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June 2009

How to hire a PR agency



We're really lucky here at [LCI](#)...we get calls every week from businesses looking to engage with a PR agency - many for the first time. After taking a few hundred of these calls, we've come up with a pretty good tip list on "***How to hire a public relations agency.***" It's not complete (every client is unique with its own needs), but it's a good place to start for anyone considering an agency search.

Know what size agency fits your needs. Here in the Bay Area, there are generally three types of agencies - the small/sole proprietor, mid-sized and large multinational. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Understand where your business matches up by doing your own thorough research.

Face to face is a plus. So much of PR is a symbiotic relationship between client and agency. It's a lot easier to build this relationship when you can actually meet in person on a regular basis.

Look beyond your category. Maybe you're a museum and you'd like to hire the agency that did such a great job for your competitor across town...but take a moment to think outside the box. Does that agency have a breadth of client experience? We're constantly cross pollinating creative ideas from one client to another - and that benefits everyone.

Articulate your needs - in writing. We're not suggesting that everyone undertake an exhaustive RFP, but it does help to have management agree on exactly what it is you're looking to accomplish before you pick up the phone. The Council of PR Firms has put

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together [a great tool](#) to help with creating a comprehensive RFP. Most importantly, know what success will mean to you and your business - and then try to find the agency that can help achieve it.

Don't ignore chemistry. You're going to be spending some time with your agency - so take the time to consider work styles. In PR, you get out of it what you put into it...so don't spend time with people who either don't understand your business or don't understand how you work.

Call references. In this world of connected networks, you're going to know someone who knows someone who worked with that agency you're considering. Ask around. Utilize online tools (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.). Former clients are the best references.

Know your budget. PR is a simple time=money business. If you know what you can spend, any agency should be able to tell you what they can do within that budget to meet your needs.

Don't hire before you're ready. Often a start-up will come to us, but they aren't ready yet for that consumer push. Or perhaps the CEO wants to hire an agency, but hasn't hired the PR Director yet. Strategically think through your timing for maximum benefit.

Set aside the time. Here at LCI we have weekly client meetings (by phone or in person) and are in touch via email/phone multiple times during the week with clients. If you don't have someone within your organization that can set aside the time to respond to/work with your agency, you're not getting the best bang for your buck.

Demand ROI. You're paying good money for these services. Ask potential agencies how they demonstrate return on investment.

Look for the "creative pitch". Agencies show their creative side by presenting program ideas...if they don't wow you, walk.

Have your own ideas? Send them along! david@landispr.com

FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU HAVE ONLY FIVE MINUTES:

1. **Delete emails.** Clean up that inbox!
2. **Drop a note to someone you haven't spoken with in ages.** You never know what's new with them - tell them what's new with you. It might lead to a new prospect.
3. **Stretch.** Sitting, typing, hunching. Seriously, give yourself a break.

4. **Daydream.** It's where that next idea comes from.
5. **Thank someone.** How often do we hear it? Not enough. Be the one to turn the tide.

Backtalk's Nonprofit Spotlight:
Coral Reef Alliance



CORAL provides education, tools and inspiration to help local communities become passionate environmental stewards for the reefs. They develop managed marine protected areas and sustainable businesses to benefit coral reefs and people. Visit them at www.coral.org

[Landis Communications, Inc. \(LCI\)](#)
1388 Sutter St. #901
San Francisco, CA 94109
415.561.0888, ext. 2300
info@landispr.com
www.landispr.com

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