

5 reasons to put PR strategy at the top of your to-do list

2021 is already bringing unwanted challenges for entrepreneurs, but it's also creating opportunities to refresh business priorities.

Alison Jackson-Carter, founder, Enlighten PR, explains why spending time dusting off your PR strategy could give you the competitive edge your brand needs to thrive this year.

You probably haven't seen your customers or clients face-to-face for nearly a year. Instead, you are having to communicate via zoom, email lists, social media or your website. Out of sight really is out of mind. This is the time when your brand needs to be more visible, more engaging and more relevant than ever before.

The initial phase of the crisis is over. Consumers know the drill. They know that your shop is closed, that your classes have moved online, and that they have to wear a mask to meet your employees. What they don't know is what your business is going to look like when this period of lockdowns and disruption ends.

This is your opportunity to explain how your business will evolve, to tell your story and share your purpose through the press, social media, video and thought leadership.

It's not as expensive as other marketing activities

Businesses are going through the greatest period of economic uncertainty that we have seen in a lifetime. It's crucial to be looking at your bottom line and identifying where you can be making savings.

PR is about earning attention, not paying for it. Consequently, PR is cheaper than paying for advertising. A well-placed article in a publication that your target audience reads is worth thousands of pounds of Facebook ads – maybe even hundreds of thousands of pounds. Any investment in PR right now will be paying off for years to come.

Life is changing very quickly

The country had less than 48 hours' warning of the last lockdown. The rules are being announced just days before coming into force and they are changing frequently.

PR is a discipline that is, by its nature, fast-paced, and PR professionals are experienced in reading the national mood and appetite. Scheduling advertorial in long lead publications or planning three months' worth of social media posts isn't going to work right now. Your brand needs to be responding to the constant changes and PR is the easiest way to do that.

People are spending more time on their phones than ever before

Lockdown has seen phone usage skyrocket, with people spending hours on social media and online news sites.

There is an audience waiting to consume the right kind of content, whether that's interesting, high-quality content on your social media feed, or well-placed commentary through 'newsjacking'. The opportunity to broaden your awareness and appeal is there for the taking.

Consumers have lost confidence in

brands

Many big brands and high street names have failed to survive this period, so consumers are naturally worried that businesses won't be around to fulfil their promises.

PR is the most effective way of building confidence in your business. It will reassure your customers that you can deliver what you have promised you will, have a plan for the future and that your business can withstand a crisis without letting the customer down. People can no longer visit your shop, your office or your place of work, so instead will be looking at your online presence and what people are saying about you.

In a poll of 12,000 people by Edelman, nearly two-thirds agreed that how brands respond to the pandemic will have a 'huge impact' on their likelihood to buy those brands. A third said they had already stopped using a brand they believed was not acting appropriately in response to the public health crisis.

It's crucial for brands to keep as much control of the narrative around their business as possible. If there are any risks that might threaten your reputation, you want to have a plan of how to manage them, as well as a proactive campaign to cushion you from any negativity.

So, block out two hours of your time this week. Revisit last year's PR plan or start a new one from scratch (subscribe to my mailing list for a free one and guidance on how to fill it in). It could be the best investment you make this year.

Alison Jackson-Carter is founder of Enlighten PR. You can find PR tips and tricks by following Alison on Instagram.