

It's Never Too Late to Invest in PR – But It Still Needs to Be Done at the Right Time. Here's How to Know You're Ready.

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It happens all the time in the entrepreneurial world: A team builds an impressive product or service, rigorously test it to make sure it functions well and then they launch it. When a few weeks go by and new business leads aren't what they expected, there's a collective lightbulb moment: We need some PR.

If you've found yourself in a similar spot, have no fear. You're certainly not alone. Over the years, I've taken what seems like countless calls from business leaders trying to drum up inbounds by getting into public relations post-launch. Sometimes the business in question is only a few months old, while other times the open sign has been hanging on the door for years.

I always preach that a PR strategy should be built out well before a business's launch date. If you're trying to retroactively ignite media interest, starting a public relations program is less about how long it's been since the business was founded and more about how your business is currently functioning.

If you're thinking about taking the PR plunge, here are three

ways to know you – and your business – are ready.

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1. You have financial resources to invest in the PR long game

One of the surest ways to end up being frustrated with a PR program is to look at it solely as a revenue generator. Yes, public relations can help drive business leads, but it inherently is not part of the click-click-buy world. Try tracking the specific dollar value of landing a news article. Actually, don't. Why? Because you can't. The same goes for speaking engagements, awards and almost every other PR deliverable.

If your business is cash-starved and you're in a place where you have to tie every dollar spent to a measurable ROI, hold off on PR. Chances are slim that PR will deliver a sustained and attributable line of revenue. However, if you're in a place where you've got relatively dependable recurring revenue coming in, and you appreciate how investing in things like a halo effect and thought leadership can bolster your organization over the long haul, then you are in a much better position to financially invest in a public relations strategy.

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2. You're willing to continuously nurture a PR strategy

While my previous point revolves around monetary resources, this one is geared more toward the resources of time and attention. Many people look at PR as one-off splashes – usually in the form of press releases – and fail to appreciate

the many ways sustained public relations efforts can deliver wins for their business. If you're in the market for someone to simply write and distribute sporadic press releases for you, by all means, that's better than nothing. But it's just the tip of the PR iceberg.

Without fail, the most successful clients I work with – yes, measured by revenue growth – are the ones that continuously cultivate a proactive public relations program. Am I saying PR is the most important factor leading to their business success? No. But it is a consequential element contributing to the good standing of the organization. As you think about public relations, I challenge you to refute the big splash worldview. Instead, draw the lens back and think of how public relations can be aligned with all your efforts over the long haul, enabling you to reach your business objectives.

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3. You know your audience

Not every time, but many times the folks who only want a big splash out of PR are the same people who aren't quite sure who their target audience should be. This is problematic for loads of reasons. In the best of the worst-case scenarios, you'll be fishing where you'll get no bites. Again, that's the most preferable bad outcome. It can get much worse. I've seen organizations invest in a communications strategy resulting in a deluge of bad leads. They not only invested money, time and energy into a flawed strategy, but also had to allocate resources to sorting through a mountain of bad leads.

One of the foundational rules of PR is to know who your audience is. Once you know that, you can figure out where their attention is placed – I like to say, where their eyeballs are. If you've got a solid handle on those two things, then you can build and execute a plan to get in front

of them (and influence them) with the most appropriate form of messaging.

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I'd bet the majority of businesses investing in public relations today didn't have a PR strategy in place at launch. If you didn't either, that is perfectly okay. Consider whether you're ready to think through the above items. If you've got each of them adequately addressed, you can feel confident that your business is in a spot to move forward with PR.

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