

# Adding Public Relations to Your Strategic Communications/Marketing Mix - Part 1 of 3

By Stephen Fairley

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Despite the turmoil in the economy and the general economic slowdown, **now is an excellent time for attorneys to develop a relationship with a public relations counselor who can help grow your business.** During tough economic times, one of the first budget categories to be scaled back is marketing and communications. With the larger firms pulling back, this provides an excellent opportunity for smaller practices to stand out with well-placed stories and relationships with reporters covering beats important to you and your clients.

To be clear, public relations is a broad term that encompasses many areas of communications. It does not, in this article, include paid media such as print, electronic and digital advertising. It will include several communications techniques including media relations, direct mail, and website media room management.

## Working with the Media

One of the most difficult aspects of working with the media is that you do not control the final outcome of the piece. With advertising, you can control all aspects of a piece – size, content, placement on page, frequency and run date – but with “free” media you do not have that kind of control. Attorneys often struggle with this because of their desire to tightly control messaging to avoid anything that may seem ambiguous, misleading or incorrect. The reality is that you cannot control the message, and you have to accept that everything you want to say will not be included and occasionally some facts may be mixed up. It is the nature of working with human communications.

Once you have decided to begin a program of working with the free media, I strongly suggest that you interview several firms specializing in professional services public relations. Just as in law there are many areas of specialization; the same is true in public relations. One great way to find firms is to ask your colleagues for referrals of PR pros they know. Another option is to contact the local chapter of the Public Relations Society of America ([www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org)) and ask them for referrals of independent practitioners or firms specializing in professional services public relations.

It is important that the relationship between the PR practitioner and you, the client, be one where you can openly discuss ideas, markets to focus on, as well as areas to avoid. Some things to consider are:

- **Areas of your expertise – in which areas are you very knowledgeable?** Don't fake it, but don't limit yourself to areas where you consider yourself an “expert” either. If you have knowledge, feel free to share it. If you need to do a little research to feel comfortable, do it as well. Just don't try to pass yourself off as something you are not.

Reporters will quickly see through that and you will lose all credibility

- **Your target audience** – what kind of company/individuals are you trying to attract as clients? If your clients are mostly corporations, small or large, then focus on business magazines. If your targets are consumers, then more general news media would be an appropriate method to use.
- **Your past cases** – you will need client permission to discuss their cases, unless you do it in extremely general terms. A good media hit is rarely worth irritating a client and referral source.

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Stephen Fairley is a nationally recognized law firm marketing expert and has helped more than 6,000 attorneys from hundreds of law firms across the country to discover the secrets of generating more referrals and filling their practice. He is the international best-selling author of 10 books and 5 audio programs.

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