



New business mailer: Carrot Communications (PR and Business Advisory)

Brief

Carrot Communications wanted a new business booklet outlining how PR can do more than generate coverage in the media; the company wanted to show how PR can be used to demonstrably drive business growth.

Carrot was keen that the mailer spoke in a down-to-earth voice – to reflect the personalities of its employees – and wanted to avoid using 'fluffy' PR language that many consultancies adopt.



Driving Business
Growth Through

PR



The motivations for PR can be many and the tactics eclectic. Sometimes PR campaigns are earnest and meaningful; other times they're fun and frivolous. But whatever the motivation and whatever the tactics, PR activity that does not drive business growth is wasted activity.

How can PR drive business growth?

PR is a powerful tool for accelerating reputations and increasing brand awareness, which does wonders for business growth. Smaller companies that execute effective PR campaigns have found that they are able to punch far above their weight and compete with large, corporate organisations in terms of the media space they occupy.

The significance of this bolder presence cannot be overstated. Potential customers will see the company in a new, more positive light and on a par with their larger, longer-established rivals – with the added bonus of being the new company on the block that is causing a stir in the media. Analysts will begin to focus on the company, giving it a respected third-party endorsement in the media and at relevant industry conferences and exhibitions – which swells the brand awareness even further. Being at the front of analysts' minds also helps increase sales – 55 per cent of companies in the UK will consult an analyst before making a significant purchasing decision.

And when a company has the media buzzing, the analysts excited and the customers just keep on coming, buyers are inevitably attracted and the value of the company rockets.

Our proven track record

All sounds a little too easy?

Well, it actually really is that simple. But we wouldn't expect you to take our word for it. Below are some examples of how our PR campaigns have propelled our previous clients' growth.

Premium TV

As Premium TV's (PTV) PR consultancy for the last two years, we're proud of how we accelerated the company's reputation among prospective customers, potential recruits and in the digital sector as a whole.

Our PR campaigns have covered the announcement of more than 30 deals and strategic partnerships. We've generated coverage on PTV's collaborations with industry giants, such as Virgin Media and Warner Music; and, equally important, with niche brands, such as the Professional Darts Corporation and World Rally Championship.

We've also made sure that PTV's management commented on relevant and topical issues in a range of media – online, vertical trade, new media, broadcast and national newspapers. In addition, by-lined articles, interviews and research all generated positive coverage that reached business-decision makers.

So it was no real surprise when, in July this year, PTV was sold to Access Industries for a cool £25 million (not a bad price, considering the company had debts of £30million only five years ago).

We're not suggesting that Carrot's activity was the sole reason for PTV's success – but we do know that it played a significant role in the company's significant growth and its valuation.

Overture

Overture was Carrot's first client. We launched it to the UK market in 2000, when it was called GoTo and before anyone had heard of Pay-for-Performance search.

Our job was twofold; explain Pay-for-Performance to search marketers and e-commerce managers and to promote Overture as the sector's European leader.

The results were impressive. In one 12-month period, we generated coverage which, had we been able to buy it, would have cost more than £420,000 in advertising equivalent value. This represented a return on investment of 5 to 1 on Overture's PR spend. As well as regular coverage in the marketing and new media press (on and offline), we generated feature articles in national and international media including CNN, CNBC, BBC Online, FT Creative Business and the Guardian.

We also placed Overture speakers at industry events including Internet World, ETRE, New Media Show, Value-Based Marketing and IDMF.

In July of 2003 Yahoo! acquired Overture in a deal worth \$1.63 billion. Nick Hynes, then Managing Director and President, Overture Europe, said: "Carrot has been instrumental in the development of our communications strategy which, with minimal support from advertising, has driven the creation of Overture's brand in the UK."

BlackSpider Technologies

Carrot was appointed in February 2004 to support the 25-strong company's launch of its MailControl Enterprise service, and to exploit its attendance at one of its key exhibitions, InfoSecurity. Its goals were to grow the number of users per customer, its total number of customers and to increase the value of the company.

Again, the results of our PR campaigns spoke volumes. BlackSpider had 3,000 users when Carrot started; by the time it was acquired in 2006, the company had 1,000 enterprise customers and more than 200,000 users. It had an annual turnover of £3 million, and was acquired by SurfControl in July 2006 for £20 million.

Urban Mobile

We recently worked with mobile marketing and technology company, Urban Mobile, to support its business development and sales activities. Our tenacious promotion of a mobile marketing deal between UCI and Urban Mobile generated widespread trade coverage and increased awareness of the Urban Mobile proposition to the extent that the company was approached by, and signed similar deals with, Disney and Warner.

So, that's why you should be using PR covered. Up next is how we'd set about driving your business' growth.

What PR campaigns will ensure that your organisation continually moves forward and add tangible value to your business?

Ask that question to a dozen different PR practitioners and you'll get a dozen different answers. Some will tell you that PR is an art form, not a science, and that unbridled creativity wins the day. Others will tell you the opposite is true, that meticulous planning and precise execution yield the best results.

Creativity, however, is of little value if it is not rooted in a structured campaign. Similarly, if there is no lateral thought to excite and engage the audience, the campaign will fall flat, no matter how well thought out and carefully delivered it may be.

The truth is PR sits somewhere between the two. And another (seldom spoken) truth is that there is no 'secret ingredient' or mystique to a successful PR campaign – it's simply a combination of relevant creativity and a structured programme, professionally delivered.

Below are the tenets for a PR campaign that will accelerate the growth of your business.

- **Keep an open mind** – don't fall in to the trap of thinking PR is all about media relations. Remember, your company is likely to have many communications channels that already reach existing and potential customers, such as customer service and sales – make sure they are all delivering agreed, consistent company messages and projecting the best possible impression of your company.
- **Integrate** – PR is a powerful tool but it cannot drive growth on its own. You can learn a lot about your industry, your customers and your own company by keeping in regular contact with individual departments, such as customer service, sales, marketing, and product development. Remember to draw on in-house knowledge and experience; a good PR campaign is informed by as many resources as possible.
- **Plan** – take the time to identify the necessary components for a successful campaign, including: defined audience; clear and measurable objectives; a practical and pragmatic strategy. And don't forget to include a budget – if the PR campaign is purely to drive growth, see if it's possible to draw additional funding from the sales budget.
- **Measure** – PR has a bad reputation when it comes to evaluating campaigns, so it's really important to set measurable objectives from the outset. This way, you'll never lose track of what you've set out to achieve and you'll know 'what success looks like' (you'll be surprised how many companies have an uncertain idea of what PR success would actually represent). Remember, evaluation is important because it should be used to inform the subsequent step of the growth campaign, not just evidence the success of the first step.

Planning, objectives and feedback

Planning

Planning is not always the most exciting aspect of a PR campaign, but it's certainly one of the most important – and often overlooked in favour of 'quick hit' coverage.

You may want to bear the following in mind when planning a campaign:

- **Get everyone involved who needs to be involved** – get buy-in from senior management as their involvement and availability will be crucial, particularly for conveying your messages in interviews. This is also the time to liaise with any other department that may inform and influence the campaign, such as product development.
- **Work with the sales team to understand industry issues and barriers** – the sales team will be privy to industry issues via direct feedback from customers, so make sure you're in regular contact with them. Marrying what the sales team is seeing in the field with what's occupying the media agenda is an excellent way to add issues hijacking to your campaign.

- **Time campaigns to fit with other sales and marketing activities** – if you're planning any other marketing activity, increase the cumulative impact by timing it so that it coincides with the PR campaign. For consistency, make sure that the company and brand messages are the same on all internal and external communication.
- **Identify a point in the campaign to review progress** – it's inevitable that some aspects of your campaign will have to change, not least because not every aspect of it will be within your control i.e. when third parties are involved. So be flexible and take stock at regular intervals. It will show you what is and isn't working and, crucially, give you chance to tweak the campaign accordingly.

“Fail to prepare, prepare to fail.”

Roy Keane

Objectives

Your objectives may seem obvious, but make sure you outline them at the beginning of the campaign as they serve as a marker for the campaign's progress. Objectives need to be clear, set within a reasonable time frame and, above all else, measurable i.e. the number of hits on a website, the number of datasheets downloaded, sales completed etc.

The following is a simple but effective method for evaluating a campaign:

- **Output** – i.e. issued six press releases in a six-month period, generating 30 cuttings.
- **Outtake** – i.e. what impact has this had on the audience? What messages did the audience take away from the campaign? Were they what you intended?
- **Outcome** – i.e. did you complete the sale?
- **Impact** – measuring perceptions at the start and end of a campaign, and tracking the difference. This can take significant resource to do. Alternatively, pull in your sales team to give anecdotal evidence of impact – have you had incoming enquiries from a sector targeted by PR, for example; or increased visitors to an exhibition stand; or have prospects read about you before the sales team call them?

Remember, evaluation takes time, so make sure you allocate enough resources and budget for it.

Feedback

A feedback or response mechanism is crucial for measuring the success of a PR campaign. Of course, not every member of your audience will feel compelled to provide feedback, so you may have to be creative to ensure you elicit a response. But elicit it you must, as the feedback and data captured about the respondent will be immensely helpful when closing sales.

A combination of offline and online communication works best – if you can drive a potential client to your website and it has an e-commerce function, there is a real possibility that they'll buy there and then.

Every PR campaign should convey a set of agreed messages.

In addition to senior management, it's worthwhile to get the input of all marketing and sales disciplines, as they will share with you the responsibility for conveying the messages. Devising a message set isn't difficult, just make sure they are:

- **Simple** – don't fall in to the trap of making messages overcomplicated for the sake of it. It sounds like a no-brainer, but you'd be amazed at how many organisations get this wrong. If you want your audience to understand exactly the message you wish to convey, don't leave room for confusion or ambiguity, but express yourself as clearly as possible. This means talking in plain English and avoiding corporate jargon at all costs. We cannot emphasise that enough. We really cannot emphasise that enough.
- **Consistent** – again, sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised at how many organisations fail to ensure that the same messages are used as the basis for all internal and external communications. If you make sure that every department – customer service, new business, HR, advertising, marketing etc – is saying the same thing, the message will get through to your potential customers. If you're inconsistent, you'll never create in your potential customer's mind the desired impression of your organisation.

- **Compelling** – be honest and appraise whether the messages you're putting out are engaging. I said be honest! Would the messages be interesting to a potential customer or journalist? Are you saying exactly the same things as your competitors? Why should a potential customer or journalist choose to speak to you rather than one of your competitors?

And one more tip:

When you draft your messages, make sure you include clear benefits for each audience that you're targeting. Whenever you make a statement, imagine a potential customer or journalist asking: "What does this mean for me?"

Remember, a well thought out message set can help position even a small organisation as an expert in its field and help it punch above its weight in terms of media presence.

If your PR campaign is to be successful, you'll need to integrate with every public-facing department and make sure you get senior management on board.

And you'll need every department to be communicating the same clear and consistent messages. Using the same messages in advertising and PR campaigns should happen as a matter of course, but rarely does this happen in reality. Advertising and PR agencies should work together and from the same brief, so that the programmes they devise relate to each other. A good way to promote collaboration is to offer them both an incentive for collective success.

You will also need to be creative and scrutinise for newsworthiness any data you currently hold or plan on collating. For example, we helped one of our clients devise a survey that it could carry out at an industry exhibition it was attending. The questions were packaged so that they not only discussed topical industry issues, but also resonated with the messages that the client wanted to convey. We then immediately drafted and sold-in the story, offering the media the opinions of more than 500 industry professionals on topical issues – while at the same time communicating our client's messages through its key target media.

If any department is likely to reap the rewards of a successful PR campaign, it's the sales team. Any positive coverage should be made available for sales collateral – be it for direct marketing, advertising, face-to-face presentations etc – as it serves as an excellent third-party endorsement of your product or service.

And remember, PR is not just about media relations. Explore every other avenue – such as analyst relations, events and exhibitions, speaker platforms, company website – that will help generate a buzz around your business and help you get on pitch lists.

Creativity

Creativity is highly valued in the PR community – with good reason – but it is has to resonate with the media agenda to be effective. There are many different kinds of creativity – finding the right messages or strategy for a campaign requires a creative approach to problem-solving, for example – and is not restricted to the kind of stunts that require you to paint a building or jump out of a window! A creative PR campaign should provide the right platform to resonate with you audience and communicate your messages effectively. ‘Stunt’ creativity for creativity’s sake may flatter a few egos, but it will not support business growth.

So before you go really go to town with a lateral campaign, there are a couple of questions you may like to consider:

- **Is it relevant creativity?** It can be hard to ditch a creative concept, particularly if it is a very clever one. But if you find that it has no obvious place in the campaign and you're trying to shoe-horn it in simply because you can't face letting it go, then that's all the reason you need to cast it aside.
- **Will it resonate with the target audience?** Again, you may think your concept is smarter than Stephen Hawkins, but never forget that the PR campaign is for your audience's benefit, not yours. If there is a chance your audience won't understand it, don't run it.
- **Are you pooling all of your creative resources?** Creative concepts should be as informed as possible, so make sure you consider the input from all relevant departments, customers and potential customers when brainstorming ideas.
- **Are you looking too hard for a stellar concept?** Don't waste time searching endlessly for the concept to end all concepts. You will be judged on whether the campaign meets its objectives; not on how many nods to your creativity you receive. Remember, the best ideas are often the simplest.
- **Are you working the advertising ideas as hard as you can?** A good advertising campaign will feed directly in to your PR campaign. You should be able to take the creative idea from the advertising and then build some PR tactics around it.

Media choice

Today, we're spoilt for choice when it comes to media, not just in terms of the amount of outlets we have available to us, but also the many different types.

The consumer is in control and can choose how and when to consume news and information. This means that it's not realistic to expect coverage in every media outlet. You need to choose the media that your potential customers consume and stick to them.

When you're selecting your target media, make sure that you get the most for your money. That is, remain focused and make sure you get in your core publications as often as possible.

Also, make sure that you consider all media outlets, such as in-house publications; online and offline titles; and local, regional, national and specialist press. Never ignore the major business broadcasters, CNN, BBC and CNBC; and consider online broadcasters too – a fast-growing but too often forgotten media in PR campaigns.

One of the quickest and simplest ways of putting a media list together is to request a media pack from each outlet. Media packs effectively do the leg work for you, helping you understand what demographic consumes what media, and how best to reach the largest possible audience in the most cost-effective way.

Another tip:

Think laterally when you consider how to reach your demographics. An IT manager is not just interested in computers, s/he will also belong to other demographic groups e.g. a father/mother, brother/sister, sportsman/woman, cinema/gig goer etc. One of our clients manufactures a quintessential business product. Apart from targeting the usual business publications, we tapped in to the fact that, among other things, business people spend a lot of time flying, so we pursued reviews in in-flight magazines. Our dogged media relations secured the product a review in Easy-Jet's in-flight publication – exposing the product to a captive audience of more than 2 million people.

You must tread very carefully in today's digital environment.

On the one hand, it represents the biggest opportunity for driving growth and securing sales. Companies can collate reams of valuable data about existing and potential customers, and sell to them, there and then, via an e-commerce function on a website.

On the other hand, the internet represents the biggest threat to business growth. There are literally millions of blogs and forums that have fostered online communities, giving consumers a louder voice than ever before. Unfortunately, in the online world, bad news travels fast. Really fast. Which means that it's imperative to have a strategy in place for responding quickly and effectively if and when your organisation is under attack.

Also, integrating your PR messages and drafting web copy in a deliberate way can do wonders for your search engine optimisation. Which is no bad thing, considering 93 per cent of B2B purchases begin with an online search, and the majority of click-throughs to a particular website occur when it is one of the first three listings of a search engine's results.

You can improve your listing position in a number of ways:

- **Keyword research** – take the time to identify keywords and phrases that your audience uses in searches, and use a web analytics tool to understand the usage patterns of each term. Ultimately, you want to find terms that are frequently searched but have low competition from other sites.
- **Relevant content** – keep keywords in mind when drafting the copy for your website. You can optimise copy for search engine pick-up by incorporating keywords in to the title, subheads and body content.
- **Fresh content** – search engines raise a website's ranking when the site offers new material. News releases, articles and blogs offer opportunities to freshen up your site with high-quality content. In addition, news releases also let you increase the links to your site.

Over to you...

So there you are: how to use PR to drive business growth. All sounds very simple (mind you, things always are when you know what you're doing).

As you may have gathered by now, we don't believe in PR for PR's sake. We are experts at devising PR campaigns that demonstrably drive business growth. If you you'd like us to help you drive your business forward, call Kate Hartley on 020 7386 4862, or email kate.hartley@carrotcomms.co.uk.

Or you can find out more about Carrot Communications at:

www.carrotcomms.co.uk

