

Is your new business ready to hire a PR company?

 By [Kerryn Lloyd](#)

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You've just started your own business and are considering hiring a PR agency to help create awareness for your brand, but you're not sure if the time is right...

Below is a guideline, based on our 10 years of experience, of the questions to ask yourself before briefing an agency. We hope to save both you and the PR agency/individual time through these guidelines and also to assist in the understanding and perception of what PR can and cannot do.

Research your competitors

Make sure that you have researched your direct and indirect competitors properly. Once you have identified your competitors, list the long- and short-term effects that they may have on your business - either positively or negatively. You will be surprised to learn that what you might think is not impactful now, might have a huge effect on your business in future.

Your 'homework' will help give your PR agency direction when drafting a communication strategy. Remember to always be transparent, highlight your fears, weaknesses and lack of experience. All these factors are going to help your agency to compile the most suitable and realistic PR timeline for your business.



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Define clear goals

After your research is done, define clear goals and objectives for your business. A plan (even a guideline plan) is important; if your agency knows what your overall business goals and timelines are, they can more readily determine what messaging to draft and where the strategic communications will lie.

Goals are basically your business' GPS - the clearer your indication of direction is, the more likely it is that you will reach your destination successfully and without detours.

Budget

BUDGET. A word that is generally non-existent in a start-up. If this is the case, don't waste your money or the Agency's time. An honest and open conversation from the beginning will help meet both parties' expectations. You need to have a clear indication as to what you can afford to spend and what you expect in return.

Your PR agency should also give you a breakdown on how they are going to spend retainer hours and an indication of what publicity you will get.

Have story ideas lined up

Stories/profiles will help PRs to generate rich content for your business or brand from the first day your retainer starts.

Do not even consider hiring an agency if your festival programme is not confirmed, your funding is not sorted or your product is still in the process of being developed. If you know there is still so much that can go wrong or you are facing timeous processes, wait a little longer before going to an agency.

PR doesn't work in isolation

PR is not a tool that functions its best without marketing support. If you have a well-established company, yes, but not with a start-up who need to sell service or product fast to stay alive or an event whose success relies totally on ticket sales.

And finally...

How do I know which agency to choose?

Compile a briefing document that outlines what your business is about, who your target audience is and what level of ideas you need from the agencies.

Make sure that specifications and budgets are clearly stated, this ensures that agencies give you suitable and most effective proposals.

The first step is usually to research agencies online, or ask for recommendations. Look out for companies that suit your brand and values, also look at what work they have done. Sometimes people call clients for references, if you want to do that it's fine. Make a shortlist of about five companies that stand out for you, contact them and start the pitching process.

And very importantly, public relations is an on-going process, you cannot expect to get maximum exposure for your brand or product if you are prepared to only spend money on a two to three month retainer, a rule that also often applies for events. Public Relations is all about building long-term relationships, with internal and external role-players. The end result should not be a "flash-in-the-pan" publicity blitz, it should be a black book of sustainable relationships which externally, makes people aware of who you are, what you do and how credible your business/product is and internally, gives you a wealth of supportive contacts.

ABOUT KERRYNN LLOYD

A technophile and poorly disguised nerd, Kerryann has over seven years' experience in Marketing, Brand Management and Corporate Communications background - with a passion for research, writing and all things digital.

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