

Using PR strategies to leverage your marketing campaigns



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INTRODUCTION

If you are launching a new company, new product or new service you need to consider putting a PR plan alongside your marketing plan to amplify your results.

However, I would recommend this only applies if your new 'thing' has news legs. PR isn't appropriate if, for instance, you are simply launching version 10 of your widget originally developed in 1995.

However, if your launch has news legs and is something that will have a major affect within your industry and extraordinary benefits to your audiences, then you just might have something worthy of a PR approach. And when you implement well, you will experience:

- Story telling that gets people excited and ready to receive your marketing messages
- News that attracts industry influencers to your brand
- Word-of-mouth spreading faster than any marketing campaign could promote
- People who matter to you and your customers developing a deeper relationship with your brand

For the purposes of this ebook, I'm primarily referring to three aspects of public relations: stakeholder engagement, government relations and publicity.

15 PR LESSONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH

#1: Prime the pump with PR

Public relations work, particularly the practice of briefing key stakeholders ahead of a launch, serves to create awareness ahead of your above-the-line marketing efforts. The benefits include:

- Identifying any issues ahead of public launch
- Ensuring 'champions' are informed and ready to spread good word-of-mouth when the time comes
- When the public launch happens, creating a buzz throughout all circles of influence where your stakeholders operate and communicate

#2: Get your creative team on the same page early

For big launches, you'll often have an in-house marketing team leading the launch. And you'll often have a creative agency, digital marketing team, social marketing team and others who are providing service in support of the launch.

Ensure that your PR people are part of this team and get them around the same table early and often. If you're the in-house marketing person, you'll be so busy that there's often things that you'll miss. If your PR people are good at their job, they'll spot risks and opportunities during the planning and lead-up process that you may never spot. Your PR team can be another set of eyes to mitigate communications risks and grab ahold of communications opportunities.



#3: Understand the current landscape

Your PR team can help you analyse the current industry landscape prior to a launch, which will help to settle on the right timing to kick-off your above-the-line marketing campaign.

Ensure you are keeping a watchful eye on media and any topics related to your company or product. You don't want to launch if there is anything controversial in the media which could affect your success.

Monitor social media – and not just your brand or product name – for what competitors are up to and for related topics. Often you can catch potential issues bubbling up that could inform your PR and marketing efforts alike.

#4: PR implementation takes a long lead time

If you do decide putting a PR plan alongside your marketing plan is of value, remember that PR planning takes a lot of time. For a product launch, for instance, PR planning should start at least six months prior to your marketing launch date.

This is because it'll take a lot of time to research all the stakeholders you should brief, do some background research about them and get briefing meetings in the diary.

If you are including a government relations component to your launch, it'll take a lot of time to get in front of ministers, government officials and staff in a meaningful way.

#5: Inform stakeholders pre-launch

No matter what sort of launch you're doing, you'll have VIP stakeholders who must hear about it before they see an advert or news story. You want to ensure they feel important and well-informed before the masses. This might even include informing your key customers the night before a high-profile launch – make them feel special.

And don't forget your detractors. Is there a scientist that might not agree with the science behind your product? Is there a regional councillor who could likely speak out against your company? Is there a social media troll that always pops up online? Include them in your briefings. At the very minimum, this will ensure detractors operating from a point of knowledge, and the best outcome is they don't feel the need to speak out because you have kept them informed.

#6: Government engagement

If you are going to engage with government in a meaningful way, it takes time. The engagement that needs to happen is often like a 'web' of overlapping briefings, meetings and discussions.

Good government relations isn't about just informing one minister. You need to think about the entire ecosystem: central, regional and local government.

And remember to not only inform elected officials, but ministerial and council staff as well.

And finally, if you want to get a minister to speak at a launch event, remember that you've got to get in their diary early – at least 4-5 months out. And often, your launch date will need to work around their availability, not your preferred date.

#7: Let your PR objectives determine your launch timing

If you're adding a PR component to your launch, let your PR objectives determine your launch date. Because your PR objectives will likely be related to ensuring you've got sufficient positive feedback, got advocates on board, briefed ministers, ensured all key staff are equipped to be strong ambassadors, etc.

Plus, part of your PR efforts will be taking the pulse of your key audiences, bringing back any potential risks to the launch team, and adjusting as you go.

It's important that you don't allow booking dates for adverts or social media campaign, for instance, to determine your launch date.

#8: Marketing language isn't PR language

Keep in mind that your marketing and promotion language has no place in the messages you'll use in your PR campaign. Marketing messages relate to 'selling' while PR messages relate to educating, informing and gaining feedback.

Additionally, when you're putting together your news stories and liaising with media, if they get a whiff that your story is focused on selling a product then you'll get nowhere except the advertising rep.

Keep the adverbs, adjectives, product USPs and benefits out of your PR collateral and news stories.



#9: Let your PR team run eyes over your collateral

Before you finalise your marketing material, let your PR team run their eyes over the collateral. This will help to catch any language or messaging that might be counter to what's been used in stakeholder and government briefings. And, if any communications risks are uncovered during the PR work, you'll want to make sure no marketing messaging exacerbates these.

#10: Your 'product' is not the news

When it comes to putting together news releases related to your launch, remember that your new product is not the headline.

Your news around the launch needs to relate to the problem you are addressing. For instance, if your product helps alleviate nitrogen leaching on dairy farms, you need a story that builds up the issue first and then talks about the impact your solution will have.

Unlike marketing messages, your news must be backed up with facts, figures and/or science to support your claims.

#11: Use influencers and champions

For highest impact at launch, it's important to have credible people who are influential in your target audience's circles to be spreading great word-of-mouth and endorsing your product publicly. This is gold!

Your PR efforts ahead of the launch should focus on achieving goals within this space and getting key people ready to be your advocates.

#12: Changing media landscape creates a challenge

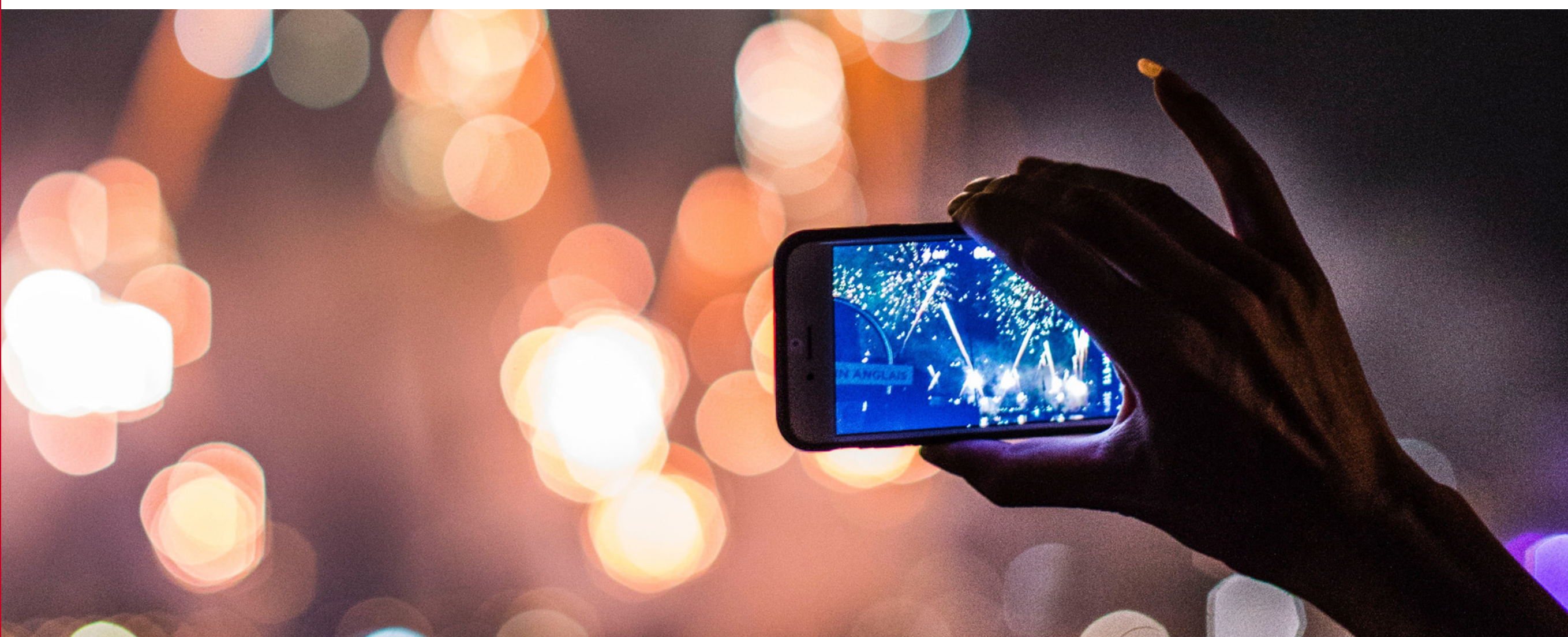
Within New Zealand and around the world, the media landscape is continually changing. The journalist you've always had a good relationship with may be gone. The publication that always picked up your news releases could disappear any day. Plus, the stories that made the news headlines last year may no longer interest your preferred news outlets.

This changing media landscape makes direct communication with your audiences of utmost importance. Your PR team can help you reach them effectively.

#13: Post-launch, keep news alive

Once your launch occurs, remember to look for additional news angles that will keep your product in the media. This could be announcing a new research grant, gaining an industry award or news with additional information that you held back to keep the story alive.

Research shows news stories continue to have more credibility with most audiences when compared to advertisements, so the more stories you have in the media will serve to amplify your marketing efforts.



#14: PR for a launch is difficult if you are unknown

One thing to keep in mind is that utilising PR around a product or service launch will be more difficult if your company or brand is largely unknown by stakeholders, potential customers or the public.

This is one good reason to implement an ongoing PR strategy all year long. That way, when 'big news' comes out, you've already gained awareness and credibility with your audience who will give you 'permission' to engage further on a new subject.

#15: Measure your PR separately from marketing

And finally, remember to measure your PR efforts separately from your marketing efforts.

That's because your marketing will be measured by the sales it generates. Whereas the measures for your PR efforts should be specific measures around awareness, knowledge, brand reputation, positivity toward your product and other qualitative measures.

Remember that PR will help you open doors and pave the way for your marketing messages so that your campaigns will have greater impact.



Get in touch

Give HMC a call if you want to amplify your next marketing campaign with a PR strategy.

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