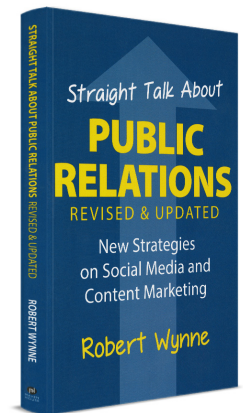


Straight Talk About Public Relations

New Strategies on Social Media and Content Marketing

by **Robert Wynne**



Contents

What is Public Relations?

Page 2

Using Social Media

Page 2

Content Marketing

Page 3

Measurement

Page 4

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Whether you're trying to write a compelling press release, pitch yourself or your product for media coverage or create a social media campaign that works, *Straight Talk about Public Relations (Revised and Updated)* tells you everything you need to know.

Author Robert Wynne, the president of a public relations company, explains what public relations is and guides you through the traditional methods, social media communications, and content marketing strategies that will help you reach journalists and other important audiences. He offers tips from media professionals on how to pitch them and explains the best practices of content marketing, the limitations and benefits of social media, and how to measure the impact of PR efforts.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to write a winning pitch
- The six rules of using social media for public relations
- How to handle negative social media comments
- How to measure the success of your PR campaign

What is Public Relations?

Public relations is powerful. Wars, highway construction, charitable campaigns, and elections are all accompanied by PR campaigns, usually on both sides of the issue. But unlike the media depictions of PR characters, like Samantha in *Sex in the City* or Olivia Pope in *Scandal*, it is not instant and it is seldom glamorous.

In its most basic form, PR is the persuasion business. It involves advocacy by convincing an audience, inside your group or from the outside world, to agree with your position. It could involve the promotion of an idea, the purchase of a product, supporting a candidate, taking a specific action, or enhancing the reputation of a person or group.

A common saying about the difference between PR and advertising is “advertising is what you pay for, publicity is what you pray for.” Advertising is paid media; public relations is earned media. In public relations you try to convince reporters or editors to write positive stories about your client, brand, or issue. These stories have more credibility because they’re independently verified by trusted third parties, rather than purchased.

Most winning pitches and press releases have at least three of the following great story essentials: it offers something new; it has human interest; it challenges conventional wisdom; it’s visual; it’s unusual; it’s impactful; it relates to a trend; or it’s memorable. Before reaching out to journalists, think like a reporter and make sure you have a great story to tell. Think about what the story is, why it is important, and why now. How well that message is delivered is the key factor for success. You must understand the story and how to deliver it in as few words as possible.

Press releases are official documents used to announce something. They’re meant to be posted or read somewhere in the public. The basic elements of a press release are headline, sub headline, “For Immediate Release”, date, location, an inverted pyramid structure (with the most important information first), and a few storytelling essentials. The most important element by far is the headline. It frames your story and often is the subject line of your pitch. If it’s not interesting, you don’t need to worry about what follows—it will be deleted and ignored. Avoid headlines which say the exact same thing as the first sentence of your release. Pick out the specifics in your story and make them newsworthy.

An all-star panel of journalists offer some advice:

- “Write short, concise emails that get straight to the

point. Show how this brand, company, product has real world value. Know the organization you’re pitching to and understand and articulate why this story is a good fit for the organization.”

- “It’s good not to oversell it with words like groundbreaking when it’s really not.”
- “you have to have contact information at the end...but you better be replying to those contacts quickly, too.”
- “I appreciate press releases that have a little bit of a personal touch and demonstrate that the people writing them know why they are reaching out to me.”

A pitch is a brief letter written to a reporter. Whereas press releases reach a wide audience, pitch letters are targeted to a particular reporter at a specific publication. Mashable lists its PR Pet Peeves, which include using all caps in the subject line, misspelling the names of reporters, and pitching old news. Offer new and interesting information that makes the reporter look good: show how a company navigated a partnership with a larger firm; or turbo-charged its growth by building a strong management team. A news peg without an engaging lesson is just a press release. Be familiar with each reporter you try to contact. Read stories they’ve done and their bios to become familiar with what they need.

It is crucial that your pitch has a good subject line. When we pitched a story for Cornell University, we wanted to promote a PhD student working with a major chemical company to introduce soybeans in India. Seems dry, but where do you grow soybeans in the slums of India? This led to a pitch that resulted in a *Wall Street Journal* story “In, India, How Do Rooftop Gardens Grow?” We were pitching a real estate attorney for a rising stars list and the headline “Billion Dollar Dealmaker” turned into a good story and the cover of a magazine.

To increase your chances of landing your story, make sure you have something interesting to say, do your research, make your story compelling, write it to serve the reporter’s needs, be sure to spell everything correctly, and eliminate all caps, boldface and underlining.

Using Social Media

Social media success is difficult. It can take weeks, months, or years to build an audience. The social media gold rush is over, but it can be effective as long as your goals are modest. The biggest challenge is to first understand the social media process and create realistic goals.

Social media can be a great amplifier with many people generating ongoing conversations. It is good for crisis relations like product recalls, scandals, or accident news, and finding reporters, producers, and editors. Here are a few rules.

- **Rule 1: Be brief, don't be boring** – Come up with an exciting way to say your announcement, like you're telling a friend why it matters. Find an image or make a video to include.
- **Rule 2: Be newsworthy** – Pay attention to breaking news. If your client is an expert, prepare an opinion. Make sure a short bio included on their profile, follow hashtags and contact reporters and producers who are covering the story.
- **Rule 3: Be Consistent, Post Lots of Quality Content** – Post regularly so there is a reason for followers to return.
- **Rule 4: Be Helpful** – A great way to get your story covered is to be on the giving end with press. Think about what could be useful to the writer.
- **Rule 5: Use Facebook Groups** – Facebook groups are a way to manage membership relations for an organization. Use it to post an events calendar or provide additional benefits for your members.
- **Rule 6: Be Live** – Monitor your business on social media and respond to mentions and comments. Social media is real-time, so the faster you respond, the better. Post videos to kick off a campaign.

If you have to choose one platform for social media, many choose Twitter. Twitter is good for announcements, research on what competitors, clients and media are tweeting about, and networking with new influencers and reporters. Target media where you'd like to be seen, friend reporters who cover similar topics, write to them, genuinely comment on stories you like, let them know about you and your story. To boost your audience, try running a contest, join as many directories as you can find, create a video tutorial, and mention your Twitter account anytime you are speaking in public.

Negative social media will happen. Trolling is one of those problems best handled by ignoring it, especially if the attacks are personal. If the attacks are professional, take the conversation off social media and try to reason with the commenter via email. If they refuse to be reasonable you can block them, ask a third-party to restate your position without engaging them, or change the conversation by posting on a different issue.

Social media can be a great amplifier with many people generating ongoing conversations.

Content Marketing

Content marketing is the publication of material designed to promote a brand. It can take a lot of different forms, including videos, blog posts, and articles. It shouldn't seem like marketing, but is a long-term, subtle approach that can improve a company or person's reputation and bolster prominence. It takes time, energy, and expense, and with so many competitors, getting noticed is difficult. You must be consistent and create useful content targeted toward a specific audience. Today, individuals and businesses can produce content in several ways. These are the more effective formats:

- Edited blog posts on Forbes, Huff Post, and others, are more effective than other posts and help with credibility and reach.
- Short videos. Pay attention to the tone and goal of the video, have some humor, and show emotion—a reaction alone can tell far more than words. Creating compelling content that will resonate with your audience is critical, but it's equally important to have a plan in place for amplifying it. Ensure that you are connecting with influencers to get your content shared and promoted. Create a multichannel approach that covers earned, owned, and paid media. Use data to find the top performing content and continue sharing with updated messaging to hit more audiences.
- Webinars and teleseminars are live presentations that often work best when a guest is invited by a company with a large, built-in audience.
- Podcasts are similar to a radio feature. They can be popular with celebrity hosts, but it's a challenge to attract ears.
- Newsletters have promise. Make sure readers know upfront what value, frequency, and general content they can expect to receive so they are less likely to

unsubscribe. Newsletter content should be 90 percent educational and 10 percent promotional, and have concise, attention-getting subject lines.

One secret to successful content marketing is to pay for it. Many media companies like Conde Nast, New York Times, and CNN offer sponsored content that look like news stories. These stories have exposure and quality writing, but this isn't cheap and can cost \$50,000 to \$100,000.

For small businesses, don't try to compete with huge companies, find your own smaller space and make it your own. For best results, pick a niche where you can be #1; post in regular intervals concentrating on one channel; be original—for example, having a six-year-old interview tech execs to see if they can clearly explain their product; speak directly to your audience and add photos and video when they're well produced.

You may need to create several different messages for different groups, for every issue or product to see what works best.

Measurement

Public relations isn't math or physics. You can't measure influence or reputation with a simple equation. There are only two essential measurements: goals and metrics. Goals are whatever the client defines, whether new business leads or website traffic. But it is difficult to assign sales outcomes or donations solely to PR. There are several quantitative metrics to use in measuring the impact of PR: counting media placements, assessing the quality of the placements, and the viral impact (i.e. total number of mentions, number of influencers, and the sentiment of the messages). Many companies simply rely on the number of media placements, but this offers an incomplete picture.

There are some common measurement systems, with their own pluses and minuses, including the Barcelona Principles used by many trade groups; the mediaQuant analysis model that collects positive, neutral and negative mentions and compares media ratings; and the Canadian Media Ratings Points system that evaluates media coverage by tracking reach and cost per contact. Although some measurement systems are better than others, they all still only provide estimates.

To measure PR:

- Set Goals and Objectives – Create strong messaging, find your target audience, and agree on a desired outcome
- Target Your Media – Find outlets that directly reach your audience; use a variety of methods from press releases to speaking engagements and influencer campaigns; and consider creating your own content marketing
- Measure Results such as active coverage, potential reach, social engagement, sentiment, quality of coverage and earned traffic like unique visitors per day.
- Analyze Your Competitors – Benchmark your results against past results and against competitors.



Robert Wynne is president of the public relations and events agency Wynne Communications. He also writes a monthly column on public relations for Forbes. He has provided public relations counsel for Cornell University Johnson School, Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, MIT Sloan School of Management, UCLA Law School, the law firm of Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, and many others.

Straight Talk about Public Relations (Revised and Updated) by Robert Wynne © 2019 Robert Wynne. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Maven House Press. 200 pages, ISBN 978-1938548857 Summary copyright © 2019 by Soundview Book Summaries®