

SMART MARK COMMUNICATIONS

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Guide to choosing
a PR agency 2015

Special Supplement to European Communications

Smartest of them all

Juliet Shavit, President and CEO

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Sky announces plans to enter UK mobile market

Sky will launch a mobile service in the UK next year after signing a deal with O2.



Tablet growth set for steep decline

Two new forecasts have highlighted the significant slowdown expected in the global tablet market.



Netflix launches on TalkTalk TV

TalkTalk has started rolling out Netflix to its 1.2 million TV customers.



Ericsson and Apple in patent dispute

Ericsson and Apple have gone to the courts to resolve a two-year dispute over mobile tech patents.

Android sales decline across Europe as Apple nears parity in the UK

The Android OS felt the heat of Apple's new launches at the end of 2014 as its market share dropped in Europe's biggest markets.



Belgacom exec starts ETNO chairmanship

Belgacom's regulatory chief has started his new role as Chairman of the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (ETNO).



Huawei reports rising revenues, profits and R&D for 2014

Huawei has said that it expects 2014 revenues and profits to rise substantially, with R&D spending also on the up.



Senior Oracle exec jumps ship to head up Alcatel-Lucent's IP business

Alcatel-Lucent has appointed Oracle executive Bhaskar Gorti as head of its IP Platforms business.

Three UK adds Spain and New Zealand to Feel at Home roaming initiative

Three UK has added two new countries to its Feel at Home roaming initiative.



Three.co.uk



EE reaches 7.7 million 4G LTE subs

EE has announced it has 7.7 million 4G LTE subscribers to cement its huge leadership position in the UK market.

“ If I was down to the last dollar of my marketing budget I’d spend it on PR! ”
Bill Gates

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Learn to engage more confidently with your current or future PR agency

Welcome to the 2015 edition of our annual Guide to Choosing a PR Agency. Bill Gates was quoted as saying that if he was down to the last dollar of his marketing budget, he’d spend it on PR! As unlikely as this outcome is, it does express how important he views the role of effective PR in communicating his organisations’ core products and values. To be honest he hasn’t done too badly.

In a constantly changing sector such as telecoms, the impact of an effective PR strategy is doubly important. When done badly campaigns can be drowned out by the incessant and often irrelevant noise. When done well its impact can be measured on the bottom line.

For this reason we have again worked with the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) to develop this guide to choosing a PR agency. We hope it will help you to engage more confidently with your current or future PR agency.

The guide looks at how you go about choosing the PR agency that is right for your organisation. We have gone out and collected case studies to find out what works in the real world and have looked into the role of social media to look at how you achieve success. We have also asked the tricky question of when you should change your PR agency.

It takes many years to build a good reputation and moments to ruin it. Having the best PR support on your side is a way to help your organisation avoid many of the pitfalls you will encounter along the way.



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Guide to choosing a PR agency

By Julie Constable, Agency Selection Consultant, PRCA



Taking on a PR agency is a rewarding experience that can help you to boost your communications power in the crowded tech market. But finding that perfect fit, the right chemistry, the right talent, and a shared culture and philosophy can often be a long and winding road.

According to PR professionals, it is the technology sector which is most likely to increase its investment in PR over the next two years – 81 percent of PR people believe it will be the biggest growth area, followed by health (64 percent) and finance (61 percent).

For tech companies it is important that your chosen PR agency not only understands your business and has real insight but shares your vision and philosophy – this can often be the most challenging aspect. Choosing the right agency is vital as they will be looking after the promotion and branding of your company and managing your overall reputation.

As an indicator of the value and importance of communications, the PR industry has grown significantly over recent years. In our PR Census, we forecast the PR industry to be worth £9.62 billion – up from £7.5 billion two years before that. The industry has a headcount of around 62,000 employees across consultancies, in-house PR functions and freelancers.


The importance of digital and online communication tasks has grown massively over recent years. Digital platforms continue to shape day-to-day PR roles, sitting alongside more traditional PR activities such as media relations. So, contemplating the right mix of channels and relevant messaging becomes even

more complicated - and seeking the best advice will be critical.

The PR industry is a broad and complex world, so you may find an agency search a little daunting. So, to help you along the way, here are two pieces of practical help for you.

First, you can use our free Find a PR Agency (FAPRA) service. This will match

your needs with the capabilities of agencies that have been audited by the PRCA and follow our Codes of Conduct and Professional Charter.

Second, check out the PRCA's PR Directory 2015, the most complete list of consultancies, in-house teams and freelancers around. Check out www.prca.org.uk/ for more information. 

Before you go to market

If you already have a contract with an incumbent agency you need to inform it of the review you are undertaking, and decide whether or not you wish to offer it the opportunity to re-pitch.

Prepare your company's background information

When meeting with a new PR agency it is worthwhile going into the meeting with a prepared brief of your current expenditure and budget along with what you expect from them. Also, take along previous work your comms team has completed that you rate highly.

Chemistry and confidentiality

Ask for case studies and credentials from the PR agencies you are meeting in order to ensure they are appropriate and can meet your expectations. Chemistry is also vital when PR agencies are involved in a business, so setting up a meeting to share philosophies and values is a worthwhile task.

Prepare your expectations

It is vital that you are clear about what it is you require from a PR agency to begin with. Make it apparent if you are expecting a strategic plan or whether you desire a full creative pitch from them. No more than six agencies should

be asked to prepare extended credentials for short listing.

Invite three agencies

No more than three agencies should then be invited to present themselves, or four if a current agency is re-pitching to retain a contract.

Allow plenty of time

Allow plenty of time to meet with agencies and understand their values. Ensuring the chemistry is right is crucial and that can only be done through informal meetings where you get to know each other – there are simply no shortcuts, so this process cannot be rushed.

Provide background market data

When meeting with agencies you should be happy to share your overall business objectives and any market data you have with them, including relevant research. This will allow the agency to understand your business and the market in general.

Decide on the winning agency

Once you have met with your potential PR agencies, try to decide on which one to use as soon as possible – usually one week after the presentation. Ensure all participating agencies learn of the result on the same day.

Changing tack: when to leave your PR company

Switching PR agencies can be a daunting but necessary step for companies needing to boost their company profile, or otherwise move away from a firm that fails to accurately promote their business vision.

Although some companies habitually switch their PR agencies every few years to avoid such situations, some continue to stick with what they know, despite not getting everything they need from the client-agency relationship. This can be borne from the hope that things will improve over time, financial troubles, or other reasons entirely.

Yet knowing when to switch counts when it comes to the commercial standing of your company, meaning it's absolutely crucial to be able to identify when your current agency relationship has come to an end. Fortunately, there are a few indicators that can help you determine when this might be.

Ian Hood, Managing Director at Babel PR, says that the departure of key team members can be an early red flag from agencies on the decline. Not only can this be a sign of things on the other end going stale, but can also lead to the loss of well-established – and often crucial – inter-company relationships.

"It can't be denied that the PR industry is all about individual knowledge and relationships. If a key member of the agency team does leave, that big hole sometimes can't be filled by the existing agency," Hood says.

"It's one of the reasons agencies like to occasionally bring 'fresh meat' to the team, but sometimes an agency just runs out of ideas, enthusiasm and belief and they just can't get their mojo back."

Paul Nolan, Head of Mobile and Telecoms at CCgroup, agrees that chemistry is an important factor to take into

account when debating whether to ditch your PR firm.

"Client-agency chemistry is extremely important in ensuring a healthy and enjoyable working environment...All too often agencies can be guilty of neglecting this," Nolan explains.

"That doesn't mean to say that client and agency contacts need to be the best of friends, but there does need to be strong mutual respect. An agency's strength is built on the strength of its people – this goes far beyond mastering core PR competencies."

Of course, maintaining a good rapport is not the sole responsibility of the PR team. Still, there are some boxes PR firms definitely should be ticking as part of the unwritten memorandum of understanding between client and agency.

Nolan explains: "Good agencies challenge themselves to constantly suggest

new ideas to clients and to look to move them out of their comfort zone. The best campaigns start with bold ideas from passionate people prepared to take measured risks and have confidence in their convictions, not from the 'yes sir, please sir, three bags full sir' brigade.


"It is crucial that PR agencies understand that the work they undertake for their clients must have commercial impact. The days of coverage for the sake of coverage are over – the best agencies are those that understand this and use the tools now on offer to draw clear lines between PR campaigns and sales leads."

Perhaps most crucial of all, however, is an agency's ability to understand and effectively promote the business and its people. Nolan stresses that this is no easy task within the fast-moving telco sector, where new technologies and companies seem to arise every day.

"There are dozens of technology PR agencies out there, but only a small percentage have genuine in-depth knowledge of the global telecoms industry," he says.

"An agency's success can often be attributed to the speed in which it can react to trends and market opportunities. Telecoms companies need to be certain that the agency they select has sufficient industry knowledge to both spot them, and capitalise on them as they arise."

If the interest in your company has faded or is no longer there, it's time to say goodbye to your PR firm, Nolan says. And, while there can be room for error, Hood adds on some occasions the axe is the only answer.

"Agencies do screw up on occasion because they are made up of human beings and we are all fallible. But if the mistakes repeat, or they are monumental in scale, you can't afford to take the risk. Go and go quickly." 



How to pick a PR agency?

European Communications has collected three case studies

A Senior Manager at a Global Telecoms Vendor writes...

To begin with, let's set aside the issue of budget – I will return to that later – together with the actual act of “picking” itself. Instead, let's talk about how you establish the relationship to enable success.

An editor once shared the incredible number of emails and calls they received leading up to MWC, from the multitude of PR agencies at work in the industry. Ninety percent of emails to editors are generic, unfocused and lacking any real insight into the companies they represent, which brings me to the first success criteria: consumer reality.

Invest in the staff of your PR agency so that they understand your goals,

products and differentiators. These are the people you need to count on to talk to the journalists, so train and invest in them as you would your own people. It's hard, but it's crucial.

Second, develop measures that allow you both to showcase success. It's not just about the output of press releases: it's about baselining and growing your share of voice, the tone and tenure of coverage and the relationship basics of who you talk to, how often and with what outcome.

Third, encourage the creativity and growth of the relationship. Put in place a budget that allows you to reward your agency's creativity and the progress of

their people in the industry. They need projects to grow and you need budget to motivate. They're running a business as well, and the best people will move to the best projects and money.

In reality, it is of course much harder than matching three criteria for guaranteed success. However, these are the three that have allowed me to achieve more, to work with motivated people and to have a bit more fun in the PR relationship.

OpenCloud chose to stick with the specialists

Telecoms software innovator OpenCloud was dissatisfied with generalist tech agencies that struggled to understand the brand in the context of the target market. The company turned to Babel PR to leverage its specialist telecoms sector knowledge. The situation was quickly reversed and OpenCloud was given the platform to

voice its opinion on industry issues.

Four years later the relationship is still going strong. OpenCloud is an industry thought leader, regularly quoted in the media offering informed comment on issues that relate to the business of its operator customers and the solutions OpenCloud provides.

Babel worked closely with OpenCloud to develop a strategy that would raise brand awareness and help communicate the value of its solutions to fixed and mobile providers. OpenCloud has always championed the software-based approach that would become central to service innovation, and this faith has been repaid now that operators are migrating to all-IP network architecture.

Its Rhino products have allowed operators to independently develop innovative new telephony products and services, while facilitating the transition between legacy and all-IP services.

From the get-go, Babel devised a thought leadership program that translat-

ed technical detail into tangible benefits for operators from a network and revenue perspective. OpenCloud has become recognised as a leader in service innovation, helping operators transform their service-layer to deliver a sustainable, competitive advantage.

The PR campaign has reflected OpenCloud's rapid growth as a company over the last few years, marked by its Sunday Times Tech Track 100 and Deloitte Fast 50 ranking, and multiple deployments across Vodafone networks (eight at the last count).

But it is the thought leadership that has really defined OpenCloud. The company is now synonymous with issues like VoLTE, Wi-Fi Calling and service differentiation. Its spokespeople are regularly quoted in the telecoms media, commenting on a range of industry topics such as M&A, EU roaming and the cloud. OpenCloud has also featured in mainstream business and technology press, including The Guardian and The Register.





Telling the best tech stories with Arieso

Promoting B2B telecoms vendors invariably means cutting through the jargon and deciphering the technology. For Arieso, CCgroup drilled down past the science in a bid to tell highly attractive stories that dominated the headlines.

Arieso is an innovative, engineering-led company in a niche market. It helps mobile network operators (MNOs) address network planning and performance issues.

In 2011, while still a privately owned company with a few dozen employees, Arieso sought to establish basic brand awareness among MNOs. CCgroup and Arieso developed the “Hungry Handsets” campaign, an in-house study using unique Arieso insight that revealed new trends in smartphone usage and user behaviour. We used this insight to generate awareness of Arieso among journalist and analyst influencer audiences, as well as new customers.

We also ran a second iteration of Hungry Handsets in 2012, which focused more on lead generation, with a clear call to action to download the report so that Arieso could collect lead details. This

second campaign was a greater success than the first, adding a TV appearance on primetime Bloomberg to over 650 pieces of coverage around the world. We drove Twitter OTS (Opportunities To See) of over two million within a week and increased report requests to more than 150 – approximately 10 percent of which were from potential buyers.

In running the campaign for a third time in 2013, we knew that beating our previous year’s success was going to be a tall order. The challenge was to beat the “buzz” from 2012, across media and social channels, and increase the number of sales leads generated.

The primary target audience for the campaign was MNOs around the world. Working closely with the CTO of Arieso, we extracted half a dozen insights from its proprietary data that would teach MNOs something new about their market and industry. Following the careful crafting of messaging and a range of angles and advice for MNOs, we conducted an influencer engagement campaign in Europe, APAC and Latin America.

We used an embargoed pre-briefing strategy, focusing on key trade, wire and business media that would translate and syndicate the story. We conducted over 20 briefings in three days, cherry-picking key titles in each region. We also produced an infographic to drive social media activity and amplify the story.

The story was a huge success, dominating tech news headlines for days. The campaign generated coverage from more than 80 original, quality business, national and trade media, which used various angles but carried our key messages in more than a dozen languages. We also delivered two pieces of primetime business TV coverage on Bloomberg & NBC.

Our content generated 1,500 media articles (versus 650+ in 2012). The story generated more than 200 requests for the whitepaper, and over 30 qualified individual sales leads in 2013.

All in all, the influencer campaign delivered high-value sales leads that were attributable to the PR effort. Arieso was subsequently acquired by JDSU in March 2013.

Top tips to make social media a success

A coherent and effective social media strategy is more than just tweeting and updating a company's Facebook page. European Communications spoke to the experts at PR agencies about how to turn social to your advantage

1. What do you want?

Before embarking on a social media strategy, you need to ask yourself whether you actually need one. Could the time, resources and money poured into social media be put to better use elsewhere? Paul Nolan, Head of Mobile and Telecoms at CCgroup, says: "So many B2B tech brands have a social presence that fails, simply because there is no goal to achieve. Are you demonstrating your industry knowledge? Driving traffic to your website? Building relationships with influencers? Supporting your search marketing campaign?"

Matt Humphries, Head of Telecoms at Babel PR, adds: "B2B companies should treat social media as an extension to their corporate communications strategy. A company's voice cannot exist on social media channels if it does not already have a reputation built on human relationships and media proliferation.

"This is not to say a start-up should not have a social media presence – far from it – only that it must come after everything else in order to have maximum influence and value. Building on the foundation of a good idea, excellent content and a proficient communications team is vital, because if you have a successful business, social media is an essential and valuable means to take it online."

2. Know your audience

It may sound obvious but you need to have a clear idea about who exactly you are targeting. Babel's Humphries says you should start with customers and business prospects. "Key influencers in the media and analyst community are also important as they can enhance your reputation and profile with your target audience."

CCgroup's Nolan says you need a degree of realism about who you can reach. "If you're hoping to use social media to target operator decision makers, we have bad news: they don't generally use social. But the people who influence them often do – who are they?"

He adds: "To achieve any degree of success, campaigns need to be engaging and highly targeted to a niche group of influencers and decision makers within the industry. For companies in the telecoms sector, this means having strong

working relationships with certain organisations, publications, journalists and analysts."

3. Pick your platform

There is a myriad of platforms out there, but for every Twitter, there's a Google Buzz. Humphries says: "Twitter and LinkedIn are undoubtedly the most effective platforms for B2B brands. Twitter enables you to track, monitor and contribute to industry conversations, to help you get noticed. LinkedIn is used by a professional audience and will allow you to connect directly with industry peers."

However, he suggests shunning the world's most popular social network. "With the possible exception of promoting your company as a good place to work, forget about Facebook – despite its size and reach, it has a strong consumer focus. It's generally not a platform for B2B businesses so don't let your PR agency convince you otherwise."

4. Don't forget the old methods

Badly run social media campaigns have been described as "shouting into an abyss". You need to make sure social networks are used in conjunction with other forms of PR. Humphries says: "Social media outreach should be used in tandem with traditional PR and other marketing activity, to engage with an audience by reinforcing key message and broadcasting information and opinions and advice. Standalone social media campaigns rarely have any benefit and so you should be very wary if that's what you are offered."

5. You are not a consumer brand, so don't act like one

While countless consumer brands have had great success on social network platforms, it would be unwise to follow their lead and tweet about your business in the same way. Humphries says: "In the B2C world customer engagement over social media can be a 24/7 job, pushing new promotions one minute, chatting about the weather the next and then fighting fires for the rest of the day. In the B2B world the impact of social media should be more measured and to enjoy any meaningful success you need to be more strategic."

Smartest of Them All

How SmartMark Communications Has Redefined Strategic Communications



For almost two decades, SmartMark Communications has been the most trusted name in public relations for the communications industry. Today, SmartMark provides a one-stop-shop for companies looking to make a statement. Whether the company is looking for industry dominance or just to change the way people think, SmartMark has earned the reputation as the smartest PR firm of them all.

Why?

Because SmartMark has learned from the industry in which it plays.

“We have worked closely with services and solutions companies as they have expanded and adjusted to meet the growing needs of the customer base. We have learned that these clients want one place to go to meet

“ SmartMark leadership immerses itself in the technology and best practices of telecoms ”

all of their needs and a trusted partner to both design, implement and fulfill a complete vision. We have taken that message to heart with our communications services,” said SmartMark’s President and CEO, Juliet Shavit.

Today SmartMark Communications offers the full gamut of services – from strong strategy to global media, analyst, and influencer relations. And when you add to that design, web development,

events and public affairs services, there really is not a more capable partner in the industry.

SmartMark also has an unparalleled reputation for understanding the communications industry, whether it is in helping clients identify key trends and buying practices or whether it is being able to translate the most difficult technologies to the Tier one business press.

The company has also developed strategic partnerships with key media globally, often helping them innovate new offerings and improve their own revenue models.

Tim McElligott, Senior Consulting Analyst, Strategicast, said “SmartMark leadership immerses itself in the technology and best practices of telecoms and is an active participant in discussions aimed at moving the software sector and the industry forward.”

SmartMark has a unique understanding of customer experience, given their growing SmartEnergy IP™ research and consulting practice, and brings important knowledge to the table about how IT departments should be investing in customer experience





The SmartMark team had fun with their holiday gifts this year.

and how marketing companies can utilize advanced analytics.

“My definition of strategic communications is far from your traditional definition of public relations. I believe in being an active player in the industry conversation,” said Shavit. “I have no intention of being a fly on the wall in a meeting.”

With three offices and a roster of clients, both public and private, that sit in

all corners of the world; including government, non-profits, solutions and service providers. But the common denominator for SmartMark is technology and why it really matters.

“The secret is simple. We get excited about the advancements in our industry and how communications is solving the greatest business problems across all industries. We love convergence and

we are passionate about the future of customer experience, and what new technologies are doing to change the way industries engage with customers.”

Shavit sums up her company’s attitude with this: “Twitter is ok, but bring on the application of advanced analytics on metrics driven customer engagement programs. Much more interesting.”

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Weber Shandwick - **engaging, always.**

Weber Shandwick has reimagined what it means to be a global public relations firm: it now considers itself an 'engagement' agency. Its teams of creatives, storytellers and producers use the power of content to engage clients' audiences more effectively and efficiently than ever before, across borders and cultures.

The consultancy builds and protects the reputations of some of the most innovative brands and biggest companies in the world, across private, public and not-for-profit sectors. Its expert teams' insights, strategic planning and creative thinking transform businesses and help clients to change attitudes and behaviour.

The rise of digital has led to huge changes in the way businesses and organisations communicate, and what they need and demand from their agencies. It's a challenging - and exciting - time. The opportunities are there for companies with an intelligent communications strategy, who understand every channel and media outlet, and use them skilfully to engage their audiences.

As content has become king, Weber Shandwick led the industry by developing its Mediaco offer, which turns brands into full-scale media networks. Mediaco enables brands to do what used to be unthinkable: produce and distribute their own stories and content, from audience mapping and developing a distinctive editorial voice, to creating an ecosystem of owned and shared channels.

In 2014, the consultancy's focus on engagement through creativity, innovation, and the best digital and social content culminated in one of the biggest shakeups in the global PR industry, when it bought leading Swedish agency Prime. This brought the extraordinary creative talent in the most Cannes PR Lions-winning agency into the Weber Shandwick family.



Weber Shandwick EMEA won 71 industry accolades in 2014 for client work across the region, including being named Agency of the Year at the European Excellence Awards. The UK operation was also named as one of the Sunday Times "100 Best Companies to Work For" for the third year running.

The agency's reach is truly global. With a core of 77 offices in 34 countries and affiliates and partners that expand the network to 126 offices in 81 countries, Weber Shandwick operates in virtually every major media, government and business centre on six continents. The firm continues to grow, invest, innovate and prosper and is pushing the boundaries of public relations, building on its reputation for excellence to add value, deliver meaningful solutions to clients, and setting the agenda for the future of the communications industry.

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Key awards

- Named Global Agency of the Year, *The Holmes Report*
- Named Agency of the Year, European Excellence Awards
- Winner of four PR Lions for UK campaigns

Specialist areas

Consumer marketing, content creation, corporate, crisis and issues management, digital and social media, employee engagement, financial communications, healthcare, sports marketing, strategic planning, public affairs, market research, technology



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"It's difficult for brands to clearly stand out in today's saturated media environment, which is why as an agency we use creativity and thought leadership to drive awareness and visibility. Telecoms is a core focus for Babel and we use that focus to ensure brands become synonymous with specific technologies, sectors or market trends.

The market has become so complex that it's difficult for the media to place companies in relation to the broader industry. We provide the context the media and other influencers need to define a company, its proposition and its position in the marketplace."

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Anite, BICS, Devicescape, Infobip, Intercede, Matrixx, OpenCloud, RTX, Ruckus Wireless, Tektronix Communications and others...

**OPINION,
SPEED &
RESULTS**



How PR can help telecoms vendors cash in on consolidation

Consolidation remains rife across the global telecoms industry. Paul Nolan, Head of Telecoms at CCgroup PR highlights the role of communications in positioning companies for exit

The global mobile industry has been rife with M&A activity for some time. As 2015 gets underway, the UK mobile operator market is being turned on its head, Samsung is rumoured to be courting BlackBerry, Time Warner Cable and Comcast are pressing ahead with merger plans and Telstra is trying to buy Pacnet.

All of these deals are the natural conclusion of intense competition, declining revenues, market saturation and slowing growth. This is certainly the current reality in the developed telecoms world, and it is having a profound impact on how the marketing departments of telecoms vendors are behaving. The financial rewards for securing a lucrative market exit can be huge.

Putting companies in the shop window

There is therefore little wonder that we are seeing more and more briefs from the vendor community looking to build their market visibility and reputation with the sole purpose of achieving a lucrative exit. Marketing departments across the telecoms space are really starting to appreciate how instrumental PR and content-driven campaigns can be in building corporate value and attracting the attentions of potential buyers and investors. For campaigns to be successful however, they must tick a number of boxes.

Presenting a vision for the future

While many vendors know what they want to achieve and how they are going to achieve it, many struggle to articulate it. In order to court potential acquirers or impress investors, these companies must

understand their relevance and points of uniqueness that sets them apart from their industry peers. This is no different to the process many vendors should follow in successfully selling their technology and services to mobile operators. Clear and coherent messaging and positioning must be built that effectively and credibly unites the company behind its vision.

To demonstrate vision, messaging and positioning must convey a new view on a vendor's target market while also articulating its points of difference. This includes understanding the key pain points of its customers and anticipating how these issues may evolve over time. This level of insight can be created through compelling thought leadership content that reveals relevant and new perspectives on common problems.

The fact remains that if companies fail to stand apart from the market, they will fail to explain to potential investors or purchasers why they – and not their competition - are worth acquiring. And why they are worth a premium.

Building technological and intellectual value

Truly ground breaking technology and supporting intellectual property drives some of the most attractive company valuations. Achieving this kind of recognition is dependent on a company's ability to articulate the key benefits of its technology and its ability to drive differentiation. Industry analysts continue to play an important role in providing Independent validation of an

organisation's technology and approach, essential for conferring technological leadership.

Industry analyst endorsement through inclusion in non-sponsored reports and market studies can be useful ways of benchmarking a company's progress versus the competition. The most critical reason for running a focused industry analyst campaign however is that companies looking for potential acquisitions will often commission analysts to conduct due diligence on potential targets. It is common practice for analysts to draw up lists of companies and then assess their potential according to a specific brief set by an acquirer. The more these analysts know about and buy in to a company's strategy, the better chance of a favorable outcome.

Demonstrating commercial value

The commercial value an organisation delivers typically stems from the quality of its order book and the earning potential locked within its key contracts and customer relationships. Traditionally, a company's value comes from common multiples of its income or profit margin. Organisations must therefore take time to understand their commercial proposition and articulate why it's superior to the alternatives, including their closest competitors. They must also recognise the scale of customers or industry specialism they possess that perhaps their competition doesn't. Consistently communicating this commercial success is therefore vital in building confidence amongst potential acquirers.





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Showcasing the management team

The senior leadership team of any organisation ultimately sets the tone and creates the culture for an organisation to follow. The vision and mission of most organisations are cultivated and nurtured by its key executives. It is therefore important that these prominent individuals are given a platform to share insight and thought leadership regularly.

Identifying and building these communications platforms sits at the heart of most traditional PR campaigns. Sharing industry opinion, reacting to key market developments through traditional and social media and speaking at industry events are all critical in proving relevance and creating differentiation.

A significant opportunity, but PR is one piece in a larger jigsaw

Companies that are successful in exiting are those that understand where they play in their market, their points of uniqueness, what makes them valuable, and the key influencers they need to convince to get access to potential acquirers. A successful PR campaign delivers the right messages, the most insightful content, and recognises the most influential channels a vendor must use to capture

attention and be taken seriously.

Typically, modest valuations can see these assets worth two to three times a company's overall revenue. However, as we have seen from the many acquisitions that have taken place recently, the global telecoms market holds greater potential. With investment in the right areas, it is feasible for vendors to increase their value to more than ten times their annual revenue.

To realise this potential, vendors must invest in their brand, in developing compelling business models, in strengthening their channels and routes to market through partnerships, in their IP and technology innovation and ensure they have the most talented personnel. In reality, strategic PR won't deliver every piece of the jigsaw, but it will present a company's assets in the most compelling way and maximise valuations.

*The CCgroup has helped ten of its clients achieve lucrative exits over the past three years. See our **PR to Attract Acquirers** white paper for further insight.*

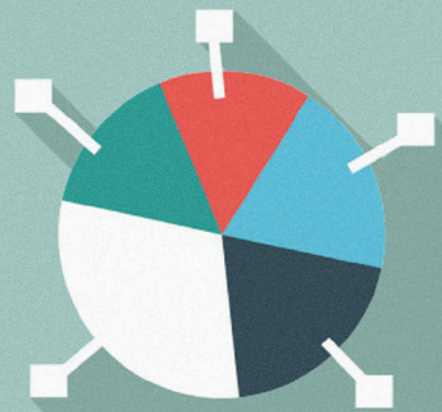
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THE EUROPEAN PR CONUNDRUM

When to start European PR, where to engage and how to sustain campaigns is, as Churchill once said of a different matter, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. But, as Winston also added, perhaps there is a key.

In AxiCom's experience the biggest challenge to launching a PR campaign in Europe is the conflation of languages, lore and journalistic tradition. Campaigns that would work in Italy are doomed when attempted in Sweden. Approaches that are welcomed in France are rejected in Germany. So the point of initiation comes down to understanding and following the

local context and traditions.

To start with language, Europe divides into the "subtitle" states and the "dubbed" states. The subtitle states are smaller countries where TV audiences are too small for English language TV programmes to be translated through dubbing. So their citizens get to watch TV in English and they listen and learn to their benefit, and generally become extraordinarily good speakers. Examples include The Netherlands, Sweden and Croatia. The larger nations have no such luck as they can afford for their TV to be dubbed so English language literacy tends to be lower, as for example in France, Italy and Spain. The key aspect is to

understand where language sensitivity has to be heavily observed and where English can suffice.

The journalists themselves follow remarkably different traditions in different countries. While German editors thrive on technical evaluation, UK journalists are interested in the macro trends in the industry and in getting the inside story. With such local variations in journalistic traditions and approaches it is absolutely critical to only compare the editorial approaches between different countries through a subjective lens.

So that is a little about the context of journalism in different countries; but diving a little deeper, when



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**“PR CAN RUN SLIGHTLY AHEAD
AND HELP CREATE A MARKET,
BUT IT HAS TO BE ALIGNED
WITH THE BUSINESS.”**

RICHARD WHITE DIRECTOR OF TELECOMS **AXICOM**

About AxiCom

AxiCom is a pan-European technology PR agency with a network of wholly-owned offices in the UK (London), Germany (Munich), France (Paris), Spain (Madrid), Italy (Milan), The Netherlands (Amsterdam) and Sweden (Stockholm). AxiCom is the technology sector specialist within the global Cohn & Wolfe network and a part of WPP.

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should you start a campaign, where should you engage and how should you sustain?

Of the three, the “when” question is the easiest to answer. A PR campaign in a given country requires three life signs to be successful: a company spokesperson qualified, (and interesting enough), to speak with the press; local customers that can be referenced; and sufficient budget to fund the PR campaign. If one of these three ingredients is not present then do not initiate the campaign.

Where to start a PR campaign generally follows very distinct models. Indigenous European companies will initiate campaigns in their home and then neighbouring countries and build from there. U.S. and AsiaPac companies tend to begin in the UK, where language challenges are minimised and from where they can begin building their constituency of followers in the analyst and pan-European focused telecoms and business media.

From here, expansion decisions come down to business momentum.

Where are the operator groups you want to reach? If you’re selling into the enterprise, which resellers are generating the sales and so delivering the local market proof points that the PR campaign will need?

However, an easy, and often made, mistake is trying to spread the campaign across too many countries leaving a campaign that is a mile wide and an inch deep. PR can run slightly ahead and help create a market, but it has to be aligned with the business.

But the biggest challenge, and one that has to be addressed before a campaign begins, is how to sustain it in the long-run. While local news hooks will always be a vital ingredient, there is also a need for a creative approach to storytelling that works off the big trends and issues in the industry and that specific country, and so can continue to build relevance and credibility for the company in the market. AxiCom’s firm belief is that your European PR team should be the people driving this and they should never be caught waiting for the long promised press release from a news shy customer. ■



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