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Publicity and PR-texts

*Учебно-методическое пособие
по дисциплине «Мастер-класс по работе с текстами в рекламе и PR»*



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Пособие состоит из трех разделов, включающих теоретические сведения о создании англоязычных PR-текстов различных типов, и практических заданий на анализ аутентичных текстов-образцов, трансформацию предложенных текстов и создание собственных PR-текстов.

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Dear Friends

Most of the work of the public relations practitioner involves writing, and it is rare that only one kind of writing is required.

The ability to write easily, logically, and succinctly is essential for public relations. The object of most PR writing is to grab the reader's attention, convey information quickly, and invite the media to cover your story.

Whether you're marketing a new business venture, promoting a new book, or simply drumming up some interest for an upcoming event, what will be an invaluable tool that can make or break your efforts at gleaning some much-desired media attention?

Without any doubt it is PR-text.

At its best, PR-text makes media professionals stop the presses (so to speak) and say, "Wow! Now this is what we've been looking for."

A PR-text should be short, to the point, and contain only the significant details that would attract the attention of media professionals. Remember, you are courting editors, journalists, or TV producers—not consumers. They're not looking for fancy formatting and they certainly aren't hoping to be impressed by a writer's expansive vocabulary. Stick to the point and be sure to include the essentials.

If it were easy to write a PR-text, there would be no need for press release writing services,

PR-writing articles, books, and newsletters. PR-writing is definitely not easy! For this reason, we have created this manual, which is aimed at teaching you the art of writing PR-texts step by step.

Happy writing!

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Introduction

Publicity and PR Writing

Publicity is the deliberate attempt to manage the public's perception of a subject. The subjects of publicity include people (for example, politicians and performing artists), goods and services, organizations of all kinds, and works of art or entertainment.

From a marketing perspective, *publicity is one component of promotion*. The other elements of the *promotional mix* are advertising, sales promotion, and personal selling. *Promotion is one component of marketing*. The following joke illustrates it in a perfect way:

- *If the circus comes to town and you paint a sign to announce it, that's **advertising**.*
- *If you hang the sign on an elephant and parade it around town, that's **promotion**.*
- *If the elephant tramples the Mayor's garden, and crushes his roses, that's **publicity**.*
- *If you can get the Mayor to laugh about it, that's **public relations**.*

To generate publicity PR-writers cannot wait around for the news to present opportunities. They must also try to create their own news. Examples of how they can achieve this include:

- Contests
- Art exhibitions
- Event sponsorship
- Arrange a speech or talk
- Make an analysis or prediction
- Conduct a poll or survey
- Issue a report
- Present a controversial subject
- Arrange for a testimonial
- Announce an appointment
- Celebrate an anniversary
- Invent then present an award
- Stage a debate
- Organize a tour of your business or projects
- Issue a recommendation

The advantages of publicity are low cost, and credibility (particularly if the publicity is aired in between news stories like on evening TV news casts).

The disadvantages are lack of control over how your releases will be used, and low percentage of releases that are published by the media.

Effectiveness of publicity

The theory says that *any press is good press* taking the examples of the situations where bad behaviour by people involved with an organization or brand has actually resulted in positive results, due to the fame and press coverage caused by such events.

One example would be the popular sitcom, Married... with Children, which achieved skyrocketing ratings after moralist Terry Rakolta attempted to have it removed from the air. It's reported that the former producers send her a fruit basket every Christmas as a gesture of gratitude....

On the other hand in most areas of activity this may be less true; journalists like a story that will run and run (one 'with legs', as they term it), and a negative story can be picked up and developed just as enthusiastically as a positive one. For instance, the problems of British Gas in the 1990s, the Dome in the year 2000, or the declining fortunes of Marks and Spencer were examples of long-running negative stories, where one bad story led to the next: the public appetite was ever-ready for the next tale of disaster.

In the process of determining how to handle a client's publicity, we can consider a 9-Point Plan for developing an effective public relations program. If followed, the Plan should dramatically improve your company's visibility and sales success:

PR Point 1 — *Know your business goals.* Define the goals of your business and the means to reach them through effective publicity.

PR Point 2 — *Identify the media* that will best serve those goals. Many business owners like the prestige of securing publicity in a popular medium, such as their local newspaper or on television. The reality is that unless this medium delivers results that relate to business growth, the publicity is of little value. Use media which target the right prospects for your business.

PR Point 3 — *Stay "target-oriented"* with your news. Target news about your company to the specific audiences that buy your products or services. Media that don't build your sales or visibility within your key markets should be avoided.

PR Point 4 — *Create a separate media database of information.* Include the name of the publication and for broadcast medium, the editor's name, the street address, the direct phone line, the fax number and the e-mail address. These contacts will get to know everything about your firm over the long-term so that your company becomes "visible" and a good source of news and information.

PR Point 5 — *Contact the media for editorial calendars* or programming schedules, and ***create a year-long media planning calendar.*** Become familiar with the "feature of the month, week, day or hour." Understand what the editor or news department wants in order to match your business goals with the various news/editorial cycles.

PR Point 6 — *Match your news to the interests of the editors.* This news may be about a new product or service, a senior-level promotion, an important upcoming event, a joint venture with another firm — or any other relevant business news.

PR Point 7 — *Think carefully about news angles* that sell your company as the expert to the editors. Editors will become familiar with your company as you send them newsworthy press releases on a regular basis. The key is to stay in touch.

PR Point 8 — *Take a media kit about your company to your industry trade shows.* Find out which editors will be attending and distribute media kits to them. If

you're an exhibitor, write the exhibit number on the media kit so every editor knows where to find you.

PR Point 9 — Don't expect publicity to work like advertising — it is not a controllable medium. With advertising, you plan your schedule, the frequency of the ad, and the related costs. With publicity, you'll never know its length and, often, you may not know when it is scheduled to run.

The Basics of the News Style

The ABCs of news writing are:

- **Accuracy,**
- **Brevity**
- **Clarity**

The first and most important is **accuracy** – a story can be creative and compelling, but if it contains errors, it is worthless. Always check numbers, spellings of names, who said what, and the other basic facts of any story. A reporter's job is to find out what is going on, then write a story that's interesting and informative.

Second is **brevity**. Each word in your story should do a job. If not, take it out. Get to the point. Say it just once. Don't be redundant. Don't say "8 a.m. in the morning," since 8 a.m. is in the morning. Just say 8 a.m. Or say 8 in the morning. Remember the inverted pyramid style of writing. Put the most important fact in the lead. Hook the reader's attention. Explain the lead and then go on to the next most important fact in the second inverted pyramid. And then the next. Lead up to an interesting finish. Don't just stop writing when you run out of information.

Clarity starts before you write. You should understand your subject so completely that your story leaves it crystal-clear in the reader's mind. Your story should leave no questions unanswered. Avoid jargon. Explain anything that wouldn't be obvious to the average person.

THE FIVE 'W's'

Every news story must cover the "Five W's:" Who, What, When, Where, Why and sometimes How and So What? You don't have to cover all these in the lead, obviously, but usually you will address one or two in the first graph.

The rest should come soon. Make sure they are all covered somewhere in your story.

NEWS VALUES

What is news? The cliché is, *when dog bites man, it's not news. When man bites dog, that's news.* Critics say, why is the newspaper always full of bad news? Because bad news is unusual, and no one wants to read about ordinary events.

"The professor arrived on campus this morning and found things much as he left them the night before."

Who cares? If *the professor finds a lion waiting for the elevator in Building 5,* then there's a story. With photos.

Elements of news:

Impact.

Impact is determined by the number of people affected, the number of boats that sink, the number of cars wrecked, etc. The more people affected, the more boats sunk, the bigger the impact of the story.

Proximity.

The closer your audience is to the event, the greater its news value. If a train hits a bus in Bangladesh, it may receive three column inches behind the sports section. If a train hits a bus somewhere near Moscow, the news will be on page one.

Timeliness.

"New" is a big part of news. If it happened just before deadline, it's bigger news than if it happened last week. Even "big" stories last only a week or so. News, like fish, is better fresh.

Prominence.

If it happens to the mayor, it is bigger news than if it happens to a professor. The public cares more about celebrities than they do about people they don't know. If President goes jogging, reporters take pictures. If professor goes jogging, dogs bark, but no one else notices.

Novelty. If an event is unusual, bizarre, the first, the last, or once-in-a-lifetime, it has more news value than if it is something that happens all the time.

Conflict.

War, politics and crime are the most common news events of all. If everyone got along, there wouldn't be much news.

Relevance.

How does the story affect the reader? If there's no effect at all, maybe there's no news.

Usefulness.

How can I use this information? Home, business and leisure news sections have sprouted in newspapers in an attempt to give readers news they can really use.

Human interest.

A story may be weak on the other news values, but be interesting anyway.

It can be as simple as an interview with a fascinating person who does unusual things. If people are talking about it, it's news, even if it doesn't meet the criteria of our other news values.

Don't expect to be able to produce copy all day long. Effective copywriting takes great creativity, and no one can be creative all the time. It's vital to take regular breaks from writing.

Task 1. Answer the following questions:

1. What is publicity from a marketing perspective?
2. What ways of generating publicity can you name? Look through the latest news and find the examples.
3. How do you benefit from publicity? Does it have any shortcomings?
4. Do you agree with the statement that "there is no such thing as bad publicity"? Illustrate your answer with the examples.

5. Imagining that you are working for a big company such as “Irkutskenergo”. Work out your effective public relations program according to the 9-Point Plan.

Different types of PR-texts

Backgrounder

A **backgrounder** is an *in-depth information piece providing*, as the name implies, *background information on a specific issue*. It will be a description of specific products or services. You may also need a backgrounder for your company, as a whole.

They often accompany press releases and provide additional information not found in the releases.

Why would you use a backgrounder?

The objective of the backgrounder is to answer any anticipated questions about a particular subject. The more information you can provide up front, the less scrambling you have to do when the media calls.

A backgrounder places the story in its broadest context. In creating a backgrounder you are assisting the media by providing information that is broadly relevant to your story, but goes beyond the core intent of your release.

The information can be used by the editor or journalist to expand on the story, or to determine whether they will send a journalist to your conference. Either way a backgrounder can be a valuable addition to your release and may markedly increase your chances of getting media exposure for your event.

There are two types of backgrounders: corporate and product.

A **corporate backgrounder** is a document outlining your company. It is written for the media. *It is necessary to include all the information that is relevant to your company such as your purpose, your market and your ability to solve a problem.*

The structure of a Company Backgrounder may include the following information:

- Where your company is located, when company started, why company started.
- Explanation of your product.
- The kind of company that you have and what the company does.
- Information about the key people in your company.
- Information about your industry.
- The accomplishments of your company. (Any "firsts" your company has achieved. Meaning, was your company the first to achieve recognition for a product or service in your field?)
- The future of your company.

Use these tips to write a corporate backgrounder:

1 Include your company name, description and the main things your company can do. List the points that would convince someone that your company is the best in a specific area. Explain why.

2 Know your audience and your market niche. Know who you are speaking to and why your company is the best suited to fulfill this niche. Offer solutions to a problem.

3 Keep the backgrounder professional and straightforward. You want to convey the main points not impress someone with flashy material. Stick to the facts.

4 Give background information about your company including the history of the company. Tell how you got started and where you are today. Talk about your customers and what you hope to achieve.

5 Prove your expertise in your field. Be confident and show why your company is competent and qualified.

6 Know the size of your market and your customers. Describe your customers in detail.

7 Include the names and positions of the key players in your company. Describe your financial situation with regards to your products and services, your profits and who is investing in your company.

8 Use basic design principles. Keep the document short and easy to read. Use short paragraphs with headings for each section. Use white space to separate the sections. Readers can then browse for the information they need.

Product Backgrounder is a description of specific products or services.

Here are some aspects you may want to include in your product backgrounders:

- What your field or industry did before your product came along.
- Explanation of any scientific terms or jargon of the industry.
- The problems your industry or field has had.
- What your company discovered - results of that discovery.
- What your specific product can do, how it can resolve previously unresolved problems.
- Your products advantages over existing products.
- What the future holds for your product or where your product may lead the industry.

A backgrounder places the story in its broadest context. In creating a backgrounder you are assisting the media by providing information that is broadly relevant to your story, but goes beyond the core intent of your release. The backgrounder information is not included in the body of your release, but rather below it, most often on a second page.

Example: If you are holding a bird-watching conference in a tiny town in Toronto your backgrounder might provide the following in brief:

- *Location of the town - coordinates - height above sea level*
- *Climate information*
- *Access to the town - air, land - distance from state capital*
- *Population of the town*
- *History of the town*
- *History of the conference*
- *Previous locations of annual conference*
- *History of organisation*
- *President of organisation*
- *A short list of speakers*