

HSMAI'S CHAPTER

'PR IN A BOX'

**How to implement a public relations campaign for your chapter...
A PR toolkit.**

THE ART & SCIENCE OF PR

Impacting the marketplace becomes increasingly more urgent and challenging in this age of information overload. One of the greatest, yet often overlooked, ways of adding power, punch and persuasion to all of your marketing messages is through public relations.

Public relations has long since been considered *the* trustworthy and credible means of communicating with an audience. Not making this part of your marketing mix means missed opportunities to reach and influence both existing and potential members.

The use of public relations as an integral part of your chapter marketing plan will serve to increase more than awareness. It will bring new members to your door, attract industry leaders in your area, as well as build the HSMAI brand.

What follows are strategies, suggestions and samples to begin the process.

Top 10 List:

Recommendations for implementing your public relations efforts.

1. **Set Up a PR Committee.**
2. **Determine Which Activities are Newsworthy.**
3. **Create a Mailing List.**
4. **Have a Plan & Set Up a Schedule.**
5. **Writing the Press Release & Pitching Stories.**
6. **Be a Spokesperson.**
7. **Be Web Savvy.**
8. **Consider an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor.**
9. **Pay Attention to Results.**
10. **Think Partnerships.**

1. Set Up a PR Committee.

Here is where you can leverage your membership base by recruiting a member who is a public relations professional to head up the PR committee for your chapter. This can be an individual who is engaged in public relations either internally (at a hotel, attraction, airline, cruise line, etc.) or someone who works for a PR agency.

Another option would be to invite a local PR agency – one that handles travel and hospitality accounts – to become a member and do “pro bono” services for the chapter. This can be a win-win situation for both parties in that it would provide the chapter with expert PR services while at the same time give the agency an opportunity to network with potential new clients.

For public relations to be successful, it is important that someone take ownership. Once an individual takes is in charge of the PR initiatives, they can turn to other members for assistance and establish a productive working committee.

And be sure that the lines of communication are open, between the PR committee, leadership and your other committees, so that those handling PR are aware of what initiatives warrant media outreach.

2. Determine Which Activities are Newsworthy.

An objective of the PR committee is to determine, help develop, and promote events, programs and information that are newsworthy in your chapter. Some examples are announcements of:

- Events, seminars, monthly luncheons
- Educational seminars and prominent speakers
- Appointment of new chapter president and board members
- Charitable functions/events
- Community outreach initiatives
- Scholarships
- Partnering news with other organizations
- Chapter and other awards
- Membership growth or diversification
- Newsworthy or trend-related results of membership or other surveys

When applicable, be sure to have photos available for publication, such as coverage of a community event, new appointments, reputed speaker, etc.

Prior to the start of the year, an action plan should be created, listing month-by-month, what activities and occurrences can be promoted by PR so that you have a schedule to work from. But keep in mind that it should be a living document that can change at any time according to Chapter activities (See #4).

3. Create a Mailing List.

Who you send press release to varies by subject matter, but for the most part, the media outlets listed below should be included in your media distribution list.

There are a number of **writers and editors** who should receive those releases. Among them are:

- Hospitality and tourism reporters.
- Business writers and editors (including Business Monday editors of newspapers).
- Sales and marketing editors.
- From time to time, your information might be of interest to a newspaper's travel editor, though keep in mind they generally handle the Sunday travel sections and report on feature/lifestyle stories.

Media Outlets:

- Daily/weekly newspapers in your area, which feature calendar listings of business seminars, educational opportunities, etc.
- Weekly/monthly business journals/magazines in your city and/or state.
- Business radio and TV programs which air locally in your market.
- Regional travel, hospitality and sales and marketing publications, if applicable.
- Publications such as Travel Agent Magazine feature regional seminars and events of importance in their calendar listing, so if your program or speaker is impressive, that can be an outlet.
- Local school or college newspapers if you are interested in developing your student membership base.
- Online local media, such as calendar events on city sights that reference business and tourism.

Ideally, all of the above should be computerized in a database with contact information including name, title, publication, address, phone, fax, email, website address, frequency of publication and deadlines. This way you can produce labels for mailings, merge names into word documents and create reporting. Many media prefer to receive information by email, but it is best to check individually to be sure you are distributing releases the most effective way.

When emailing releases, place the type in the body of the email, *NOT* as an attachment – the media will not open unknown attachments.

4. Have a Plan & Set Up a Schedule.

Begin with a plan that incorporates your initiatives and activities. That means putting down on paper what you want to accomplish – the messages you want delivered and what markets you can use to reach them. Consider the plan a working document that changes as issues arise.

The key to getting media coverage for your chapter and events is to provide a compelling reason or useful information to the press with advance notice. Therefore, your action plan should include a month-by-month schedule with due dates so you can track progress and be sure you're meeting deadlines.

For example, if you are holding a luncheon with a prominent guest speaker, you can create three different releases:

- 1) Pre-event feature release, which focuses on the speaker and the content they will deliver (Sent at least a month in advance; earlier for monthly publications).
- 2) Calendar release – who, what, where, when (sent at least three weeks in advance; earlier for monthly publications).
- 3) Post-event release recapping the important information that was discussed, which should be sent within 48 hours following the meeting. Also, include a photo from the event which will help the possibility of placement. This should be distributed only if the event resulted in data or commentary that is worthy of releasing.

Also, working with the media means establishing relationships, so be sure to invite (free of charge) some of the major media in your area to your events when the subject matter is appropriate and of interest. If it is someone whose beat is hospitality or marketing, not only can they find future content from your meeting, but it offers them a chance to meet your membership base who may be a source of other stories they will be working on.

5. Writing the Press Release & Pitching Stories.

When appropriate, don't be afraid to be creative and provocative.

If you have a really interesting speaker, write the announcement so that it peaks the media's interest.

If there is an industry issue that is a hot topic, feel free to get varying opinions from HSMAI members and pitch the idea of a controversial story to the media.

Often you will be publicizing events with the basic who, what, where, when release, but when you have an opportunity to be creative as to the who and what, take full advantage.

Also, don't just rely on mass distribution of releases for events, but take the time to tailor individual pitch letters to a writer or editor that might be of particular interest to them.

When writing releases, be sure to follow accepted style with respect to the writing as well as formatting. See attached samples and templates.

6. Be a Spokesperson.

Become a resource to the media and you will find that you may be called upon to provide comments for news stories about the travel and hospitality industry, as well as sales and marketing practices and trends.

If you, or your board members, are experts on a subject or knowledgeable about an issue, feel free to communicate that to the media. Writers and editors are always looking to incorporate commentary from professionals in their reporting, as well as new, fresh ideas for storylines.

A Media Contact List of Travel Industry Experts, which consists of HSMAI Board and Foundation members along with their topic of expertise, is distributed to media on a national level each quarter. Why not create that on a local level and send it to your media list along with an explanatory cover letter. The press find this an invaluable tool when working on stories. You can also post it on your website. A copy of the National edition is enclosed.

Don't be intimidated to take a proactive approach if you have the goods to offer up.

7. Be Web Savvy.

Since so much is done on the Internet these days, ensure that your Web site is informative and easy to navigate, and make a press room one of your site components so that media can access press releases, photos, logos, a list of story ideas, a newsletter if you have one, as well as a media contact with phone and email. Make sure your Web site address is on *everything* you print or publish.

8. Consider an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor.

If there is an issue worth talking about, write a letter to the editor or opinion commentary section of a publication. In most cases this would be best signed by chapter leadership (president, executive director, etc.), and should reflect the thoughts and opinions of the chapter. It can be about a local issue affecting the industry, any trends that are impacting the community and relate to your business, or some other newsworthy subject that is appropriate.

The Op-Ed page is found in the back pages of daily newspapers. It is best to read them thoroughly to get to know what generally appears, as well as who is on the Editorial Board.

9. Pay Attention to Results.

Keep a close watch on the fruits of your labor. Having a steady stream of pitches and press releases sent out is a great start, but you want to be sure you're getting pick-up.

Contracting a press clipping service is a good way to track the majority of placements, but that can be quite costly for those on a budget. While you can't read or watch every media outlet out there, keep a close eye on what you can and recruit others on your board to be on the lookout.

Whoever is in charge of your PR effort, keep the lines of communication open and discuss what you have to promote and the type of coverage you hope for.

10. Think Partnerships.

There is definitely strength in numbers, so consider other organizations in the local area to join forces with on an issue or event. This can help add to the credibility, increase the sphere of influence and draw a larger audience. Often, this tactic creates a more substantial and compelling story and increases the likelihood that you will be able to get the media interested.