

Cracking the C-suite

The ultimate guide to
getting board-level buy-in
for your PR budget

Foreword



Clear and confident communication with customers and prospects has never been more crucial. As companies continue to adapt to the challenge of doing business amid ever-changing circumstances, making sure you remain relevant and real to your audience is vital. This is where the right PR strategy can make or break your ability to remain authentic and trusted during times of unprecedented change.

However, despite the key role played by PR, we know that getting buy-in from the board or C-level executives is no easy task. With scrutiny on budgets at an all-time high, every penny spent is under examination. Add to that the reality that whatever fancy measurement tool you use, media coverage or sales cannot be guaranteed, the fight for C-suite buy-in and attention is on.

A survey by PR Moment showed that CEOs are more worried about financial performance (58%) than any other metric, including company reputation (13%) and managing talent (13%). But surely company reputation and financial performance are intrinsically linked? That is certainly the million-dollar question. If you are a marketer with a PR budget, and you need to justify spend to the board, how do you show the vital role PR plays?

We work with a wide variety of businesses across different industries, but no matter the size or sector, the success of PR is often measured by its impact on sales. Unfortunately, proving the value of PR is not an exact science but there are a number of ways to get buy-in from those paying the bill and show the key role that PR can play in building and maintaining brand loyalty.

This guide will cover some key steps and questions to consider before approaching stakeholders and those who sign-off the budget.

Lynsey Barry

Managing Director, Berkeley Communications

Our six steps for PR sign-off success

1. Create a plan and link it to business objectives

Sounds obvious, right? But, according to a recent report, less than half of B2B businesses have a communications plan in place, even though those with a plan accelerate their business goals faster. However, blindly setting out on a mission to 'do some PR' will leave the business questioning your aims and you battling each month to protect your budget. Writing a communications plan and aligning it with the business doesn't have to be long or complex – a few well-defined areas of focus can make all the difference.

2. Knowledge is as important as numbers

A PR update in a board meeting will often consist of a coverage book and some key metrics, such as volume, reach and share of voice. While these things are all important, adding insight to explain how this relates back to the business, what value media coverage brings and how it can reach your target customer will all help you fight your corner. Insights gained through PR – like data about your competitors, industry and how the media and customers perceive you – can be used across the entire business, not only in communications.

3. Be adaptable and agile

Planning is essential but adaptability and agility are crucial. There is no point getting buy-in, following a plan and then presenting back at the end of a quarter only to find that wider business goals have changed. Regular meetings with the board will ensure that any planned activity remains relevant and in line with how the business is evolving. That way you can tailor plans accordingly and show the value of PR first-hand, to support changing company initiatives and aspirations.

4. PR might not always be the answer

Yes, I really just said that. Taking a step back and looking at where marketing budgets are best spent is especially relevant to companies who are looking to take their first foray into PR. For those companies, spend on PR could constitute a large part of their marketing budget to make it a reality. You might think PR is what you need, but another discipline such as content marketing, lead generation or SEO may be more suitable.

5. Build your story

Every business has a story to tell – it's just a case of communicating it in the most compelling and engaging way. Putting storytelling at the heart of your PR strategy will help bring campaigns to life and position your company, and what you stand for, in a way which resonates and is relatable to your audience. A communications campaign built on this approach will be far more successful than relying on product updates and win announcements to solely fuel your content.

6. Get the C-suite involved in storytelling

An effective way of getting the board onside with your communications approach is to involve them in its creation. Whether you are looking to make your message more memorable, build a compelling brand story, or talk about your business plans or turnaround, storytelling is a good way to engage audiences; both internally and outside of your organisation. Hold a messaging workshop to gather the views of the C-suite and then build your strategy around it. This process will make everyone feel more accountable, and ultimately more invested in making it work.

Don't get caught out by common questions from the C-suite

Before approaching the board, there are a number of key questions you will need to be able to answer to get budgets signed off and ideas across the line. Our *Head of PR Sarah Tokeley*, answers some of the most common questions we regularly get from the C-suite about PR, budgets, ROI and more to give you the top tips for response...

Why would I spend on PR over other marketing activity?

PR is a crucial part of the marketing mix. It's the only discipline to generate third party endorsement for a business and its products, and when carried out successfully, it will generate valuable coverage from trusted media experts.

It does, however, work best when integrated within the marketing mix. To feed the media, your PR team will create an abundance of business stories and content, including by-lines, case studies, white papers, reports, videos etc, all of which can fuel your marketing campaigns and be used across your entire organisation. It's also worth noting that PR can help your marketing activity land more effectively by educating customers and building trust around your brand.

What do I get for my money?

A modern PR agency should be able to offer you great value for money as it can create your story, tell it to the media, write and design your website, run a content marketing programme, shoot and edit a video, and run your social media channels all under one roof. Clear and transparent planning linked to objectives will make it easy to understand where the money is being spent and why.

Do our target customers actually read the media?

The way we consume news and information is constantly evolving. It is up to your PR team to tell your story to your audience through the right channels. This could be niche trade titles or national media, online news hubs and specialist media websites. What works for one company might not be right for another. Agreeing a tiered media list from the outset will ensure any campaign focusses on generating coverage in the places where your customers and prospects get their daily news fix or industry insights.

Can PR bring me leads?

In short, yes! The secret is in the story you are telling. Get that part right and the leads will follow. A recent PR story we released for one of our clients, UiPath, resulted in a piece of coverage in the Irish Times, but also importantly 11 new business leads. But it's not just national PR coverage that will get the leads flowing, creating content plans across lots of different channels means your story is seen by customers and prospects wherever they may be.





PR is long term, but what if I need quick results?

While brand awareness is a part of PR that can take some time to build, any programme should be multi-faceted.

All of our PR programmes start off with a plan that aligns to your business goals. This will enable us to get you in front of key customers fast, while helping you reach a broader audience over time. We'll make sure you have quick wins to report back to your board, building momentum as we go.

What ROI can PR bring to my business?

The best way to show ROI is to build a PR strategy around your business goals. If you can show that PR is having a direct impact on the business, then that's the ROI battle won. When we work with clients, our first question is always 'what are you trying to achieve?'. If the answer is brand awareness, or (re)building your company's reputation, then a hardworking press office is a great solution. But if you are measured by driving or converting leads, that is less likely to be the case. Taking time to ask the right questions is likely to make your boardroom conversations much easier to navigate.

How will I measure PR success?

Although there is no magic metric to gauge success, this question is becoming easier to answer as the PR landscape evolves. PR is typically measured through audience reach and share of voice metrics. However, it can also deliver valuable insights such as competitor and industry data, as well as tell you how the media and your customers perceive you. All of which is vital information for the C-Suite and can be used across the entire business, helping to demonstrate the value of PR.

Get ready to take your PR plan to the board

Whatever your size or challenge, getting PR backing from the board doesn't need to be a headache. Building a communications strategy based on your business goals, adding insight, involving your C-suite from the start, and embedding that strategy into the day-to-day are just some of the ways to ensure your communications deliver success.

**If you are considering
creating your brand story,
developing your
communications strategy,
or getting PR or content
marketing off the ground,
we can help.**



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