

UK PR: media relations tips for US companies



What could possibly be easier than extending a US PR campaign to the UK? We have a shared language, UK readers are familiar with American spelling and idioms, and media publications sometimes have news desks that span both continents.

And yet, as many US companies have found, simply adding UK journalists on to a media list is rarely a route to success. The news release that went down well at home just doesn't gain the right traction in UK media, while the offer of an interview with a well-respected senior executive is inexplicably ignored.

Over the past 15+ years we have worked with many US companies, primarily in the tech sector, helping them to raise their profiles in the UK. As a result we have learned a great deal about what works and what doesn't. If you want to make a splash in the UK, the tips below will help.



1. Be relevant

Being successful in the US first is a positive when arriving on UK shores (the same isn't necessarily true if you're entering France, although that's a separate story). You'll still need to make sure the media cares about your brand, however, and that means communicating the potential impact of your arrival.

How are you going to help your UK customers? How do you compare with more established UK companies and competitors? Are you going to create local jobs? If you do not have an office or even any UK customers yet, you must at least be able to demonstrate an understanding of the UK market and a grasp of local issues.



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2. Find your UK figurehead

You will need a spokesperson who can be the voice of your brand in the UK. This person does not need to be based in the UK – the British media cares more about what someone has to say rather than where they are based. But bear in mind that if someone is based in the US, the time difference will restrict interview opportunities.

The most important thing is to find the right person – and ensure they are well matched to the journalists you want to reach. British journalists want to quote knowledgeable people – an expert on the subject matter. This can often mean they are reluctant to talk to anyone with “sales” or “marketing” in their title.

So, if you have a UK country manager who can talk knowledgeably about the local market, tech or future of the industry, that’s great. However, if the best person happens to be based in California, use them – even if there is a time difference.



3. Keep up with the media agenda

If you don’t have anyone physically based in the UK, your spokesperson will still need to be well briefed on what the UK media is talking about. You should be well acquainted with the publications in which you want to appear, and the latest topics of conversation which are likely to feature in them.

If you know what journalists want to write about, you will be more prepared when opportunities come along. It also helps if you are aware of the latest goings-on at Westminster and are familiar with key dates, such as the UK Budget, local elections, etc. This will be a big help when trying to hit certain titles and build relationships with specific journalists.

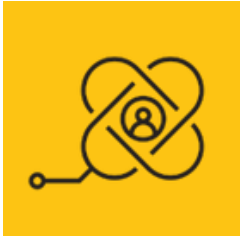


4. Watch out for the hype

There are cultural nuances you need to be aware of when telling your story in the UK. This applies to all audiences – from customers and partners to employees and future recruits – but it is nowhere more true than when communicating with the UK media.

It is, of course, a stereotype to suggest that UK journalists are all deeply cynical and that they despise hype, but like many stereotypes this contains an element of truth. You’ll need to tone down any hyperbole in news releases. When it comes to news stories, the UK media consider it their job to be the judge on whether your product is world-leading, next-generation or cutting-edge. They believe your job is to tell them, as quickly and concisely as possible, what’s happening and why it matters.

Try to write in short factual sentences, minimise capital letters (UK headlines use sentence case, for example) and be conservative in your use of adjectives. Be aware that if a UK journalist feels they are reading a thinly-disguised sales pitch, you will quickly lose their trust and they will stop reading. Worse still, this could damage their perception of your brand and their inclination to write about you in future.



5. Remember, knowledge is power

British journalists have little time for news that is not of specific interest to them, but they do welcome comment from various sources – as long that comes from a place of real knowledge. So, if you have genuine insight on a particular issue or industry, journalists will often be willing to weave that perspective into their stories.

If you can add depth to a story, or present a contrary viewpoint, you have a good chance of being quoted. If you do this regularly enough on a specific subject matter, you'll eventually become a trusted source that journalists know they can turn to when they need comment on particular issue.



6. Understand the evasive nature of UK journalists

One of the most frustrating things about UK journalists is that they often don't tell you they are not interested. They don't want to get into a debate with over-eager PRs about the value of their client's commentary so they stay non-committal and avoid giving you a straight answer. It's the same reason why they won't show you any copy before it's published.


Their expectation – or hope – is that you should make your pitch and then wait patiently. The reality is that you can still be persistent, but take your time and build up relationships with journalists, and conversations will become much easier. Yet, even when warmed up, be aware that the friendliest contact may sometimes still prefer to say nothing than tell you "no."



7. Become the journalist's friend

Many UK publications and editorial departments are now operating with a very small headcount and their editors are often overworked. It makes sense, therefore, to make things as easy as possible for them. For example, if you want them to run your news release, ensure you put the salient points at the top – don't make them wade through pages of quotes first. Ensure that you always pitch meaningful comment, and accept gracefully that you won't be included in every article. Journalists will become more receptive to your pitches over time.

And, if you want them to come to your event, give them good reasons to come. If they see it as an opportunity to meet new people and pick up stories, it will sound appealing – and will keep their editor happy. Ensuring they know if some 'samples' or 'refreshments' will be available is also a good idea when you are working with overworked and underpaid journalists.



If you want to learn more about how a PR agency can support you, please get in touch.

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