

Public Relations (PR) 101: What Is PR & How Can It Benefit Your Business?

PR vs. Advertising

A fundamental point to understand is the difference between PR and advertising and what each can bring to your business:

ADVERTISING

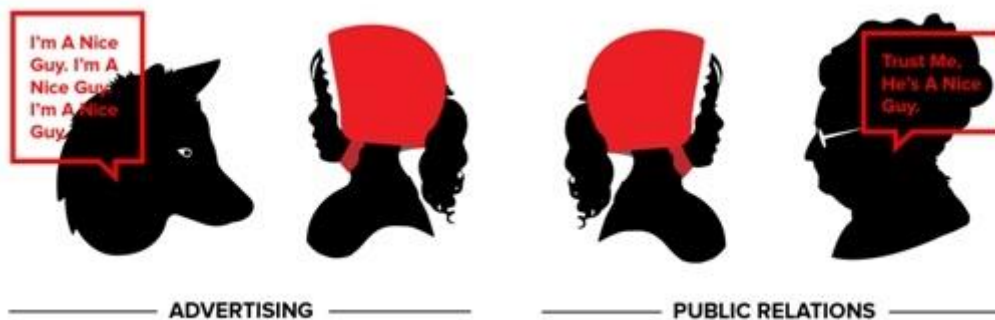
You **control** the message and tone



PUBLIC RELATIONS

You **shape** the message and tone

Advertising is a cost paid by you directly to the media outlet in return for **VISIBILITY**. PR on the other hand is **EARNED** – it focuses on securing **CREDIBILITY** by influencing and informing others to talk on your behalf. Think of it this way:



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So What Are the Pros & Cons?

Ultimately, PR and advertising both aim to influence your audience to make a certain decision – they just approach this in different ways.

An advert may contain all the brand messages verbatim, but there can be a lack of 'independent verification' to help push consumers through the indecision barrier.

We all know the power of a personal recommendation: PR uses other people to do the talking for you – relaying their personal experiences of you, your clinic or treatment to the media, and in doing so pass on your messages indirectly. Some key differences:

Advertising	PR
Paid	Earned
Builds exposure	Builds trust
Audience is sceptical	Media or third parties give validation
Guaranteed placement	No guarantee, must persuade media
Complete creative/content control	Media controls final version
Ads are mostly visual	PR uses language
More expensive	Less expensive
"Buy this product"	"This is important for you"

Many clinics do not have the budget for a combined marketing, PR and advertising approach – so think carefully about your business objectives, available time, resources and budget when deciding which route to use.

Another consideration is return on investment (ROI): advertising can provide a direct cost : exposure ratio – you will know exactly how many people have seen your ad, but PR has a broader remit in terms of exposure, word of mouth, brand trust and therefore presents more of a challenge in calculating a direct cost : sales ratio.

How Do These Approaches Work In Practice?

- **Advertising:** you pay for an ad slot (either a one-off or as part of a series) and fill this with content which you control completely. You can run the same advert repeatedly for as long as your budget allows – the more times the ad is placed, the more visible your brand becomes. However, audiences know they are being sold something, so can be less receptive and more sceptical.
- **PR:** you 'pitch' your story to a journalist to get your 'offering' (be that a product, service or business) written about for free. The journalist and publication have control over if, when and how they write about your story. Generally, they only write about something once – you need to come up with fresh approaches and 'new news' to get more coverage. The audience sees your story as part of the overall news agenda, giving it more credibility and more chance to create engagement as it is perceived to be independent.

What Can PR Help You To Do?

For your particular product, service or business...

PR CAN:

- ✓ Create a favourable 'market'
- ✓ Educate audiences to increase understanding and awareness with a view to driving demand/sales
- ✓ Influence perceptions in order to change decision-making behaviour
- ✓ Establish and nurture a reputation, creating trust

PR CANNOT:

- ✗ Control the news agenda
- ✗ Eliminate competition for news
- ✗ Eliminate the negatives of a story
- ✗ Compensate for an inadequate story
- ✗ Replace other marketing techniques

Should You Use A PR Agency or Go It Alone?

This depends very much on your capabilities, time and budget – with a clinic to run, there are often other demands!

Critically, what you are buying when you bring in a PR specialist is not only their time and capabilities, it is their media contacts and relationships: these can bring you instant access and exposure.



A full retained PR agency team is also not the only option: there are other cost-effective and flexible options, such as PR consultants and freelancers who can support one-off projects, either at a strategic level or at a tactical level.

PR support can be secured either with a longer term retainer model (a fixed monthly sum for a given scope of work) or on a shorter term project-by-project basis. Here's a helpful checklist to help you determine whether you need extra support:

- **What are your objectives?**
 - Enhanced reputation and media profile?
 - Drive more new patients through the door?
 - Grow your existing business?
 - Become a media spokesperson?
 - Promote/launch a new clinic, product or service?
- **What are your expectations?**
 - Media coverage (How much? Over what timeframe?)
 - A one-off PR event or an ongoing program?
 - Building journalist relationships?
 - Key assets developed (website, press materials, clinic materials etc.)
- **Who will manage the workload?**
 - You? Your practice manager? Another staff member (marketing manager, beauty coordinator, customer service assistant)?
 - How will this impact their existing job description / time / compensation?
- **How much budget do you have and what is your timeframe?**

For many clients, the question always comes down to budget when considering whether to do PR in the first place, and then whether to bring in a specialist.

It can be very much a case of 'how long is a piece of string' - but my advice is just to be clear and upfront about what you're prepared to spend and it should be a minimum of 10% of your marketing budget.

PR is a longer end-game, but it brings lasting rewards if you have well-planned investment over a period of time: a one-off flash in the pan burst of activity may get you some short-term exposure, but this will not ultimately help you achieve those key pillars of **educating, engaging and influencing** customers for a longer-term business benefit.

Next time: How to identify, pitch and brief a PR support!



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Julia Kendrick has over 10 years of experience in public relations, and is the founder of new start-up Kendrick PR Consulting: a bespoke strategic consultancy service specialising in medical aesthetics and healthcare PR.

A previous winner of the Communiqué Young Achiever Award, Julia is passionate about delivering award-winning client campaigns and high-calibre results.

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