

# PR Works

By Mary Schnack

*Two FREE Chapters*

## Planning

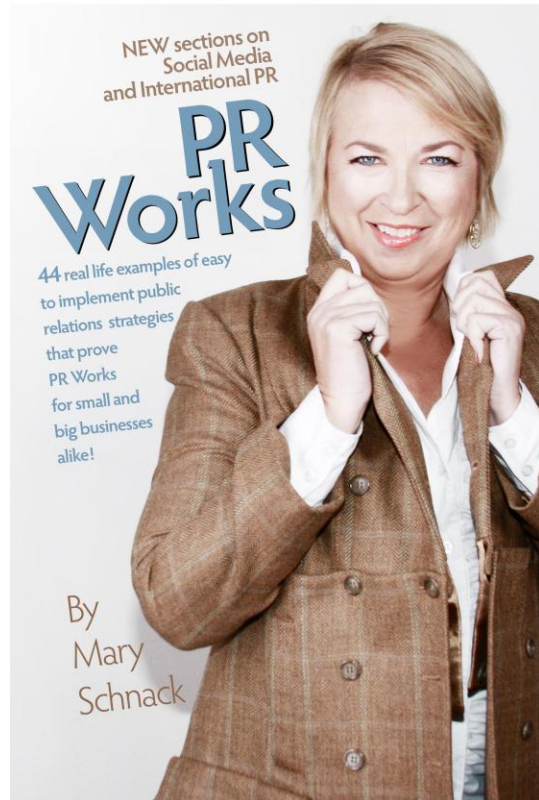
It is imperative to create a Communications Plan, which serves as a road map for your outreach strategies. Just as you can take a turn when traveling, you can change the plan as you go if your goals change. But it is best to take some time to map out your strategy before you begin.

The planning process is also a great way to get more people involved in the plan. The development of the plan by a committee of key individuals will give “ownership” of the process to others.

To start your plan, answer the following questions:

- What is your objective?
- Who is the target audience?
- How are these audiences to be contacted?
- Who/what is your competition?
- What is different/unique about your product/service?
- Develop three to five message points
- Develop a timeline
- How should the plan be evaluated/measured?

Take some time in answering these questions. The answers may not be as obvious as you believe at first glance. Schedule a half-day work session to debate these answers, and put them into a form so you truly have a guideline as you embark upon a new relationship with your community—one that takes full advantage of the communication channels that are out there, waiting for your information!



## Planning Gives Targeted Results

When a network of nurse-owned home health care agencies, located throughout the state of California, wanted to increase their public relations contract with us, we insisted on developing a communications plan first. How were we to know how many more hours were needed if we didn't "know where we were going?"

The home health care agencies had joined forces six months earlier to assist them in procuring statewide contracts from larger health care insurance companies, medical groups, medical systems and hospital systems.

In the first six months, we placed stories on them in the major regional newspapers (Sacramento Bee and Los Angeles Times) and nursing publications throughout the state of California. Now, they wanted to increase their exposure to national media, such as CBS news, USA Today and Time Magazine.

They agreed to develop a communications plan and we facilitated a brainstorming session for two hours during their board retreat.

This work session illustrated that their target audience was not the end user, those at home who needed professional health care, but the people in the offices of insurance companies and hospitals who write the contracts with them, and then on the second level, the case managers who refer the patients/clients to the local agency in their network.

The "national media" was going to take more time, and money, and was not going to be as effective as publications in the insurance, case manager and nursing industries.

In fact, rather than increasing our contract, we recommended that they give us only three more months on our contract to place stories in these magazines, and then devote their limited funds for marketing, sales, advertising and public relations for door-to-door sales.

During that final three months, we placed stories in five industry publications. The stories either had a by-line of a board member of the network (ghost-written by us) or were a story written about the network. These stories became excellent tools to include in their subsequent sales kit, adding credibility and positioning them as the "experts" in providing home health care and responding to the needs of the doctors, insurers and providers.

Detailed questions to answer when writing a communications plan include:

- What is the objective of your public relations program? It may not always be to increase sales. It also could be to obtain financing, increase your profile, or increase your network of referrals.
- Who is your target audience? Besides defining their demographics, determine their interests, attitude and level of knowledge about your industry and services or products. How does your audiences' needs fit with your needs?
- What is the best way to reach your audience? And which media clips will be the most meaningful as you move forward? These can be useful for a sales kit, to frame where customers can see them, or to help educate your consumer.
- How will you plan the outreach? Start simple keep in your comfort zone and then broaden the outreach as you progress. Perhaps you get something in your local weekly paper and move on to your industry publications before you tackle the business journal, the daily newspaper or a television station.

## Measure Success by Establishing Goals

We did public relations for the California Podiatric Medical Association (CPMA) and the goal of the statewide campaign was to generate public awareness about the expertise of podiatrists. Many people see orthopedists for foot problems, not realizing podiatrists are the only medical specialists devoted exclusively to the foot

We sent out news releases and pitch letters on a monthly basis to daily and weekly newspapers throughout the state, as well as radio and TV stations. Many weekly newspapers picked up the informational news releases (on topics such as children's foot health, wearing the proper shoes, bunions, sports injuries, diabetes and foot care, etc.) word for word. Daily newspapers, TV and radio stations interviewed CPMA members and have done stories on these and other topics.

One podiatrist did a live interview on a San Diego TV morning news show. After the interview, he received a call from a new patient wanting her bunions removed. She had been trying to make an appointment with an orthopedist, but decided after seeing the interview that the podiatrist was the real expert. PR goal accomplished!

### **PLANNING TIPS**

- Establish goals for your PR campaign—what are you trying to accomplish?
- Keep PR goals top of mind when crafting story ideas.
- Keep a steady stream of information in front of the media. They may not pick up a story idea the day you send it, but they will notice the continuous contact and will eventually do the story sometimes as much as 6-9 months later.

# International Public Relations

## Give Your Brand a Voice

In 2005, Zoë Dean-Smith was working for Gone Rural in the Kingdom of Swaziland (next to South Africa) when she first met Mary Schnack at Mary's "Market, Product Innovation and Client Relationship Management" training in Ghana. Gone Rural designs and produces unique beautiful home accessories handmade by 700 rural Swazi women. Since then, in 2007, Zoe launched a non-profit branch of Gone Rural, known as Gone Rural boMake, to support health, education and other social programs for the women artisans and their communities.

Zoe learned to develop an "elevator pitch" (a 30-second speech, the time it takes to get on and off an elevator). In order to receive the necessary funding from potential donors when she contacted them, she had to make an impact on them quickly to keep them listening. Besides the elevator pitch, Zoë introduced a descriptive tag line below the Gone Rural logo. People who get mailings or emails are more quickly aware of what the business does thanks to the tag line.

Both the for-profit and non-profit branches of Gone Rural did a lot of international outreach and publicity, but rarely informed the local community of their work. While they had attention internationally, most people in Swaziland did not know what they did.

Zoë started to do more local outreach and advertise their successes. Every time they won an award, they wrote an article and sent it to the local media. They also started inviting local journalists on visits so they could meet the artisans and author their own stories.

It had never occurred to Zoë to advertise on their own doorstep. As a result, people started shopping at their local store and donated to their non-profit activities. Zoë has left her primary role with Gone Rural and is consulting. She shares the information she learned from Mary's training with other women and small business owners around the world. As Managing Director of Visionary Growth & Development Consultants, Zoë uses what she learned about touting one's success and shares valuable communication pointers as she conducts trainings throughout Africa and Southeast Asia.

Working with emerging handcraft organizations and women who have great talent, Zoë has received positive feedback from the communication principles she teaches. In many of the communities and countries where she works, most women have very few rights in their community and are taught to be humble.

"The women I work with may have started out as a farmer's wife, but they have taken their incredible artisan talents, taught their sisters, cousins and neighbors, and now have 150 women working with her," said Zoe. "They have the dream and the drive, but sometimes lack the business skills. I tell them it is OK to brand your success because it's an incredibly powerful tool. Once they've been given the "OK" to do so, they are willing to use their new communication skills to build their businesses."



## TIPS TO GIVE YOUR BRAND A VOICE

- Tout your success.
- Develop an elevator speech. In general, you have only 30 seconds to grab someone's attention. While small in the spectrum of time, 30 seconds can sometimes be all it takes – and all the time you have -- to make or break a deal.
- Add a tag line to your brand and logo. For those who don't know your company's name or recognize the company logo, a tag line quickly describes who you are and what you do.
- Don't forget the local community. Publicize your successes, your activities, your products and your services on a local and regional basis, too. Invite journalists in to do their own stories.
- Create special events. Gone Rural's workshop is located next door to a well-known and well-supported performing arts venue which hosts theatrical performances, festivals, etc. The Gone Rural retail store is thus well-situated and their handcrafted products can be bought by the Performing Arts attendees. Gone Rural has even developed an educational "tour" package for locals, journalists and visitors to : see their workshop, visit their artisan women in a nearby mountain community and it ends with—what else—but a stop at the store to buy products!

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