

# PR and the relationship with access to market for SMEs

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"I'm getting lots of great PR coverage on a variety of platforms but it's not translating into sales - where's the gap?" This was an interesting question posed to us recently via one of our Adopt-An-SME clients and we wanted to share it and talk through some of the processes that followed.



Source: [www.pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

As a reminder, our Adopt-An-SME initiative is a partnership between ourselves, accounting firm SME.Tax and local fintech innovator SME Snapshot. We take high-potential SMEs – typically part of Enterprise and Supplier Development initiative – and we help them establish back-office systems as well as help them grow their businesses through finding clients and establishing strategic relationships.

As entrepreneurs ourselves, we know that knocking on doors is a thankless task – especially when you're working hard just to get a minimum viable product to market – and just the thought of sales-related rejection is almost too much to contemplate.

One of the reasons we loved this question is it holds us accountable – we never want to just go through the motions when supporting clients.

Here is the process we went through when reviewing the question:

### **PR is part of an access to market strategy**

Those who work with us know that we don't position ourselves as a "PR" or "communications" offering – the language we specifically use is "access to markets". We believe that access to market is one of the single biggest challenges that SMEs face in the country and where we believe we play an important role in helping small businesses find and grow their client base.

### **PR contributes to evidence of success**

Would you do business with somebody who has no track record and has never delivered for an actual client?

This is the problem that many small businesses face. Who do you trust more: Somebody you found on a Facebook group or the person who was featured on your favourite radio show?

For most small businesses, they don't have a sales force that can point to fancy marketing campaigns, billboards, or a vast array of clients.

By being able to point to the coverage, immediately makes it easier to open a door for them. As the clients achieve small, incremental wins, we can start building out case studies that are their own form of PR and we can share these with other industry partners as well.

### **PR helps the client refine their pitch**

This partner company is great. Over time they have refined their pitch and it is such a pleasure to work with a team who understand both the social and business elements of their pitch.

They have done this because they have had to prepare for interviews on radio, television and with other journalists.

### **How did we respond?**

Momentum is one of the most powerful forces in the world, but many small businesses simply can't get the flywheel turning. One step forward and then they fail to capitalise on this.

We immediately set ourselves the task of using this most recent coverage to dial-up three potential clients where we had some pre-existing relationships. We used this coverage as the door-opener and our pitch was simple: "We need a reference client so that the next time these guys are on radio, they are talking about how clients have adopted this technology."

It was great because we were not coming in cold. The potential client saw the news coverage and immediately attached some credibility to the project. What was even better was that after this pitch, we were introduced to another team who might be interested.

Suddenly the link between PR coverage and access to market becomes clearer.

In a larger business, the marketing and sales or business development activities are two separate functions that theoretically should integrate or align. In a small business, many entrepreneurs find it easier to hide behind the softer elements of marketing but don't have a follow-through strategy to evidence their success.

Business development inside of a small business isn't easy and getting in the door is a very real challenge. If you have a strategy that combines PR and business development activities, you will find it is much easier.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emma Montocchio is a consultant for Decusatio, a South African consulting firm focused on tackling the twin challenges of access to finance and access to markets for small businesses.

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