

Managing Your Firm's PR Expectations

The start of the new year is a good time to review your firm's public relations/communications strategy and plan. It is also a good time to manage your firm's expectations of your public relations program.

There are many misconceptions about how PR works, so explaining the process and underlying value to a law firm can be an uphill battle. If you are in charge of your firm's public relations program, you'll want to educate the company about [the basics of media outreach](#) and your internal processes so you can limit frustrations and complaints. It is also useful to explain how your firm will leverage social media, along with how your PR strategy integrates with other marketing programs.

To help manage expectations, set clear goals with measurable criteria and seek agreement at the outset. This is why it's important to explain the PR process and provide an understanding of the [media landscape](#) as well as factors that could prevent the achievement of goals. It's essential that you collaborate with your management team to both define what success looks like, and to gauge how realistic the outcome will be.

When setting goals, I recommend taking into account the following considerations to help manage expectations.

Identify your team

It's important to identify those in your firm that will be the key players in your public relations program. You'll need to describe their roles and expected levels of engagement. It's also your job to make your attorneys understand that if a valuable media opportunity arises and they're nowhere to be found to comment, the opportunity could be lost.

Acknowledge limited resources

Your PR budget, along with the size of your marketing/PR team, will have an impact on the results of your PR efforts. You can only accomplish so much with limited resources, so take this into account when setting goals. Consider hiring an outside agency. This route may be a better use of resources, especially if managing your firm's PR program is just one of your many responsibilities.

The best media outlets for your goals

When setting goals, think about the media that will be the best for reaching your target audience and generating worthwhile results. Explain the rationale behind the outlets you've selected, and why pursuing opportunities in outlets that have no interest in



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covering your firm doesn't make sense. For instance, a bylined article in a trade publication can reach more potential clients than one in a popular general business magazine. This is a good time to ask which media outlets are important to your firm. Do the attorneys expect to be featured in the *Wall Street Journal* or *Forbes*? If yes, is there a story that is strong enough for one of those outlets? If not, tell them upfront. Our role is to help the attorneys and firm management understand what makes a good story for the most-appropriate outlets.

Does the media care?

Although it may be uncomfortable, it's important to point out when something is not newsworthy. For instance, many firms are eager to share news of awards or recognition they have received. You may have to explain that many publications don't cover this type of news because too many companies receive awards every day; the media only cover the most-prestigious of these awards. Help your firm understand the steps necessary to generate genuine media interest.

It's also very important to emphasize the difference between being featured versus being quoted as knowledgeable leader. I often hear from lawyers and accountants that they would like to be featured in a particular magazine for their client work or some corporate initiative. The reality is, if your client's work or initiative is not unique or groundbreaking, a journalist will not be interested. Most of the time, journalists are looking for informed, savvy sources to support their stories. This type of coverage is a win-win because you provide the media with value *and* a member of your firm gets quoted as a thought-leader, which is incredibly valuable.

PR results are not guaranteed

Today's expanded media landscape has created an online world with more and more options for placing stories. Despite this increase in outlets, though, there is intense competition to be featured or even quoted in a story, especially in the more-prestigious outlets, whether print or electronic. Try to make sure your firm understands that being interviewed is no guarantee of being included in the final story. Because journalists who work for earned media are pulled in many directions, there's also no guarantee that a story will appear or what it will say. Your firm has to understand that [PR is a long-term process of building relationships with the media](#) and one that will pay off eventually if you stick with it and prove yourself, your firm and your attorney as reliable, knowledgeable sources. It's your job to open the door of opportunity for the firm. What happens after that is somewhat out of your hands.

Communicate constantly

Don't forget to provide frequent, consistent updates on your progress. I suggest creating a public relations tracker that you can update on a weekly or monthly basis to list all your activities along with your status and results. Maintaining transparency on successes and challenges ensures there are no surprises.

Let me know how I can help with a PR plan or your PR goals by reaching out to me at

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