

How to select a PR agency

If you are reading this article, congratulations!

It means you are serious about building a positive reputation.

Having a Public Relations agency helps in creating the reputation you are seeking.

However, finding a good PR agency is comparable to trekking on a rocky hill barefoot.

It is difficult because the market is full of upstarts managed by people with least experience in the field.

They would promise the moon and leave you stranded in a hole.

Go to a big PR brand and the end result is no different, only this time you will have a big hole in your pocket.

There are a few credible PR partners who present real facts about the craft of reputation building and help you walk the path.

They don't rely on fluff to bag clients. They rather work with few clients and give them their best.

But how can you differentiate one from the other? The magic lies in the process you follow.

This document is created to help you with this process.

Before we go on to talk about what process you should follow to find a great PR agency, let's look at what process you should avoid.

The process that many prospective clients follow is:

Step 1: Call for PR proposals

Step 2: Keep the budget a mystery

Step 3: Create unhealthy competition between PR agencies

Step 4: Hire the agency that promises the highest number of media impressions at the lowest cost

This is an inefficient process that leads to the selection of a sub-optimal agency that delivers sub-optimal results. You should avoid this process at all costs.

An efficient alternative that generates optimal results for companies features transparency and trust.

It goes like this:

Step 1: Define PR objectives and your expectation from the PR agency

Step 2: Define a budget

Step 3: Publish the Request for Proposal openly

Step 4: Organize a Q&A call

Step 5: Organize separate calls/meetings to talk about each agency's proposal

Step 5(a): Focus on ideas

Step 6: Select the agency with the best ideas, irrespective of the budget

Let me explain each step in detail.

Step 1: Define PR objectives and your expectations from the PR agency

Clear objectives and expectations set the ball rolling.

It gives the prospective agency a clear picture of what you have in mind.

Step 2: Define a budget

The PR industry is big, with agencies ready to work for Rs. X to Rs. 100X or even higher.

It is impossible for anyone to explore so many agencies.

Clarity about the budget helps in reducing the number of participating agencies to a manageable number, as it would evoke interest from only those agencies who can work within the given budget.

This also gives the agencies a clear picture of what is achievable within the given budget. It equips them to submit a practical proposal.

If mentioning a specific budget is not possible, give a range.

Step 3: Publish the Request for Proposal

You should publish the RFP on your website and/or preferred social media channel to inform the target agencies of your requirements.

This is in addition to emailing the RFP to a handful of agencies that you have already identified.

Publishing it on the website and social media channels expands your reach and enables you to discover a PR partner you might not know exists.

Step 4: Organize a Q&A call

The agencies have gone through your requirements and know your budget.

By now, they have a clear idea of what they need to do. Still, they may have some questions.

A Q&A call is their opportunity to get answers before they submit their proposal.

Also, this is your opportunity to ascertain how much do they know about your business.

Usually, an agency that understands your business will ask deep questions.

Step 5: Organize separate calls/meetings to talk about each agency's proposal

You need to insist on the presence of the servicing team in these meetings.

Here, you need to look at the credentials of the servicing team deputed for your account.

It is important to do so because it is the servicing team that will plan and execute the PR program for you.

Step 5(a): Focus on ideas

Every agency claims to have enviable relationships with journalists. They may be right but relationships don't convert into stories.

Most agencies also promise a big number of impressions per month to satiate clients' hunger for coverage. But we know what matters more is the relevance of media.

A good story in a relevant publication is worth 100 stories in irrelevant ones, or maybe more.

Ideas enable good stories in relevant publications. So, focus on what ideas are being shared by the agencies.

Step 6: Select the agency with the best ideas, irrespective of the budget

You have already set boundaries for the budget by publishing it clearly in the RFP.

The agencies that are vying for your work have committed to working within the given budget.

All you have to do now is to select the agency which has shared ideas that are aligned with your business objectives.

Even if this agency is charging the maximum fee, it won't matter because it will still be within the range you had published.

Final words

These are all the steps you need to take to find your next PR partner. Anything else is just fluff.

Happy searching!