

# Strategies

Technology

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## THE NEW MYTHS AND REALITIES ABOUT PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR TECH COMPANIES

A commonly-held belief is that *"My company will succeed based on the value of its technology."*

The technology may well be important, but how will the market learn of its value?

A well-grounded public relations plan and expert implementation can pave the way to public acceptance and enthusiasm for a company's product or service.

Public relations' strength is its subtlety in forming and shaping public opinion about a product, service or idea. Advertising, while a useful marketing tool, still suggests purchased praise. Inherent in public relations is the credibility conferred by a third party -- editor, association, conference organizer or financial or industry analyst.

The practice of public relations is more than the conveyance of news releases. Public relations requires a set of planning and communications disciplines, combined with creativity, to introduce and position a young technology company effectively and carry out longer-term communications objectives.

The professional practice of public relations has been around for nearly a century, and during that period, a number of myths have evolved. It's time to debunk those myths and take a clear-eyed look at reality.

Myth #1 MY COMPANY WILL GET ATTENTION IF I SEND OUT SEVERAL NEWS RELEASES A WEEK.

### Reality

**Yes, but it may not be the attention you want.**

Journalists often complain about companies that send too much paper and not enough news. The Securities and Exchange Commission reports that the number of publicly-traded companies ranges from 12,000 to 15,000, depending on the number of initial public offerings, dissolutions, and mergers & acquisitions going on at any given moment. Most traded companies and those privately held would like to see a favorable story on their organization .

As a result, in this age of increasing competition for attention, reporters are deluged with "news." From mounds of paper and electronic news releases, reporters and editors select the few that will make it beyond the wastebasket or delete key.

## Myth #2 AN INDUSTRY ANALYST'S JOB IS TO BE INTERESTED IN MY COMPANY'S STORY AND TO GIVE US TIME TO TELL THEM OUR STORY.

### Reality

#### Yes -- if only they had the time.

The rate of technological change and the sheer volume of companies and products being pitched have placed industry analysts under as much, if not more, pressure than reporters.

Analysts are becoming more difficult to work with because of the increased number of companies they have to cover. They know they should meet with you, but there are only so many hours in a day. Many of the leaders have backlogs of eight weeks or more, and are now requiring applications to be filled out even if you've previously met with them.

If you are relevant to their industry, however, they have to follow you. And that becomes a task of your public relations effort.

You need to demonstrate your relevance... or emerging relevance.

INHERENT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS IS THE CREDIBILITY CONFERRED BY A THIRD PARTY.

## Myth #3 MY PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM SHOULD SHOW QUICK RESULTS.

### Reality

#### Yes and no.

While public relations is a nimble marketing technique, there are few overnight successes.

The desire for quick results is understandable. For example, one company introduced the concept of selling surplus material to

businesses online. Management wanted quick results for its introduction to the marketplace. It was the first to offer such a business online and figured, rightly, that a powerful public relations launch would give it the propulsion it needed. There was one article generated the first two months of activity, as the agency laid the groundwork.

Executive patience paid off. In the next four months there were 100 placements. By the end of 12 months, however, there was the phenomenal total of nearly 400 placements, giving the company a compelling presence in the marketplace. While the sheer volume of results for this company was an exception based on market timing, a little luck, as well as PR skill, it reinforces the fact that public relations is a cumulative technique that can take months and years, not weeks, to make its full mark. While you can design your media campaign to achieve some results in the early stages, the true test of a public relations program is time and progression, building success upon success.

## Ten Questions to Ask Yourself Before Calling the Media

Following are ten basic questions that you need to answer before making contact with a reporter or editor. Remember: pitching a story to an editor is simply a very sophisticated form of direct marketing. Selling an unwanted product is always more difficult than selling a solution to a customer's problem.

1. What are my goals with respect to media relations?
2. Who are my target audiences?
3. What are their needs?
4. Which media are important to them?
5. What makes my company, product/service or business philosophy different from all the others vying for media attention?
6. How does that point of differentiation coincide with an unmet need of my target audience?
7. What is the very essence of my story -- and can it be expressed in less than 50 words?
8. Which specific editors/reporters at my target media are likeliest to be interested in that story?
9. Have they ever covered that story (or one like it)?
10. How can I best deliver that story in a way that's customized for each specific reporter/editor?

## Myth # 4 MY COMPANY HAS A GREAT PRODUCT; I'M SURE IT WILL BE A HOT STORY FOR THE MEDIA.

### Reality

#### Yes, but...

With the proliferation of Internet businesses, the number of stories from which the media can choose has also expanded. Routes to the media are being choked by thousands of others trying to obtain the attention of reporters and editors.

While e-mail makes it a lot easier to communicate with reporters, it comes with its own unique obstacles. If the subject line of the e-mail does not sell the story immediately, the editor clicks his mouse button and it's gone. Deleting 50 e-mails en masse is a simple task. The road to media coverage may be arduous, but the trip's worth taking. Take the efforts performed for an entrant in the vast telecommunications industry as a good example. This telecommunications service provider was one of many vying for market share in America, but it had an interesting story.

THE TRUE TEST OF A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM IS TIME AND PROGRESSION, BUILDING SUCCESS UPON SUCCESS.

The challenge was to find a way to bring its message to as many media outlets as possible. The company decided, as its strategy, to have its agency arrange meetings for executives with editors at an upcoming trade show. Considerable care was taken with the preparation of relevant background material -- essential information a reporter requires, but doesn't want to spend time researching. The result of these efforts? Twenty-nine interviews for executives over the course of this trade show. In addition to immediate exposure, the company forged crucial relationships with important gatekeepers.

In a further effort to draw the attention of reporters, the agency focused on the CEO's personality and personal interests to create cachet in an industry dominated by charismatic CEOs. This tactic paid off in several interviews resulting in stories across a wide swathe of business media that ended up focusing more on the

company than the CEO's personality. Additionally, the agency secured numerous speaking engagements for the firm, including one for a chief executive at a Fortune 500 forum, face-to-face with an archrival on the same panel.

HOW YOU POSITION YOURSELF PUBLICLY HAS A STRONG BEARING ON YOUR ULTIMATE SUCCESS -- AT LEAST IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CONSTITUENCIES.

## Myth #5 MY BUSINESS IS UNIQUE; IT DOESN'T HAVE ANY "REAL" COMPETITORS.

### Reality

**Not so. Whether or not your company must fight for market share, it undoubtedly faces competition for share of voice and mind.**

Whether for customers, employees, investment dollars, analyst attention or media coverage, every enterprise -- even a market maker -- has aggressive, nimble competitors.

Competition is as much about perception as reality. While you may not feel you have a direct business competitor at the moment, the media will almost always compare you to someone else in order to put their stories in perspective. As a result, it is best that you choose whom you compete against -- rather than leave that identification to an editor or reporter.

Your competition determines your stature, and in the minds of the media and industry analysts, your likelihood of success.

How you position yourself publicly has a strong bearing on your ultimate success -- at least in the hearts and minds of your most important constituencies. Astute public relations counsel and execution can be just the edge you need.

Learn more about how  
**Makovsky's Technology Practice**  
can make a difference for your company.

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### About Makovsky + Company

Founded in 1979, Makovsky + Company ([www.makovsky.com](http://www.makovsky.com)) is today one of the nation's leading independent global public relations and investor relations consultancies. The firm attributes its success to its original vision: that *the Power of Specialized Thinking™* is the best way to build reputation, sales and fair valuation for a client. Based in New York City, the firm has agency partners in more than 20 countries and in 35 U.S. cities through IPREX, the third largest worldwide public relations agency partnership, of which Makovsky is a founder.

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