

# PR Agency or Hire In-House? Five Questions to Ask

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Many organizations are clear about their need for public relations. They have a story to tell and know they need help getting the word out, reaching their target audiences more effectively, creating press releases and pitches, putting together a social media strategy and/or widening their influence through speaking engagements and awards. And that's a fantastic start.

However, how to best go about that is another story, altogether. Perhaps the most important issue is whether a business or non-profit should hire a public relations agency to carry out these needs or find an in-house person to handle the task. There are pros and cons to consider and the answer isn't always cut-and-dry. Here are five indicators that point to a need for agency support:

## **1. Your business' activity level is high.**

Honestly assess the level of attention you need to commit in order to create and execute an effective public relations program. Does your business have multiple locations or serve a wide geographic area? Do you regularly have news to announce? Are there guest columns you could write on your area of expertise but you simply don't have the time to go at them solo? Some clients that our agency partners with have press release-worthy news – new hires or promotions, new offerings or noteworthy projects, community giving initiatives they are involved in – consistently, week-in, week-out. They have monthly column commitments, blog posts to be reviewed, questions about their social media plan and a need for bigger-picture thinking tied to their business goals. These

companies; that is, ones with a high, constant need for public relations support, are typically well-served by partnering with a public relations firm.

## 2. **Your company lacks the right internal resources.**

Executing a public relations campaign and getting stellar results requires a high level of skill. Be certain you have a deeply knowledgeable professional by your side, whether that's a high-level hire or an agency partner who can bring that ability into the mix. For instance, I've honed my know-how over 18 years (and have a team of professionals with their own decades of experience and impressive results to match) and am constantly learning to ensure I'm able on top of the latest industry trends and changes in the media landscape. I also invest in the latest tools of the trade to do so. An entry-level marketing, social media or public relations professional doesn't have the breadth of experience needed to adequately manage a brand's needs.



## 3. **Your business would benefit from a more global perspective.**

Working with an agency gives you access to multiple people with varied expertise and strengths, along with a variety of resources, such as media lead programs and databases. There also is the benefit of the agency's cumulative experiences

working with other like-minded companies as well as its work with businesses in other industries that may inspire ingenuity, heightening the agency's efforts on your behalf. Many hands make for a light load and many talents make for a more creative team.

#### **4. You value advice.**

I've often joked that I'll tell clients what they *need* to hear, but not necessarily what they *want* to hear. (Sorry, clients!) That's because I care about their reputation and mine. Often, when the public relations function is taken in-house, particularly if it's not a combined position where there is a marketing or in-house PR person who then works in tandem with the consultant to achieve a company's goals, there is a tendency to get myopic. Since a public relations firm is external, its team often has a better ability to advise business owners and see their situations from a far-reaching perspective.

#### **5. You require some degree of flexibility.**

I've heard the rent versus buy analogy used to describe working with a public relations firm versus hiring someone in-house to handle the function and it makes great sense. Tapping an agency gives a company the ability to grow its reach and budget as needed and also to reassign resources when the scope changes. Hiring an outside firm also means a business is not responsible for benefits, vacation time, office space or other requirements that typically come with a full-time internal hire. Depending on budget, it also may make better financial sense to pay for exactly what your company needs without buying into more than you do.

I'll be the first person to admit that hiring a public relations firm is not a move that makes sense for every single business or organization. Sometimes an in-house hire is the perfect solution, but other times, working with a public

relations firm can be an ideal solution and the start of a fruitful, results-driven partnership.