



workinpr.com

<< prbite >>

> [website](#)
> [contact us](#)

the online newsletter for experienced PR and marketing professionals and those who hire them

GO >

<< prspeak >>

"It is not enough to show people how to live better: there is a mandate for any group with enormous powers of communication to show people how to be better."

- Marya Mannes, *A Word to the Wizards*

"Seventy percent of success in life is showing up."

- Woody Allen

<< what's up >>

We have a highly qualified database of 35,000 job seekers. This is the place to list jobs, events and quick news about your company. Call, write or email us.

<< events >>

Conferences, Seminars & Workshops

NOVEMBER

Writing that Sells...Products, Services, Ideas, New York

Public Relations: Research, Measurement and Evaluation, Boston

Public Relations and the Litigator: When Public Opinion Matters, New York

The 2004 Web Content Management Conference, Chicago

Welcome from Workinpr.com
November 2004

Happy Election Day! We all hope the best man wins. Regardless of the outcome, we communications professionals can all take heart the mud slinging and relentless ads are coming to an end. The big question remains which campaign was most effective? Opinion seems evenly divided enough that if the reds stand on one side and face the blues (sorry Ralph) we could have arm wrestling teams that stretch across the U.S.

So let's get back to business and consider the onward march - or perhaps evolution - of the high tech industry. The industry at the epicenter of the economic debate given its bubble and bust. The challenge and promise of e-commerce and of computerized business solutions remains, not to mention the splash over into home electronics.

So what's become of the communications and public relations professionals who help high tech companies reach their customers? In Industry Watch this month, Brian Solis, President of FutureWorks Inc, a high tech PR agency, describes how he got into the business, how he's survived, and what's needed to get the high tech PR job done.

As a seasoned PR professional, Brian also describes, in PR Perspective, how to go about Building the Right PR Team.

Building the Right PR Team - An Overview of Internal Versus Outsourced Strategies

By Brian Solis

PR is a necessary component of any successful marketing organization and a critical driver for increasing sales and fueling the overall corporate brand. Tackling a broad and highly complicated evaluation such as this truly requires a dedicated book, of which I'm sure no scientific, proven formula will emerge by the final chapter.

But analyzing the approach behind the two different avenues and combining them with the company goals and budget will provide the insight necessary to build a solid PR team whether it's internal or an external extension of the marketing team...



Industry Watch: High Tech PR Agency

This month we interviewed Brian Solis, founder and president, FutureWorks, Inc. ...



Industry Watch: High Tech Public Relations Agency - November 2004



Q&A with [Brian Solis](#),
Founder and President,
FutureWorks Inc.

Q: You founded FutureWorks Inc. six years ago. What prompted you to start up your own PR firm?

A: That time - 1999 - was an interesting one for public relations. I'd say it was its heyday. I was a director at The Benjamin Group at the time, a prestigious Silicon Valley firm. I worked with some important, well-established companies. Mostly, these companies required customer service type PR. Then I began working with some startups, which allowed me to be really creative and aggressive. I found I wanted to provide services to startups because while they needed the enthusiasm and aggressiveness, they couldn't afford The Benjamin Group's fees.

So I started out as a consultant for the startups in my garage! Soon, what started as a consulting business with just me turned into an agency. I hired some people, and I put desks and a conference table in the garage. That's where we all worked. It was a humble beginning, but there was an atmosphere of excitement, and we developed a reputation for enthusiasm and aggressiveness for startup companies. I still work with six people who were there in the garage at the beginning.

Q: What does a typical workweek look like for you?

A: There's a lot of administration that needs to happen. I just opened an office in Southern California, and I'm bringing the same excitement and enthusiasm to this new office as I did with the first. I'm involved with each client. I ask what are the creative things we can do for each of them. I still write press releases. I'm involved both in the nitty-gritty and in the corporate chair. I do some of everything. It keeps me grounded in the real work.

Q: In general, what are some of the best practices being used today by PR practitioners in the high tech sector?

A: I hear complaints that many public relations practitioners aren't taking time to read publications or to check out and understand their clients' industries. Best practices means really taking time to understand your client's industry and to read the publications for that industry.

Q: What are some of the unique challenges you face when working for high tech clients?

A: The competitive landscape is a big challenge. First, there's direct competition. For instance, in digital cameras, the direct competition would be other digital cameras. The indirect competition would be disposable cameras. With the indirect competition, you have to look at the demographics of the people who buy disposable cameras and figure out how you can reach them. Consumers have so many choices - they might shop for a digital camera but buy a video cam instead. You also need to know where your customers - say Soccer Moms - will look for information about cameras before they buy one. You have to understand how all the facts work together.

Another challenge is sorting out whether what a client tells you are benefits actually are. This goes back to best practices, doing your homework, and really understanding the client's industry. The more you understand best practices, the more you develop good practice in a specific industry.

Q: What would you describe as the high point of your career? How about the low point?

A: The low point was when the recession hit and I had to lay people off. Most of those people had

been with me from the beginning. We were like family. It was a very hard time.

A high point was when I became director of The Benjamin Group. It was a big company in Silicon Valley. My getting that job made things official for me - that I knew what I was doing. And of course starting FutureWorks. Starting the office in Southern California is a sign that we are doing well enough that we can expand, and that's definitely a high point.

Q: What is the current state and future of tech PR? How has the high tech PR industry been affected by the last few roller coaster years?

A: Companies are starting to let go of their PR budgets a little. They may not be jumping into the pool yet, but their feet are on the steps. We're seeing a stronger PR industry now because during the boom a lot of non-professional people got involved in PR and now they no longer are. The recession took care of them.

The new philosophy is more for less. In technology - we've turned it into a product and a solution for the greater good of society. We've had to present it as safe to implement. Let's face it, technology is not going away, but becoming even more present in the day-to-day. As an example, there are people who build their own networks at home - okay, I've done it at home for my kids' computers. That is much more prevalent in day-to-day life. It's also a great sign for high tech PR.

Q: What changes do you predict for the PR industry over the next few years? What aspect of the PR industry do you think will be fastest growing in 2005/2006?

A: The dotcom economy brought about major changes. Tech PR will eventually not be called tech PR - tech won't be segregated the way it is now. Marketers are and will continue to become savvy about technology and high tech products. PR people will need to prove their value this way as high tech becomes more and more main stream. These days you see information and stories in Newsweek about computer technology that you used to see only in consumer publications such as PC World.

Things are more diversified. The fastest growing market is at the consumer level - consumers have gadgets that go with them. Their watches are high tech. They can access email on the run. At the enterprise level - the small and middle size business markets - there's an explosion in business solutions.

Q: What skills or characteristics are most critical for a new PR hire at your company?

A: We try to earn our clients' business everyday. So first and foremost, a new PR hire really needs to understand a particular tech field we work in, such as enterprise storage or digital cameras. And they need to be enthusiastic about that field. We're all tech geeks here. They should also be confident enough to do media and have a solid command of writing - not just AP style.

Lastly, it's important to realize that what has kept us in the PR industry going - ultimately those of us who have worked hard at our craft - has raised the profile of what's needed in PR.

Brian Solis

founded FutureWorks Inc. in February 1999 with the goal of bridging the communications gap between rapidly evolving technology and real world benefits for users. He started his marketing career 14 years ago at a small advertising/PR firm in Ventura, California. Prior to founding FutureWorks, Brian was a Director at The Benjamin Group, a Top Ten National Technology PR agency. Solis has helped start-ups, well-known consumer product companies, pre-IPO and public companies and some of the top enterprise technology companies in the world. FutureWorks Inc. can be found at <http://www.future-works.com>.



«prspeak»

PR Perspective: Building the Right PR Team - An Overview of Internal Versus Outsourced Strategies

By Brian Solis

PR is a necessary component of any successful marketing organization and a critical driver for increasing sales and fueling the overall corporate brand. Tackling a broad and highly complicated evaluation such as this truly requires a dedicated book, of which I'm sure no scientific, proven formula will emerge by the final chapter.

But analyzing the approach behind the two different avenues and combining them with the company goals and budget will provide the insight necessary to build a solid PR team whether it's internal or an external extension of the marketing team.

Once the decision has been made to pursue a PR campaign, the next step is to truly evaluate the company's goals in order to build a realistic approach to obtain them.

Investing in the Value of PR

Executives must start by assessing real value to the marketing function and then assign a real-world budget in order to effectively arm the PR/marketing group for success. All too often executives dilute the value of marketing and PR by viewing it as a luxury instead of an investment, which by default places cost as a driving factor in the creation of a marketing organization.

In that regard, capabilities, experience, and vision should become the driving factors for the development of a results-driven marketing team.

PR as a function has grown beyond day-to-day media relations, press releases, media alerts, and tradeshow. PR has assumed an overarching marketing role that often encompasses brand creation, channel marketing, marketing communications, direct marketing, and product marketing.

Hiring a PR firm or an internal PR person/s that can succeed on these fronts may appear to be an expensive premium, but the old adage "You get what you pay for" holds true. Investing more on the front end can yield higher returns in both near and long term.

Evaluating the Need for Internal or External PR

The debate for which solution is more effective may never finalize, but in the meantime, analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of each may help determine which strategy is right for the organization.

The size of the company and the state of its marketing efforts will determine the next steps for evaluation. Either way, someone within the organization must realize the potential for PR. That person, whether it's the CEO, VP of Marketing or even an internal PR manager, must champion the effort, from inception to day-to-day activities.

Hiring one person internally to lead PR efforts or hiring a small agency or consultant usually gets the ball rolling effectively. The common trait required for a successful program is a mutual understanding of the company product, value proposition, competitors and market wants and

needs. Eventually, the person hired to lead the PR effort, if they're good, will create more momentum than any one person can handle. The need for a larger internal team or the addition of an external extension is the enabler of significant momentum and market visibility.

Finding the Right Person/Team for the Job

Any decision to be made must focus on hiring a person or team with the experience necessary to achieve results. Whether internal or external, company executives must commit to hiring a candidate/s that meet the criteria and display the potential for achievement through the demonstration of proven successes, maintenance of industry contacts, and knowledge of the industry. The goal is to focus on capabilities and then hire to match budget. In most cases the budget may need to be raised or lowered based on the ideal prospects. On the other hand, hiring primarily based on budget - in order to save money for example - will dramatically prolong the delivery timeline for results or prevent them from being obtained all together.

Advantages and Disadvantages of an Internal Team

From the 40,000-foot level, one of the clear advantages to building an internal PR group is the fact that the team (or person) is dedicated 100% to the company. They will breathe the company culture everyday, which will allow them to become true spokespersons for the product/s and the company as well as industry experts. They would be focused on the company market, customers, and competitors without the potential distraction of representing other clients. Internal teams also have an opportunity to bond with other departments to extend internal excitement, a little PR for the PR.

Disadvantages for internal staffing depend on the evolution of the company. Experienced candidates may carry a premium salary and eventually, one person usually becomes overwhelmed with all of the potential action items that stem from a successful PR and marketing program. The prospect of absorbing more than one salary to staff a PR team could be daunting, especially when benefits and administration costs are factored into the equation. Another potential disadvantage could be the 'drinking the bathwater' syndrome where internal communications persons lose touch with industry perception because they're too close to the corporate story. The overall reach is also something to consider in this scenario. Internal teams are usually tasked with simultaneous projects, which limits the amount of resources necessary to extend the visibility of the company/product into new, promising markets. As the company grows, the need for PR direction and management becomes pervasive, requiring the need for a virtual "mini" agency inside the company.

Advantages and Disadvantages of an External Team

Outsourcing PR carries its own set of pros and cons, of which there are no right or wrong philosophies, only right or wrong decisions based on the team itself.

PR agencies/consultants offer a tremendous potential for offloading the overwhelming task of building an internal PR department from all business administration angles including Information Technology and Human Resources. From a budgetary perspective, a qualified team could deliver more bang for the buck. If the team is knowledgeable about the industry and they have maintained current relations with target reporters, influencers, and analysts, chances are an entire team could be commissioned for the price of one internal salary. A team can focus on an expanded set of opportunities, which will increase the potential for enhanced brand equity. An external team may also provide a balance of internal visibility combined with an outsider's view to provide expert opinions and marketable vision.

Disadvantages surrounding the outsourcing of PR usually focus on the potential distraction from other clients. Depending on the budget size as well as other client events, the team may be pulled away or prevented from focusing on your account. Many times, the fact that most agencies are not "next door" to their clients prevents strong relationship ties from forming. An external team can be perceived as expendable if it is not integrating itself within the dynamics of the internal team. Also, unless the outsourced team is incredibly communicative through an internal

PR champion for the overall PR program, executives and accounting departments have a hard time justifying the expense on a monthly basis.

Middle of the Road Scenario

In my 13 years of agency and in-house PR experience, the most common team structure I have found usually combines a mixture of both internal and outsourced PR services. By hiring an internal PR or marcom manager to manage and direct an external team based on day-to-day company communications directives, the foundation for a scalable, cost-effective, results oriented team is set. In my opinion it allows companies to enjoy the best of both worlds by maintaining someone on staff who is directly in touch with executive management, corporate culture and mission, and also in-step with the leaders of their outsourced team for real-time market feedback, strategy, and direction.

PR in turn can work together to grow alongside the company to provide the day-to-day results necessary to increase sales and brand resonance as well as justifying its existence and expense.

At the end of the day, there are an infinite series of combinations for internal and outsourced PR services and I believe that every executive and communications professional has their preferences based on past successes. What is common throughout every winning initiative is that the right people were involved at the right level at the right price. Whether internal or outsourced, or a combination thereof, building a qualified, motivated, cost-effective, and scalable team are the absolute keys to marketing, and ultimately business success.

Brian Solis is founder and president of FutureWorks Inc., a tech savvy communications agency in the Silicon Valley. Visit FutureWorks at <http://www.future-works.com>.