

Public Relations



Public relations is a mandatory element in the growth and development of a disability consulting firm. Note that I used the word mandatory! Some level of a public relations marketing approach should be used by all new consultants as a means of introducing their service to the general public.

A publicity seeking approach will act to both promote and define your service while creating instant credibility for your firm. We strongly suggest that you take steps toward implementing a public relations campaign prior to or simultaneously with the placing of your first advertisement. Public relations should not be ignored by any consultant who is truly interested in achieving success.

Purpose of PR:

The purposes of public relations or "PR" as it is often called, are to introduce or heighten the public awareness of a new product or service. Public awareness of a new product can be achieved through a variety of creative approaches. The methods used in PR can be both purchased or acquired at no charge. The PR approach will require the same level of skill as is needed to create effective media advertisement.

There is no clear and discernible difference between advertisement and public relations. Both require an in-depth understanding of your product and your market. A well developed advertisement will also double as a public relations methodology and vice versa. Advertisement should create awareness and a positive image of your firm and PR should do the same. You must approach the creation of your public relations campaign with the same care that you would give to the creation of an effective paid advertisement piece. Why, because advertisement and public relations must have essentially the same effect. That is, to attract attention to your service!

Elements of PR:

There are several basic formats used in the creation and distribution of public relations materials. The following is a list of the most common formats used in PR:

Promotional letters.

News releases

Fact sheets

Interview memos

Institutional advertising

Press kits

Promotional letter:

A promotional letter is a publicizing tool used to promote and create a favorable impression of your service with a specific group of people. A promotional letter can take one of two basic approaches. You may use your promotional letter to create and solidify your company's name and reputation or you may place your emphasis on an explanation of the dynamic aspects for your service.

A promotional letter is a very effective medium used with either of the above approaches and should always be available in some form (letter, brochure, etc.,) in case of an inquiry. A promotional letter should be placed on your company's letterhead and written in a formal business style. Be sure to request that the information found in your promotional letter be released to the public if sent to a media forum.

You would be surprised at how many people produce beautiful promotional letters, send them out to sources and then forget to ask for the publicity. Rule one is to make sure that you ask that the information you are providing be shared with the public as a news item.

News Release:

A news release is essentially the introduction of a story idea written by you or your public relations firm explaining your company goals, philosophy and services.

A news release is sent to a media source such as a newspaper, television or radio station, with a request that the news item or story be released to the public. A news release usually contains highlights about the company, service and who to contact if you are interested in the service. A news release is not meant to be a detailed explanation of a company or service.

The process of attempting to gain free air time via a news release is also referred to as a placement. A news release that is well written covering the dynamic aspects of the disability consulting industry, has a good chance of being aired. Local channels are always looking for new and interesting businesses or services that they can share with the public. Try to have your news release aired during a news program for increased credibility.

You can improve your chances of being aired by using a moderate level of controversy. However, don't go to extremes! In other words, don't offer a news release that sounds like something written by a rabid revolutionary.

Pointing out some of the more controversial aspects of disability consulting will be perceived as being more newsworthy. However, your service must also be made to sound like something that is not only publicly acceptable, but is also useful to the public at large. Where television is concerned, perceived controversy will always act to greatly increase your chances of being aired and will also more readily capture the attention of your audience.

What are some of the more controversial aspects of this industry? In our sales brochure introducing customers to disability consulting, we mentioned several little-known aspects of this industry. Without saying negative things about SSA, we pointed out that a number of people are denied benefits each year as a result of not understanding the system. We also mentioned the fact that few individuals have anyone to turn to who can really help them with their disability claims. These examples are nice polite ways of saying that SSA is not the friend of the applicant.

If you point out some of the red tape problems experienced by applicants in a subtle manner, your news release will have the same effect. These types of controversial subjects are interesting to the public and have a good chance of being picked up by the media. Anyone who has ever applied for disability benefits will testify to the accuracy of your statements, greatly increasing your credibility in the eyes of the public.

Fact Sheets:

A fact sheet or press kit is designed to give a more detailed explanation of your company and its services. A fact sheet can be used to explain your training, background, company goals and services in relative detail. If you have had any level of success in disability consulting, this should be pointed out in your fact

sheet as well.

Fact sheets should be sent to magazines who specialize in doing articles on new businesses, new business concepts and creative entrepreneurial projects. The fact sheet is most effective when presented in a story form, pointing out some of the personal experiences of the author.

Interview Memo:

An interview memo or tip sheet is a method used to inform a potential media source of your willingness and availability for a personal interview. You are essentially holding yourself out as an expert in a particular field who is willing to make comments whenever your specialty is in the news.

This short informational memo should be attached to your news release or fact sheet. The interview memo should also give dates you are available for interviews, biographical information about yourself and possible suggestions for interview topics in your specialty area. Many community based news programs are anxious to do interviews that affect large numbers of viewers as is true with disability advocacy.

Do not make the mistake of thinking yourself unworthy of obtaining or giving public interviews. In order to succeed in consulting, you must be seen, heard and noticed by as many people as possible. To be seen as the expert is stronger yet! Don't allow shyness or lack of confidence to interfere with your determination to be seen and heard in your community.

Institutional Advertising:

Institutional advertising is a method of advertising that emphasizes your company name and reputation. This advertising approach is in fact public relations aimed at building name recognition using your product or service as the theme. This type of ad mentions the product or service only briefly, while hammering at the name and reputation of your company. This type of approach should only be used when the community is well informed about disability consulting services in general and competition is beginning to emerge. The object of institutional advertising is to place the reputation of your company above that of a competitor.

Teasers:

Public relations, as you may have noticed, involves a great deal of skill in written communications. However, there are other ways of practicing public relations that can be more effective than the best written news release. Using an incentive or teaser approach to bring in the customers is one of the most successfully utilized methods of public relations.

A teaser acts as a public relations tool only if it creates a positive image for your firm. This is done by offering customers, via a paid advertisement, a way of personally evaluating your services prior to signing on.

One of the most effective teasers is the free initial (first) interview approach. This allows a potential customer to talk to you about their case without feeling obligated to sign on. This free evaluation approach creates an image of fairness for your company that is invaluable. It also allows you to assess a customer's needs and determine the percent chance of winning a particular case. So in fact, you lose nothing by offering this incentive! We strongly suggest the use of teasers in all of your advertising and public relations materials. Be sure that the media source covering your story also mentions your teasers in their presentations about your firm.

SUMMATION

Public relations is a mandatory element in the growth and development of a disability consulting firm. The purpose of public relations is to introduce or build a solid understanding of a new product or service in the eyes of the general public. The primary elements in the utilization of public relations are:

1. Promotional letters.
2. News releases.
3. Fact sheets.
4. Interview memos.
5. Institutional advertising.
6. The press kit.