

A quote from my book, [How to Win at the Sport of Business](#) got picked up in multiple stories. In the book I stated effectively that "Startups should never hire a PR firm". As you would expect, the PR Industry was not over-joyed at the comment. Articles were written about how incredibly valuable a good PR person can be to a startup.

Actually, I have no doubt that a smart PR person can add value to a startup. The problem is that all things considered, it's not enough value.

The first problem with hiring a PR firm is cost. Cash is always in short supply in startups. Given all the potential places that you need cash in a startup, is the company better served having that cash available to potentially keep the company alive another day, week or month ? Or hiring a PR person ? I would rather have the cash.

The next issue is time.

The thing about PR people is this: while they may have great contacts and they can get articles placed, they are not capable of doing a vulcan mind meld. They don't automatically know all the elements about your business that you want to convey to media, partners, customers, potential employees and even potential investors. In all likelihood the entrepreneur doesn't either. Knowing the message you want to communicate is always a work in progress. To have a successful relationship with a PR shop, not only must you have the time to communicate to your PR person what your company is all about, you must have the time to continuously educate him/her about how they should respond to questions from the media people they are contacting. That is a huge time suck . Far too many meetings .

On the other hand, the same amount of time could be spent communicating directly with the media outlets you want to cover you and using that time to develop a direct relationship.

At this point, the PR pro steps in and discusses how many pitches media people get from entrepreneurs like you every day. How there is no way for a small company can break through the clutter to get the attention of media. If you are a startup that incorrectly thinks it needs to get on Letterman or Good Morning America in order to be a successful company, then they are right. But the reality is that for the vast majority of startups, particularly tech related startups, most of the media that is going to benefit you out of the gate is trade related or local media. And these people are ALWAYS looking for stories to write. They want to hear from unique companies.

It's amazing how often a simple email to a writer for a trade publication or local media will get a response. The key to getting a response is being short, sweet , hyperbole free and to the point. You have to sell your differentiation in a paragraph.

Subject : Tracking Traffic to Reduce Vacancies

Dear Real Estate Industry Writer,

My name is Mark Cuban. I would love to tell you more about our company [motionloft.com](#). We have internally developed a sensor that when placed on the side of a building can track in real time the number of people and cars that pass by. Motionloft is being used by building owners in San Francisco and New York to lease space by showing potential tenants the exact amount of foot traffic in front of a store location. Its being used by tenants to determine the best time to open, close and to offer specific products in services.

In one test case we would love to share with you, a tenant decided to rent a store front and go against the conventional wisdom of the area and open for lunch...with great results. They made this decision based exclusively on the data provided by motionloft.com

If you would like to see more information about motionloft.com and how your readers could benefit, just let me know !

all the best

mark

It's simple. To the point. Far from perfect, but it will work. Notice we never say we are the "best, biggest, fastest, most " or add any hyperbole. Doing so will get you a quick delete. The whole point of the email was to get their attention by showing what I believe to be would be of great value to their readership. Help the writer, they will help you.

Just as important, its the first step in developing a direct relationship with a media person who is right in the middle of the industry that I need to be successful in. Media people are not only great outlets for information about your company, but they are great sources of information as well. If you can develop a strong relationship, they will often be happy to compare notes and to ask you what you think about others in the industry and what they are hearing about them. Knowledge is power.

Not everyone is going to respond. But by making yourself available and communicating in a short simple fashion, you are building awareness that will pay off when you see the same people at industry events or when a customer or prospect mentions your company .

You can also ask your customer and any vendor partners if they have any relationships with media and ask for an introduction. They may even have a PR person that they work with that you can glom off of for free. Like any good sales process, its about asking for referrals and PR is no different. You just have to hustle.

So back to startups hiring a PR firm. Yes, you can get there from here with a PR firm, but im a believer that you accomplish much, much more with direct relationships than by using an intermediary. And that cash you keep in the bank can be the difference between staying alive as a small business, or not.