



Ten keys to successful lobbying

Sooner or later an organisation will want to gain a higher profile with politicians. That's when, as a PR professional, you get asked to get involved in lobbying. When this call comes, there are a few points you need to call to mind:

- **Understand the system.** You need to know how politics works, how policy is made and how it affects not only new laws but how things operate. One useful source is the Industry and Parliament Trust (www.ipt.org.uk). This Trust runs a number of study programmes and seminars for business leaders.
- **Be honest.** Ultimately, there is no benefit and quite a few disadvantages in being duplicitous in your dealings with politicians. Not only do they tend to be cleverer than you in this respect but they will try to find the vested interests behind any lobbying you are doing. It will be better for you if you don't conceal anything. Moreover, it's simpler and kinder to tell them straight away about any vested interests behind your proposals. Oddly enough, you're also more likely to be heard. You may even get a positive reaction from them.
- **Find – and stress - the 'big picture'.** Government is all about benefitting society as a whole – not you or your business in particular. To promote your views to politicians successfully, you need to think beyond merely selfish benefits.
- **Be useful.** It helps if you can point out any pitfalls or unintentional disadvantageous consequences of legislation or Government plans. The Government dislikes making embarrassing mistakes and so will be grateful for this sort of information. It could come as the result of some research which your organisation has sponsored.

- **Identify the decision maker(s).** Do your research – probably via your network of contacts – to find out who is the politician who is the key opinion former on the issue in which you’re interested. Find out, too, who that person listens to – and these people could be advisers, civil servants, other politicians or, at times, somebody else. Often, getting to know civil servants – who tend to have some knowledge and expertise on the issue that concerns you – is going to be invaluable to you. If you can find the right civil servant to lobby, you may never have to see the minister.
- **Identify policy, not bills.** Don’t wait until draft legislation is laid before Parliament. By then it will probably be too late to have any effect on things. You need to identify policies that are being discussed with a view to formulating legislation at some point in the future *and* on which your business has a valid view and can contribute something of use.
- **Think ahead.** Try to pick tomorrow’s (or at least the next Election) winners and ensure you talk to them. It’s important to build long term relationships with those who are in and out of power, on the basis that anything can and probably will change eventually.
- **Keep your options open.** If you are only interested in talking to members of one political party or – worse still – only one politician, you are making it extremely difficult to succeed. You will need to change your message (or the emphasis of your message) slightly depending on your political audience but, at the very least, you need to contact and have a relationship with, all the major shades of political opinion if you want to stand a chance of being heard in the corridors of political power.
- **Identify a need.** Your lobbying message will have something to do with achieving your business strategy. Lobbying for the sake of merely raising your business’ profile is a waste of time, effort and money. Even politicians get bored with being feted and not being asked to do something as a result.
- **Further information.** You may find the <http://www.ipt.org.uk/UsefulLinks> page helpful. Another useful move could be to contact Bob Little Press & PR (www.boblittlepr.com).