

Leveraging Client Relationships to Generate High-Impact PR

By Jonathan Jordan of [919 Marketing](#)



What's true in sales is typically true in PR. Any good sales professional will tell you that referrals from happy clients are the best source for new business opportunities. When searching for your next PR opportunity, especially when you are low on news, the best place to start is with your happiest customers.

The media is ten times as likely to cover your organization if you partner with a client to craft a story. Partnering with your clients not only validates your key messages, but provides the dual perspective that training publications, vertical trade and local media are looking for, and in most cases demand, in a story. If positioned and executed correctly, this strategy can result in positive coverage for both you and your clients. Ready to get started?

More than a press release.

What I am suggesting is not your typical press release announcing a new client training engagement. These types of releases are very important and have tremendous value to the media and other audiences as well as for keeping your Web site content fresh, but to increase your chances of in-depth feature coverage, you need more than a press release. Clients are usually happy to provide you a quote or two for a release, but a more hands-on approach can take you a lot farther. You need to ask if they're willing to speak directly to a media contact (along with you) about how you're working together. The hope is that an article or news story would happen that portrays both of you in a positive light.

Get approval.

What you are asking a client to do is to go on record explaining how your training solutions affected the organization. All relevant parties involved will need to participate in the message planning and sign off on any communications to the predefined targeted media. Any information, including numbers, figures and even quantitative claims will need to be pre-approved. Sometimes this is an easy process that can be accomplished by a friendly phone call. Other times this can take months and months to push through the right channels. Your client contact may not even know the correct procedures for getting approval.

In some cases, no matter how great your relationship is with the client, the favor will be declined. No matter the case, it is up to you to ensure all appropriate approval is obtained. Otherwise, bad blood between you, your client and the media could result.

If you never ask, you'll never know.

To borrow a line from a good friend and world renowned sales trainer, John Costigan, one of the most important questions you can ask is "Have I earned the right to ask you for a referral?" Oftentimes we are too afraid to come out and ask our clients for what we really want. If you have provided your clients with superior value and service, asking them to go on record and speak about it is a reasonable request. If you are tactful in how you ask and in your reaction to their response either way, only good things could result.

Discuss it upfront.

A tactic used by many organizations is to actually work this type of agreement into a standard contract. Of course, if the prospective client raises concern about the clause and requests it be removed, it is your responsibility to do so without argument if you don't want to lose the business. As with almost everything, being proactive is preferable to being reactive. You will see better success in securing these types of stories if you dialog with your client before any actual opportunities arise. It's best to discuss the possibility of doing this type of PR and then take the agreed upon information to the media, rather than receiving a "bite" from the media and rushing to a client for help and participation at the last minute.

Make it a win-win.

The best way to guarantee your client's participation is to clearly identify how the coverage will help him personally and his organization professionally. If the article will spotlight him and his organization as an innovative and savvy professional by choosing to work with your organization, how could he turn the opportunity down?

Don't go to the well too many times.

It's very important never to wear out your welcome. You might be tempted to ask your client to do several interviews, often under tight deadlines of the media. This is natural as you want to receive as much positive coverage as possible. But be aware of the limits to your client's kindness and willingness. Unless your client expressly states his interest and availability to do as many media interviews as you can generate, typically two per year is the recommended maximum.

Fulfill on your promise.

The easiest way to guarantee a long line of clients willing to champion your organization is to provide impeccable products and services. If you are not fulfilling on the promises you make to your clients, either those written in formal contracts or those given by word of mouth, you'll have no leverage in convincing them to assist in your PR efforts. Go above and beyond your agreements and promises, and you'll have a steady engine of PR opportunities, resulting in not only increased awareness, but more importantly, increased business.

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