

We Live in a ‘Right Now’ World – But Good Things Take Time. Here’s How to Explain Long Lead Times to Your Clients.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

There was a time when it was standard in the PR world to wait weeks or even months to learn if a client’s news was published. Even the daily newspapers wouldn’t “stop the presses” unless a story was earth-shattering. Today, between print, digital and social media, literally any news or information is at our fingertips at any time. It’s awesome! But if you own and manage a business like my PR firm that relies heavily on the news cycle, it can also be a massive challenge.

Why? Because instant gratification has become the norm. I’m guilty of it too – search and you shall find ... right away. The problem is that clients often think this translates to their PR team snapping their fingers, and magically, their brand starts trending. If only that were the case. The reality is that although news moves faster than ever and there are more platforms than ever, there’s also much more competition to get those headlines. What’s more, there’s always something else clamoring to take away that attention once you get it.

So it’s not just about getting results now; it’s also about remaining top-of-mind later. In PR, this can be achieved through short and long lead times. Here’s how I help my

clients understand the value of both. And how the premise can be applied to any service industry.

Related: [How to Make Your PR Campaigns Customer-Focused](#)

The importance of timing in PR

As the saying goes, timing is everything, and that's particularly true in PR. What's false is the belief that PR won't work for you if you can't get your name in the news right now. Or that if you invest to achieve those initial PR results, you should stop there.

This is where lead times come into play. Clients always want to be included in the big, national print publications. But so does everyone else. That's partly why those publications have such long lead times, up to six months of an issue hitting newsstands. Regional print media is somewhat shorter (up to three months), but the news you pitch them still must be planned accordingly.

On the other hand, media channels that operate with a short lead time (up to one month) include online outlets, TV, radio and weekly and daily newspapers. Sometimes, there are even last-minute opportunities, but that's not the norm (and is thus a topic for a different discussion).

While the nature of lead times may seem frustrating, they actually allow brands to create "stickiness" or memorability with their audience. Remember the old rule of seven from marketing class? It takes up to seven impressions for people to remember your brand. In my experience, that's true, and the right mix of short and long lead times can do just that. Now, getting your clients on board with this principle can be another story.

Related: [This New Approach to PR Is a Game-Changer for the Industry](#)

I take a three-step approach to help clients understand the value of both short and long-lead times in the PR world:

1. Educate them

Companies hire a PR firm because they need expertise in this area, so it's understandable that they don't know the process's inner workings. Again, as consumers, we've all been conditioned to expect immediate results, so there's an expectation coming in that PR clients should be able to get in the news as quickly as they can access it.

Educating them early on is vital. The first step is to ask many questions about the client's product or service, audience, goals and challenges. Only when you know precisely what they're looking for can you determine the most appropriate outlets to pursue their desired results. So, the next step is to match the client's profile to a particular media strategy and explain why this strategy was chosen. For example, I've had clients who think they want to focus on national media only. Still, when we explain the lead time involved (and, in one case, why their audience was more likely to follow regional TV and online outlets), it's easier to get the sign-on for a combination of both.

Related: [Your PR Is Doomed Without a Consistent Digital Strategy. Here's Why.](#)

2. Show them

Nothing speaks to a client more than seeing their competition succeed (or fail) in PR. We've been able to show clients others in their industry who clearly had a quick PR push and then dropped off the radar, as well as those who consistently keep their name top-of-mind not only through news but also through social posting and thought leadership (which are also great PR strategies).

Competitive analysis that shows where brands like theirs went right and where they went wrong in their PR helps clients put lead times into perspective in a way a verbal explanation may not. What's more, it incentivizes them to do even better than their competitors by having the patience and putting in the time that combining short and long lead times into a media strategy requires.

Related: [How to Align Your PR and Marketing Strategies to Get More Out of Both](#)

3. Diligently track ROI

Sure, I have project-only clients, but my goal as a business owner is to form long-term partnerships that help sustain and grow their brands and, in the process, my firm. Regardless of how well clients are educated and shown the results of others, the only way to prove the value of short and long lead times to them is through successful ROI.

To start, decide what metrics to measure and set a baseline of where a client's brand stands initially. Then, set short- and long-term goals, identify media publications to achieve those goals, and pitch, pitch, pitch to exceed client expectations. Yes, there's more to the process, but starting with these fundamental steps lays a solid foundation for producing targeted outcomes.

Applying the approach outside of PR

Although we've been explicitly talking about PR so far, the "right now" expectation businesses have can hold for many different industries – all service providers are in the same boat in this regard. I believe the approach outlined above applies more universally to many service sectors because short and long lead times also refer to any type of media, supply chain issues, manufacturing turnarounds and staffing.

In all such cases, by educating your clients, showing them the results of their competitors and tracking ROI successes reasonably and realistically, you can prove that some things are worth the wait.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-explain-long-lead-times-to-an-antsy-client/472392>