

# What is Public Relations?



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PR remains a key part of the marketing process and is often far more cost-effective than traditional advertising. PR professionals build strategic relationships between organizations and their target audiences to build or enhance their reputation and create partnerships with the media to get more exposure for their clients.

Deanna Simonian, president and CEO of Mediafy Communications, told us that many small businesses are still confused about what PR is and why they need it.

“One of the most important things about starting a campaign is that having PR helps define the message of your company,” she said. “The first question we ask is, ‘Why are you doing what you’re doing? Why do people care?’ ... It helps fine-tune the message and keep it consistent.” Without consistency, customers won’t understand or trust what your brand represents. A strong PR campaign creates a recognizable message across multiple media platforms. This is important for small businesses, which lack the name recognition of larger companies and corporations. “When small businesses don’t have PR, things are all over the place,” Simonian said. “PR keeps things consistent.”

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## **How does PR differ from advertising and marketing?**

Paid advertisements are the way a company represents itself. A PR campaign, on the other hand, creates unpaid, organic contact between a business and its audience to build brand awareness.

“PR is about third-party credibility,” Simonian said. “This person is an unbiased person genuinely saying, ‘I love this brand.’”

The goals of public relations campaigns differ by company, industry and initiative, but all rely on partnerships with journalists, influencers or community leaders.

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While organizations can control their own marketing and advertising messages, PR cultivates genuine, authentic reactions to the brand. A successful PR campaign accomplishes its goal when the public receives the message from a third-party organization, not the brand itself.

A sponsored post on Instagram, for example, is advertising. But when a company sends a blogger a product to use and the blogger likes it and posts about it, that is PR. Being quoted as a source in a newspaper, being featured in a magazine or being a guest on a talk show are other common forms of PR. Sending press releases for company announcements counts as PR as well.

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“I think PR is creating the most positive image of your company that you can then share with the public,” Simonian said. “Whether that’s through traditional media or social media ... PR means getting your name out there and building your business’s image.”

## **Key Takeaway**

You don’t need a large budget for successful PR. Instead of hiring an agency, focus on creating relationships with local journalists, pitching stories that matter to your customers, and writing press releases that people will actually read.

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# Implementing PR into your business

## 1. Work with media outlets.

Small businesses often wonder if media outlets will be interested in covering them or mentioning their products when big brands are much better known. Many times, though, that lack of previous exposure works in their favor.

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“I’ve worked on IBM, Toshiba, Coca-Cola – and I’ve worked with really small brands too,” Simonian said. “I think media outlets find small business more interesting ... they’re big fans of the ‘uniquenesses.’ For bigger clients, PR is more a matter of managing the press they’re already getting.”

Small businesses, by contrast, don’t already have a narrative or perception attached to their brand, which gives media outlets and influencers the opportunity to shape the story.

“It’s a lot more fun to help create that image and share it,” Simonian said.



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## 2. Build relationships.

Whether you're working with a firm or handling your PR on your own, focus your efforts on people who are already influencing your target customer.

“PR is figuring out ways to build relationships, whether it's with a reporter or social media influencer,” Simonian said. “Look for people who have a lot of clout, and build that relationship. Help them to understand your message and how their followers can relate to you.”

Successful PR builds trust between your company and its customers. Building positive relationships with the right media outlets is essential to creating that trust. If that relationship isn't already there, you won't reach the right audience, no matter how many places feature you. Learn how to build healthy business relationships that will be mutually beneficial.

### 3. Enhance your social media presence.

By engaging with followers and creating content that resonates with them, organizations can generate positive publicity without hiring a marketing or PR agency. Through social media, you can directly communicate with your target audience and build a following by engaging in conversation and providing unique solutions. For additional buzz, you can send products or host giveaways on your social pages.