



## **Getting the best out of your PR agency**

There are people in your organisation who don't seem to have much to do but you can't find anyone suitable to do your PR in-house. If you employ a PR agency, on the other hand, you'd have people – who are, hopefully, competent - to do the work that needs doing.

### **Why hire a PR agency?**

The main reasons are flexibility and competency. You want an agency – and, preferably, someone within that agency - with the right expertise. Moreover, you don't need that person to be a full time employee, with all the responsibilities that this brings you, as an employer, manager and so on.

### **Finding the right PR agency for you**

Use word of mouth. If there are people you've worked with and they're tried and tested, ask them first. Otherwise use your networking contacts. Ask them to suggest reputable PR agencies with whom they've got on well and feel they've received good customer service and value for money. Failing that, contact a PR agency that specialises in the area/ sector that you need.

### **Remember: you get what you pay for**

The lowest bidder is unlikely to do the best job. If the specific PR skills you need are in short supply, be prepared to pay what the market demands. Remember, you're still saving on overheads, benefits and the general costs of employing people when you use an agency.

### **Manage the relationship**

Your relationship with your PR agency is *not* that of an employer and employee. Rather, it is that of a business-to-business partnership. The PR agency/ specialist does not work *for* you but *with* you to achieve your ends. You need to understand this and structure your relationship with the PR agency/ specialist accordingly.

### **Be specific**

Communicate clearly what you require of the PR agency/ specialist. It's important to specify timescales; deliverables; key performance indicators and milestones – and get confirmation from the PR agency/ specialist that it/s/he understands, accepts and agrees to be judged by these things.

### **Trust the PR agency/ specialist**

Since you're engaging a specialist on the strength of her/his skills, you must respect her/his ability to find the right solutions. So trust the specialist's judgement. Accept that, when it comes to someone else's specialism, you may not know best.

### **Keep them informed and 'plug' them in to your corporate culture**

Whether the PR agency/ specialist is working on your premises or not, you need to facilitate their access to the people and systems within your business with whom they will need to communicate. This means keeping regular touch with the PR specialist looking after your account to give her/him news and information about your business, goals and objectives – and, maybe, even plans. This also means putting them in touch with your employees and clients who can help them do the job you've asked them to do.

Don't imagine that the PR agency/ specialist can guess what needs to be done and who s/he needs to speak to among your employees and clients in order to do it.

Remember, you're paying the bills and you want the results. So help the PR agency/ specialist to achieve those results. After all, no one wants to do a bad job – and, if you're ever dissatisfied with your PR agency/ specialist's performance, ask yourself first whether you could have done anything at all to help prevent the current state of affairs.