

## How To Select A Public Relations Firm

Article provided by HMA Public Relations

Utilizing the services of a respected public relations agency can help an organization create, build and protect its good name.

Because an organization's reputation and image are vital to its survival and success, the selection of that agency can be one of the most important decisions an organization can make.

To start, an organization must first determine what it wants to achieve. It must identify and prioritize its corporate goals. These goals will then become the basis for determining your public relations goals.

To identify the right PR firm for you, talk with peers, friends, business acquaintances or fellow members of civic organizations to find out if they retain public relations counsel. If so, which ones? Are they happy with their performance? Would they recommend them?

You may also check with the Public Relations Society of America. Local chapters have directories of firms in their area. Look for an agency that adheres to the PRSA's code of ethics and that has a strong commitment to the professionalism of its industry. Also, try to find an agency that's got a good track record. It is too important to get stuck with some fly-by-night operation.

After identifying the public relations firm for your initial screening, contact a principal at the firm by telephone or letter. Describe your organization and its public relations needs as you see them. Ask if they would be interested in talking with you. If so, check to make sure that they do not already represent a client which might cause a conflict of interest. Have a realistic budget in mind and be prepared to share that with your prospective agency. You'll also want to find out:

- The firm's general background and any experience in your organization's area;
- Its range of services;
- The depth of professional qualifications, such as accredited staff members, organizational memberships, such as PRSA, International Association of Business Communicators, Society of Professional Journalists, National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, and others;

Then, if you remain interested, visit the agency to meet your prospective account team. See where your account team works and take notice of the agency's atmosphere and environment.

Throughout the interview process, remember it is inappropriate to ask firms to undertake speculative work. However, you may ask for an outline of the scope of work the agency

expects to provide. This should be flexible and something that both you and the agency agree on.

Once you've agreed to contract with an agency, the next step is to discuss fee arrangements and the initial length of the contract. The firm will then send you a signed letter of agreement outlining these terms.

If your organization wants its public relations firm to succeed, you must supply more than monetary support. You must approach the relationship as a partnership. Be prepared to help them help you. They cannot be expected to operate in a vacuum.

A successful relationship between a client and a public relations firm is based on these fundamentals: the best match of capabilities to needs, total agreement on objectives, constant accessibility, full information sharing, continuous interaction, regular program and progress reviews and a clear understanding of contract responsibilities. Underlying all is mutual trust and respect. Assemble these components and together you can build a strong, rewarding and lasting business relationship.

Source: The Counselors Academy, Public Relations Society of America

*HMA Public Relations is a full-service marketing communications agency whose experience encompasses work in the traditional marketing communications disciplines including public relations, media relations, marketing communications, issues management, community relations and special events.*

*Located at 3610 N. 44<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 110 in Phoenix, HMA Public Relations can be reached at (602) 957-8881. Its web address is [www.hmapr.com](http://www.hmapr.com).*