



Developing your school's PR strategy

It's no longer just about prospectuses and hand-outs at school open days. Schools and academies now need to proactively market themselves to potential new students and teachers, through a variety of means. This guide takes a look at the ways schools can promote themselves, whilst also maintaining their reputation online.



Contents

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Getting started

3.0 Refining your school's PR

3.1 What makes a great press release?

4.0 Future proof your school's PR

Do schools really need PR?

1.0 Introduction

Public Relations, or PR, isn't just reserved for large, international corporations or public figures. It can be used to promote the image of not for profit organisations, charities and schools. In this academy guide, we will take a look at the ways your school or academy can put PR into play, and the benefits you can start to receive.

PR and your school

It's no longer just about prospectuses and handouts at school open days. Schools and academies now need to proactively market themselves to potential new students and teachers, through a variety of means.

Now with the addition of the Internet and social media, it's now even easier to share information about your school online, which can be good or bad. Freedom of information means there may be some additional upkeep of reputation required to ensure the online perception of your school is as accurate as possible.

Why do school's need PR?

A school or academy doesn't just need to promote themselves towards prospective students. It also needs to highlight the opportunities and development it can offer teachers and staff, as well as the ways in which it gives back to the local community.

Maintaining relationships between current and prospective, students, parents, teachers, governors, Ofsted inspectors and the local community doesn't need to be time consuming. Having a PR programme in place can help you effectively communicate with new applicants, as well as alumni and governors.



2.0 Getting started

When is the best time to implement PR at your school?

PR is a continuous activity that will benefit your school all year round. Even an oversubscribed school will need to maintain contact with parents and the local community even if they feel recruiting new students isn't a main priority.

Whilst PR should be a continuous activity, there are specific activities and events that require more planning. Here are just a few which need careful consideration:

- **School inspections.** Whether it's Ofsted, Estyn or ISI, inspections are important to every school. As inspections are carried out without much notice, planning inspection related communications beforehand could make delivering your grade to parents and students much easier.
- **Staff recruitment.** Are you a new school looking to recruit large amounts of staff, or need to fill a maternity position? Don't neglect your external audience of potential teachers. Instead, promote yourself in local press and through your website in order to reach job seeking teachers.
- **Changing status to an academy.** Transferring from a school to an academy doesn't have to affect your marketing or PR. Simply announcing how excited you are for the move, and what the future holds, to the local press is a great place to start. Then updating your website with new branding and ethos can help back up your move, and help build confidence in the local community.



The best PR tools for your school

There are already some great tools at your school's disposal. Your school website and prospectuses are two of the best examples, and we've listed some other useful tools to kick start your PR activities:

School PR can be delivered in a number of ways, most notably:

- **Your school website.** Usually the first place potential students and their parents will find out about your school, so it needs to be up to scratch. Sharing up to date news and plenty of information on your school can help turn your website into a first class PR resource.
- **Press releases.** These can be a great way of getting free publicity for all the good work going on at your school, whilst also maintaining ties with local journalists and the community.
- **Social media.** A great way to share updates about your school, whilst also interacting with students, teachers and parents. Sharing links to your school website, as well a digital prospectus, could also help recruit new admissions.
- **Prospectuses.** Whilst hard copies are still a really important part of PR, digital prospectuses are a great way to give parents an overview of your school, online.
- **Promotion within the local community.** It's likely that the majority of your student body and teachers will live close to your school. Bearing this in mind, it would be beneficial to work with local charities and community groups to not only promote the name of the school, but also give back to the local neighbourhood.

3.0 Refining your school's PR

Proactive and Reactive PR

With an established marketing plan, it can be easy to implement proactive communications. However, there may be some instances when a reactive approach is required, i.e. school inspections, or awards received by the school.

Proactive PR is the practice of planning ahead, securing media coverage ahead of an event and ensuring articles are written before they are needed. This is often the practice with events such as school open days or exam results, something that the school will have scheduled for in advance.

Reactive PR requires schools to respond to news following the event, usually following news on school inspections or awards the school may have received. In the event that a more reactive approach is required, the press release or statement should still be approved by an relevant parties, to ensure the message still matches your tone of voice.



Do schools really need PR?

3.1 What makes a great press release?

From time to time, you may need to produce press releases to highlight upcoming school events, great exam results or changes to the school, for example. Whilst there is no defined, perfect press release, there are some elements that should be included to ensure the important information is included.

- **Great headlines.** Not just used to create catchy opening sentences, but also for SEO purposes. Write your headlines as though the reader has no prior connection to your school – what is interesting, and what would make them read on?
- **The 5 W's.** Who is your story about, what actually happened, where did it occur, why is it relevant or important to your school, and when did it happen. Answering these questions before writing your press release can help you get all the important information in front of you first.
- **Quotes.** Your press release should be majority fact. The only section that should be in anyway opinionated is your quote, which should come from a nominated spokesperson, or someone directly involved with the event or press release subject.
- **Images.** These can help illustrate the story further, and also break up large portions of text.
- **'Call to action' or school contact information.** Some press releases or news stories may invite the reader to contact the school, or provide additional information this story. Include this in the final paragraph of your release, or in a 'Notes to editor' section.
- **Bonus tip: Be concise.** Don't waffle, and stick to the facts.



Do schools really need PR?

8

Defining your school's tone of voice

It's not just what you say, but how you say it. Defining your tone of voice is similar to outlining your school's values and ethos. Will you have a personable tone online, or will it be different for the various outlets you use? Will the tone of voice you use on social media also work with your press releases?

Answer these four questions to outline your tone of voice:

- 1. Persona.** Who are your students, your staff and teachers? What do they enjoy, and what do they excel at? Does your school have an easily identifiable personality?
- 2. Tone.** What is the general atmosphere like at your school? Do you want to write in a personal tone, or use more direct wording?
- 3. Language.** What kind of words do you use in your marketing? Would you use a professional tone across all outlets, or would you use a fun voice across social media?
- 4. Purpose.** Why are you using this outlet? Is it to engage your students, or to inform the local community about your school?

Writing press releases, tweets or a blog? This simple plan can help you define exactly what tone is needed for each type of PR.

- **Content type:** What are you writing? Is it a tweet or a press release?
- **Reader:** Who are you talking to in this scenario? Are they a current student, or a member of the local community?
- **Reader feelings:** What do you want to evoke from this piece of content? What does the reader already think and feel about your school?

Your school's marketing team

Getting buy in from your school regarding any marketing activity can be easier when they are directly involved. Forming a team of school staff, teachers and students who can write and plan the school's PR activity is a great place to start, especially as they are directly involved with the school.

Student who attend events or work on projects, which are then included in your PR activity, are also best placed to be included in the writing process.

Should students be involved in the PR process? Yes, especially those that are attending events where they represent the school.

4.0 Future proof your school's PR

PR in your school shouldn't be short term. There will always be events or instances where your school will need a pre-existing marketing plan, and these points can help you prepare for the future.

- **Marketing plans “proactive”/future for PR in your school.** Simply creating a marketing plan can make the next few months much easier. Note down upcoming events that are important – for example, exam results and school open days – and plan some PR around these days.
- **Saves time, planned ahead so it can be scheduled in properly.** Once you've established your marketing calendar and plan, it's a great idea to start writing draft press releases, blog posts or website content in advance. This method can help produce more refined content as it can be planned ahead, and not rushed.
- **Getting buy-in from the school is an important aspect.** We've mentioned it already, but getting buy-in from senior teams at your school or academy can really transform your PR activities. Helpful tips to encourage advocacy from different stakeholders, such as governors, students, and teachers, include include sharing the benefits of continued marketing activity – increases in admissions, and an improved perception in the local community - as well as marketing training and internal updates about the progress of your marketing activity.



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