captions
- 9 If your story is published, journalists really appreciate a call or email to say thank you. It's easy to overlook this old-fashioned courtesy in the excitement of getting coverage but really worth remembering to do.

If this advice has put you off, you might consider investing in the services of a local PR person or freelance journalist to help you on an ad hoc basis. Both have the advantage of being able to write in the appropriate style and should have contacts on the local media. It could be much more cost-effective than the DIY approach and leave you free to do what you're best at – being an entrepreneur.

If you don't know any PR people personally, you could key in 'public relations' and the name of your town or county for a web search. You could also contact your local Chamber, Business Links or The Chartered Institute of Public Relations which has a list of all its members and offers a matchmaking service.

For those who are still determined, here are a few tips for writing a press release – the first step in effective media relations:

- Make your release concise and factual
- Start with a punchy headline which sums up the story in a few words

- The first paragraph must contain all the main facts of the story
- Following paragraphs should give details to expand the story
- Use plain English and short sentences
- Don't use jargon, technical terms or slang
- Include an interesting, concise and relevant quote from senior/key/influential people about the topic of the release
- Don't make extravagant or untruthful claims – you don't want to be challenged
- Include a contact name and telephone number at the end of the release so journalists can get more information if they want it
- You can incorporate a “notes for editors” section which is a list bullet points giving key, factual background information about the business or event
- Include the date that the press release is issued, at the foot of the page
- The release should be typed and double spaced
- Try to limit your release to a single sheet of A4
- Do not underline words or use upper case (except at the beginning of a sentence) or write anything in bold or capitals because you think it is important
- Do not keep repeating your company's name
- Send a release only when you have something interesting and newsworthy to say
- “A picture is worth 1,000 words” - remember to include a top quality professional e-mail image or photograph to increase the chances of your story being used
- Pictures must be accompanied by captions identifying the people, premises or processes in them, together with an image reference, your name and telephone number
- If you send the material by e-mail, remember to identify it in the subject block with “News story – then the title of release”

And good luck!