

# PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE OILFIELD

Tips and tools for effective public relations programs

From the world's leading **marketing, advertising** and **public relations** firm for the oil and gas industry



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## WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Public relations, or PR as it's often referred, encompasses a wide variety of activities aimed at gaining positive exposure and awareness for your product, service or company. It develops a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics – customers, prospects, investors, employees, etc. – that builds a sustainable relationship, which results in a change of thought or action.

While advertising and marketing are important parts of any communications strategy, public relations takes those strategies to another level. It provides a line of communication through which to connect your organization to its audiences. This is accomplished in a multitude of ways through many strategies and formats. A successful PR program will encompass a wide range of these formats to reach people in different ways.

To start, think of all the forms of messaging you're exposed to every day:

- Television
- Internet
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Advertisements
- Email
- Outdoor advertisements
- Phone calls
- Conversations
- Radio
- And many more

One of the keys to putting together a successful public relations plan is to think about *how* your audience receives information and devise a strategy using the many tools available to best reach your targeted audience.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS IN A BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

For a public relations program to be truly successful in a B2B environment, particularly within the oil and gas industry, you should consider many factors, including:

- Your audience is typically highly educated and well informed (i.e. engineers).
- Your audience is continually seeking information and making important decisions (i.e. management).
- You have a built-in infrastructure of industry media and communications opportunities (i.e. trade journals, conferences).

## **WHAT OTHER ROLES CAN PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAY?**

Public relations is important for many reasons other than just improving your public image and name recognition, including:

### **Support for integrated marketing communications**

Public relations provides support for all of your marketing communications initiatives. It complements advertising by continually presenting your organization to its audiences. It encourages sales by educating customers and potential customers about your product or service offerings. It supports brand awareness by familiarizing people with who you are.

### **Position your company as the expert**

Public relations allows you to position your organization as the expert and thought leader in your field. Through articles, webinars, technology transfers, etc., PR makes your company the “go-to” firm for information.

### **Outside Endorsement**

Public relations is an important part of an integrated marketing communications plan because it not only increases your company’s level of awareness and improves its reputation, but it also adds an invaluable sense of credibility that is often unmatched by other forms of communications. Public relations starts a dialogue that provides channels for other sources to speak on your company’s behalf or vouch for its success, instead of just you. Sure, potential customers want to hear what you have to say, but when it comes down to making big decisions, they also like to seek information from other experts. You want those experts talking positively about your company.

### **Educating your audience**

As previously mentioned, much of your audience in the oil and gas industry is going to be highly educated and well informed, and many will be making important business decisions. PR helps these decision makers learn all about you and what you can offer them through technical articles, case studies, webinars and other vehicles.

**“Advertising is more likely to succeed when prior public relations activity (also called market education) has created knowledge and understanding of the product or service being promoted.”**

**-Renee A. Prejean-Motanky**

*Strategic Marketing and Communications Consultant*

**“Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior.”**

**-Renee A. Prejean-Motanky**

*Strategic Marketing and Communications Consultant*

## **KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAN**

To maximize the results of your PR program, it's important to be:

### **Proactive**

Public relations efforts must be proactive. You want to form your messages and your audiences' opinions before someone else can do it for you; and, in today's multimedia world, that can happen very quickly. Most likely, people aren't going to approach you for information or comment if they don't know you. It is your responsibility to present your company where there might be opportunities for publicity – that's the strength of public relations.

### **Ongoing**

You don't always know when a public relations opportunity will present itself, so it's important to apply your efforts continually. An editor might have a space available for a feature article for which your company has the perfect case study, but if your timing isn't right, you might miss that opportunity. If your company is consistently engaging in PR activities, it helps to minimize these missed opportunities.

### **Versatile**

As you will see in the list of potential public relations activities, there are many, many ways to reach people through PR, so be sure to explore several of these options. Diversifying your PR functions increases your program's effectiveness by creating a more well-rounded message that has the opportunity to reach different people in different ways.

### **Flexible**

In the same way your public relations program should be versatile, it should also be flexible. PR is always changing and evolving and it's imperative that your efforts can adapt. Nothing is guaranteed in PR as it is with paid advertising, and it can be more difficult to control your message, so be prepared to roll with the punches. If one tactic doesn't work, figure out why not and either fix it or move on to another strategy. This is where monitoring and evaluation play a very important role in helping you determine when it's time to try something new.

For more on change and flexibility in oil and gas marketing read [\*Are You an Agent of Change?\*](#) by President George Foster in the [\*February 2010 issue of Fostering Ideas\*](#), Foster Marketing's monthly newsletter.

### **Trustworthy**

This characteristic should be considered the most important, but it is often overlooked. Effective public relations relies on strong relationships, and these relationships are based on trust, credibility and dependability. Proving to the media that your company can continually be trusted to deliver credible information makes them more likely to depend on you for information in the future. Moreover, you build a reputation with the public by being an honest and straightforward organization.

**THE PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL KIT**

There is a nearly endless list of public relations tools and techniques available to gain publicity for your organization. Below is a list of PR activities commonly used within the oil and gas industry:

**News Releases**

News releases are written announcements, usually one to two pages long and targeted to key members of the media. They are most often sent electronically to a targeted list of media covering related topics and can announce a variety of things including new people, products and projects.



**Feature/Technical Articles**

In a B2B environment, and particularly in a technology-centered industry like oil and gas, feature articles on projects and technology can be a very effective form of publicity for your organization. Key decision makers are continually researching and evaluating their options for vendors, and a feature article in a reputable industry publication can help form favorable opinions about your company's services and products.

**Media Kits**

A media kit is a tool that briefly and easily tells the media who you are and what you have to offer – in a print or electronic format – specifically tailored to journalists. A current, effective and well-designed media kit is something all organizations should have on hand. A few of the items commonly included in a media kit, include:

- Company background information;
- Bios of key management;
- Contact information;
- Recent news releases; and
- Product and service information.

## **Media Relations**

It is important to build strong, credible relationships with editors and reporters within your industry to allow for an ongoing flow of information. Your organization might be interested in coverage in these media outlets, but so are many others. These relationships enable your organization to stand out among the crowd. In addition, not only is your organization looking for coverage, but the media outlets are also looking for stories and their readers are seeking information. Facilitating this flow of information forms a relationship that is mutually beneficial for all involved.

Partnering with an agency that is already familiar with your industry, its editors and the flow of information can save your company valuable time and resources. Foster Marketing has 30 years of experience in building media relationships within the global oil and gas industry. We're familiar with the process and have earned a reputation as a reliable source of information to the industry's media.

## **News Conferences**

News conferences are designed to make important announcements that require more impact than that provided by a news release. This is an opportunity for your company to engage many members of the media at one time and allows for more immediate interaction and feedback.

Although news conferences can be called at any time, it is common to see them centered around trade shows and industry events, where many members of the media and other interested audiences are already gathered.



## **Trade Show PR**

Trade shows are great places for strategic integrated communications efforts, because your audience is right in front of you. At trade shows, you're usually surrounded by potential customers and trade media who are looking for newsworthy and interesting items. It's the perfect chance to tell them about what you can offer. As previously mentioned, trade shows provide opportunities for news conferences, as well.

For more information on trade show marketing and PR, visit [www.fostermarketing.com](http://www.fostermarketing.com) for our *Trade Show & Event Marketing Guide*, coming later in 2010.

## Social Media

Social media is content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies such as blogs, LinkedIn®, Facebook and Twitter™ to distribute information and engage with others. With more than 300 active users now on Facebook and more than 47 million users on LinkedIn, social media is quickly becoming a popular marketing medium for business-to-business marketers. An effective and strategic social media marketing plan can help to distribute information to your target audience, position your company as experts and actively engage your users.



For more information on social media and digital strategy, refer to [A Digital Media Guide: Tools, research and best practices for the oil and gas industry](#) and the article in the [November 2009 issue of Fostering Ideas](#), Foster Marketing’s monthly newsletter, both available at [www.fostermarketing.com](http://www.fostermarketing.com).

## Search Engine Optimization (SEO) in PR

Effective PR is a great way to participate in search engine optimization (SEO), which helps your website to improve its position in search engines. When using search engines, such as Google, where does your company’s website appear if you enter keywords relevant to your business? You want to be as close to the top of the ranking as possible. Foster Marketing can help you learn about ways to improve your SEO techniques to rise higher in the rankings.

There is more information on SEO available in [A Digital Media Guide: Tools, research and best practices for the oil and gas industry](#).

### **Webinars**

Webinars have been quickly growing in prominence as a marketing and public relations tool. Available in a variety of formats, webinars allow organizations to position themselves as experts in their field, control their own messages and engage interested audiences in an interactive setting. They are most often available live, then archived for continual viewing.

Audio, visuals, questions-and-answer sessions and audience feedback are just some of the ways you can interact with your audience using webinars.

### **Technology Transfers**

A technology transfer is a lunch-and-learn for trade media. It is an opportunity for you to share your technology or service with a group of journalists, and provides an opportunity for dialogue between your experts and the purveyors of the information.

### **Media Monitoring and Measurement**

At the end of the day, the goal of all communications activities is to gain positive awareness for your company that will ultimately lead to its success, and the expenditure for this effort is a business decision. Therefore, it is important to gauge the return on investment you see from your communications efforts. However, proving the impact of communications efforts, particularly PR, can be difficult.

The first step is to track all mentions of your company in all media – in print, on the Web and through broadcast. This helps you gauge your coverage and reception. You can then use this information to determine if your efforts are reaching the most-effective outlets, to expand your base of media relationships and to estimate the appropriate value of the publicity in relation to your investment.

At Foster Marketing, we have internal and external methods of monitoring and measuring your media exposure.

### **Crisis Communications**

Unfortunately, companies are all too often caught completely off guard and unprepared to face the communications challenges that surround crises or emergencies. Having a well-planned, well-coordinated crisis communications plan in place before these situations occur can greatly help protect your company's reputation. Being prepared enables your company to present a strong, confident, capable image. In addition, if handled correctly, crises can even help to open a positive dialog between your company and the media, your customers and your potential customers.

## **Media Training**

This is another area where many companies are unprepared. Not having people available who are qualified and adequately trained to respond to the media can cause a variety of problems when your organization is suddenly called upon for comment. On the other hand, having properly trained key people within your organization who can interact with the media, particularly in times of trouble, offers many valuable benefits, including:

- Limiting response time;
- Providing a dependable voice and face;
- Limiting errors and incorrect information; and
- Projecting a sense of preparedness and control.

## **Special Events**

There are many different types of special events, but they should all have the same effect from a public relations perspective. Any event, from grand openings to holiday parties, should help convey a positive image about your company. You should invite the media, creating an opportunity to begin a dialogue for your company. Some events can also warrant publicity of their own through journalists' coverage or follow-up news releases and media relations.

For more information on event marketing and PR, visit [www.fostermarketing.com](http://www.fostermarketing.com) for our *Trade Show & Event Marketing Guide*, coming later in 2010.



## **Annual Reports**

Annual reports are important public relations tools for conveying messages to investors and other audiences interested in the financial performance and strategic messages of your organization. While often perceived only as a financial tool, annual reports provide a good opportunity for your organization to inform readers about its successes, products, services, people, vision, values and future potential, making them more familiar with your company in general.

## Internal PR

Companies often forget about internal public relations, but this can be a very effective PR function for several reasons, including:

- Conveying important company messages;
- Recognizing employee success;
- Boosting morale and continuity; and
- Improving performance and service.

You can accomplish this in a variety of ways, including:

- Employee newsletters;
- Intranet, email and website messaging; and
- Employee events.

## Community PR

Although the opinions of your company's community might sometimes take a backseat to those of your customers and shareholders, it's still very important that your organization be respected for what it does and what it represents. Good corporate stewardship can go a long way in creating a favorable opinion and increased brand awareness for your company.

***These are just some of the opportunities available. The key is to determine which options are best suited to you and your audience and how these activities will coordinate with the rest of your marketing communications initiatives and objectives. Foster Marketing's expertise can help you sort through your options to determine the appropriate opportunities and streamline the process.***

## HOW TO GET STARTED

The first thing to do is to ask yourself a few questions about your organization and your PR needs:

- What public relations activities are we currently doing?
- Are we getting the results we want?
- What could we do to achieve even more exposure?
- Do we have the resources to handle this internally or should we outsource?

Meeting with our team of public relations and marketing specialists can help you sort through the questions and gain the insight you need to move forward with a successful public relations program. We will help you research and determine what activities are best suited to helping you achieve your objectives and map out a comprehensive and strategic integrated marketing communications plan tailored specifically to you and the audience you want to reach.

**“Strategy is the articulation of the overall objectives along with general guidelines on achieving those objectives.”**

**- Leonard Saffir**  
*in 'Power Public Relations'*

## WHY FOSTER MARKETING?

Foster Marketing has been providing cost-effective, creative communications solutions to the worldwide oil and gas industry for 30 years. We understand the industry and its unique challenges and opportunities.

Because of our presence and involvement in the industry, we have built solid relationships and a reputation with journalists all around the world. This makes it easier to facilitate your message and provide the media with valuable information.

Our diverse and strategically built team of professionals understands the importance of executing a comprehensive, integrated marketing communications plan, and we know how to coordinate all of the pieces to maximize its effectiveness.

By nature, public relations is a time-consuming process. There are many steps and lots of work required to get your desired results. By being able to streamline the process, Foster Marketing can provide your organization with cost-effective and proactive public relations to achieve your objectives while freeing up your company’s valuable time.



To speak to a marketing specialist, please call

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