

A GUIDE TO PR FOR SMEs AND STARTUPS

By Matt Phillips.



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He has 20 years of experience in tech PR (working with brands such as BBC, Universal Music, TransferWise, Mirror Group and dozens of startups) - working in-house, in agencies and independently. His previous business, PPR (2017-2022) delivered hundreds of pieces of coverage for over 50 marketing services firms and tech scaleups.

INTRODUCTION

I've worked in PR for over 20 years in a bunch of different roles that have given me a broad perspective on the subject.

My first proper job was in-house, and eventually front-of-house, as a spokesman for the recorded music industry at the BPI. Then three years in-house, but behind the scenes, leading a tech PR team at the BBC. I then spent three years at a PR agency specialist in marketing services in an advisory and client handling role, with stints either side as a freelance consultant, copywriter and media relations person. Today I'm an agency owner specialist in purpose-driven scaleups.

I've learnt lots about different industries, and the parallel disciplines of branding, advertising, marketing and sales, and how these disciplines can complement my own specialism of PR.

This is a summary of some of things I've learned along the way, split into three sections. The first is about practicalities and operations. These are things I recommend you do before considering PR. The second is about messaging and strategy. What to say and how to say it. The third is about tactics, how you might get your message out there.

I hope you find it useful.

PART 1 // PRACTICALITIES

The first thing I'm going to say about PR, is that it's expensive and high risk. So if you're thinking that 'earned media' is a cheaper route to fame than 'paid media', it isn't.

It's quite easy to find marketing freelancers, digital marketing and social media consultants, and copywriters, many of whom can get content done quickly and cheaply and include PR on their list of services.

But an awful lot of this stuff is 'content landfill' that adds little to anything but the noise. It's quite easy, and relatively cheap to write SEO blogs to feed a machine like Google or Facebook the data and signals it wants than it is to create content that journalists want. It's a different skill set.

Good PRs triangulate what a client wants to say, what they have to offer, and what journalists want to hear. They can present that information to a busy journalist in a format they need when they need it. And this is hard, and therefore, expensive.

Can we afford PR?

There are three main options available if you're looking to get PR coverage; do it yourself and hire someone, hire an agency, or hire a freelancer.

Let's start with freelancers.

As I write this, in June 2022, we're in a cost-of-living crisis and 'great resignation'. Remote working and portfolio careers mean few still work still an actual set 'day' in person, but juggle a bunch of clients. And there is a movement toward more value-based pricing. So it's a funny market. But most operate on a "day rate" basis, and expect to pay between £350-£500 a day, depending on sector, reputation, experience, how busy they are, and the nature of the brief.

Bearing in mind that those at the better end of good tend to be able to deliver more in less time - between £1,500-£2,000 a month is a reasonable ballpark budget depending on the brief, your expectations, whether you need them to focus on strategy, copywriting or media relations.

If you need them to do all three, bear in mind that this will take longer and few will be great at everything as, by nature, most are specialists; in discipline, sector or both.

Some are great client handlers, offering great advice. Sector specialists know the people and the issues that matter. Some great publicists don't write content. Some great content writers don't do publicity. B2B vs consumer? Different kettle of fish. And some marketing consultants say they know PR, but their PR experience actually comes from managing agencies.

So while there's lots of talent, it can be a minefield. Be realistic on how much of the brief one person can deliver on their own for the budget you have.

The other option is an agency.

Agencies have a broader offering than a freelancer. They do consultancy, content and media relations under one roof and can offer more, creatively, by virtue of the diversity of thought and braintrust that comes from a group. They can be slicker, quicker and more responsive with service and account management. They often have tools and systems that make them better at media monitoring. And they have brand profile, scale and more regular contact with journalists; tighter relationships that mean their pitches are more likely to be opened.

But they are much more expensive. Bigger teams and bigger overhead, with senior people spread thinly and usually more focused on their 'better' accounts that offer either fun, fame, fortune (or a blend of all three). Most work on a retainer basis that can require a longer term-commitment on the part of the client, and may not carry any guarantee of results.

Boutique, independent agencies can offer SMEs on a lower retainer good value (ballparks between £3,000-£5,000/ month), relative to big agencies. Big agencies do have better relationships with the most influential people in media, but that market power comes at a price and won't necessarily yield any better results, for reasons I'll explain later.

And almost all PR agencies want their clients to 'do something' to warrant media attention which will drive up the cost and create demands on the internal team. Certainly in consumer PR you will need an activation budget; not having one would be akin to putting an entire house-building project budget into the architect and not leaving any money for bricks. Everyone needs raw materials.

The retainer model, a sunk cost, is the norm in PR. Few work on a results-basis and for good reason - it is extremely hard for an agency to predict how good a client will be in practice and many of the reasons for not earning coverage will be out of the agency's control.

The problem here is that agency sales teams, if competing against other agencies to win the business on the highest possible retainer, can over-promise. This in turn can lead to a breakdown in trust, stress on both the client and agency side, and lead to behaviours that don't do anyone any favours.

Finally, the in-house option.

Few smaller companies do this, as it's more expensive than hiring an agency, pound for pound. There might not be much to do. And in-house people won't be so tuned-in or picking up the opportunities that agencies get by talking to journalists every day.

A PR graduate, starting at intern level on say, £25,000 a year will likely want to work in an agency environment initially so attracting one (or retaining one) might be a challenge and they will lack, initially, the contacts, relationships or wider business experience.

Someone with 3-4 years agency experience may cost nearer £40,000 whilst someone who can operate at a board level will cost £70,000-plus (which buys a lot of agency).

And these people may not want to do outbound media relations and will probably expect a team or an agency budget.

That's why most companies add managing a PR agency to marketing's remit.

What's in a PR brief?

PR briefs often talk at length about the company's desired brand positioning and company value proposition.

This is because they are often written by marketing people who may not be PR specialists, who have marketing KPIs to meet.

It's important to remember that PR and marketing are opposite sides of the same coin. Related and complementary, but different.

Marketing is usually focused on finding new prospects, and turning them into sales leads. It helps people understand what your brand stands for, how it can solve their problems, and influences them to choose you ahead of the competition. Marketers are focused on the brand message, and often the features of the product itself.

But PR is about getting a journalist to trust a person as a source of useful information.

Journalists are not interested in brand propositions or product features - they want access to interesting, clever and powerful people who can help them write about the issues that impact their audiences.

So we are talking about a completely different audience, in-market for a completely different product, operating in a completely different context.

This is no slight on marketers. Good ones are the soul of the brand, the voice of the customer, and the agent of growth. And, PR *can* be hugely effective as part of a marketing plan, but marketing metrics such as reach, impressions, clicks or conversions are better met through marketing methods. PR is just part of that mix.

For those who know sales, PR works *through* the sales funnel.

It can bring you to the attention of people who have never heard of you (top). It can help people who are mulling whether to pick you or the other one to choose you (middle). And it can prompt people to buy in the moment (bottom).

But like any form of brand marketing, useful and accurate measurement and attribution to make a precise assessment of ROI may be more trouble than it's worth.

This is why there are no common measurement standards for PR. We use a mix of outputs and results, based on a pay-as-you-go model. But for all the will in the world, the rest is beyond our control. So it's important to bear this in mind when writing a brief.

The key things I look for are;

- what the business' main objectives are, how it makes money, and from whom
- what impactful actions does the business expect to take in the next 12 months
- who is available to speak, and what do they have to offer
- how much they have available to spend, and what the coverage expectations are

The rest is background. A good brief will save hours in conversations and make it easier for people to respond.

When should we start doing PR?

Timing is everything and a difficult question to address.

Start too soon, it's unlikely that you'll have the commercial traction to be credible enough to journalists. Or you'll lack the internal infrastructure to make the most of the opportunities your PR people create.

Leave it too late, and you risk competitors stealing a light that could have been shining on you. Done well, early stage PR can be a core part of a highly effective marketing programme that attracts better customers and partners, helps hire better talent, and puts a halo around the business and more.

My company is designed for mission-led 'tech scaleups' - companies between Series A and IPO that are led by people trying to change things for the better.

Companies that are driven by a purpose tend to punch above their weight in terms of appeal to journalists. Someone early-stage in climate change is going to have more PR appeal to a journalist than a dull, pre-IPO martech business. Prior to a Series A, few firms have the money, traction or structure to make an agency work.

Business journalists write about people with power, presence and reputation. Power, because what these people say and do has influence. Presence, because you won't get written about if you don't get seen and remembered, and Reputation because journalists respond to people who are consistent; in terms of competency (achievement) and character (values).

The proportion of media coverage any person will attract, as a baseline, is relative to how much of these attributes journalists perceive a person has.

Power could be measured by revenues, headcount, partnerships or investment. It's an indication of how much influence that company can have on its commercial environment. Human beings are hardwired to pay attention to 500lb gorillas.









Presence could be measured by how often a company has been seen or remembered by certain people in a certain environment. Journalists are less likely to cover the unknown. Being visible, e.g. at events, invested in marketing, can make the PR effort easier.

Reputation is proof that others have placed trust in you. It could be measured by things like results, case studies or awards. It's social proof that you do what you say.

PR cannot, in of itself, enhance power or reputation. Presence is the one way a business really can punch above its weight.

Effective marketing is perhaps the most important pre-qualifier for PR readiness. A business is unlikely to be growing without it, and it demonstrates that the business is credible.

So with that in mind, here's my pre-PR checklist:

-  a good digital footprint (website, socials)
-  great photos (particularly of people - more on that later)
-  clarity of audiences (knowing exactly who the customer is)
-  awareness of competitive set (so you know how to be different)
-  business objectives (so it's clear where PR fits in the business plan)
-  provable traction (to show growth)
-  budget (so you know you can afford it)
-  a marketing team (so you have support in delivering)

If a client doesn't have most of these things in place, our advice is usually to fix this first especially if there is an imperative on sales (or include in our scope).

But it isn't an exact science. Some companies with great marketing and brand profile don't get coverage. Others punch above their weight with novelty, tone, diversity, purpose and character. And sometimes coverage can come from just being in the right time at the right place. But knowing your benchmark is a great starting point to set realistic expectations and provide focus for your PR efforts.

PART 2 // MESSAGING

As I suggested in the previous section, marketing-oriented messages don't work for PR as you're trying to get a different audience in a different context to do a different thing for different reasons.

Here I'll outline a few approaches to find messages that work..

Find your North Star to articulate your value proposition.

Data drives communications. If they don't actually force the decisions we make, data does help us post-rationalise in our heads the decisions our emotions take in our hearts.

But numbers are easier to remember, and repeat, than prose. And it's also the first thing a journalist looks for when skimming text.

It's fine to use multiple data points to substantiate an argument, ideally a mix of reputable third party research and first party data owned by you that gives you a unique take. But by North Star I mean the best number that carries your key message.

For me, the best North Star is a measure of the *problem* your business is trying to solve. This is because a journalist is far more likely to engage on the wider issue of

who has the problem than any other data point. Which people are affected by the problem, and by how much?

If you have a measure of the *solution*, that's great. Anyone interested in your business - staff, customers, investors, partners - will want to know how much your business saves its customers, or how much it can make for its customers (whether that's time or money).

But a problem number exists in a wider context, you broaden the impact of what you're saying because it could impact more people.

This makes your story much more interesting for the journalist, as it brings so many others into it; people already trying to solve the problem (peers), people that are barriers to the problem (enemies), people who can be part of the solution to the problem (allies), others indirectly affected by the problem (victims) and more.

Finally, a North Star message takes you away from the sales pitch. The less you are seen talking about the attributes of the product, and the more about the scale of the problem, the more credible and authentic you are seen to be.

So if you don't know the size of the problem you're trying to solve, that's a good cue to come up with an answer. Even a back-of-the-fag packet guesstimate is better than nothing; if you're wrong or people challenge it at least it gets people talking.

And I call it the North Star because whomever you're talking to, in whatever context, and however lost you get in the moment - you can always follow it to find your way back to your key message.

Avoid unmeasurable adjectives and jargon

Problems arise with messages when they have unsubstantiated adjectives in them.

For example;

“Widget Inc is a *leading* widget manufacturer that *saves* money for the world’s *biggest* brands by using *innovative* technology.”

This doesn't work because the claims have no metrics or proof points. It's just waffle that isn't going to cut through.

I could add lots to this list, such as “we’re strategic” or “we’re ambitious”. Consider the counterfactuals and ask if any else is making that claim - using the examples above - does anyone else claim to be “unstrategic” or “lazy”?

Generally (in PR terms and especially in a press release) any adjective should carry a number - before, during, after - to qualify claims and put them in context.

Let case studies and facts carry the adjectives for you, only more credibly. Otherwise it's filler that distracts from saying something else more valuable, or implies you have nothing of substance to say. Jargon that needs explaining also takes you in the wrong direction.

By the same chalk, spokesperson biographies should also avoid the same fluff. Journalists won't write that a leader is *dynamic*, *inclusive*, *successful* or anything else - just give them the best facts you have.

Describe the Hero's Journey

If you're an early-stage founder, or the owner of an SME, you might not feel like a Luke Skywalker or Erin Brockovich. But telling your own story, using a storytelling arc known as the Hero's Journey, can make your PR more effective.

If you're not familiar with it, the journey describes a journey to a strange place, prompted by a challenge, involving conflict and allies, and return to where it all began with learnings.

It has 12 moments, or milestones in total, each of which raises a question that anyone can ask themselves and answer.

This can feel grandiose and overblown for the owner of a small firm. But I'd urge any business leader to try it as even one or two of the answers might surface interesting answers that could help explain who you are and why people should come with you.

Or you're describing a journey ahead, or telling a smaller anecdote that works as an analogy for a bigger challenge ahead.

A manifesto - whether in prose or 'interview style' Q&A is a good way to capture all this - and explain who the company serves, why it exists, how it will deliver on that mission and what it actually does.

In terms of data and proof points, I think there are four key things to focus on

- I am on a *personal mission*: this matters to me personally (proof point: an anecdote or moment from the hero's journey that explains your "why")
- Our brand is *trusted*: other people believe in our idea (proof point: a case study, investment or partnerships - someone has put their trust in your company)
- Our business is *successful*: we are making progress commercially (proof point: sales figures, growth metrics - people choose us)
- Our *category is in growth*: we are on the right side of history, part of a new future (proof point: analyst research, trade body data - there is scope for growth)

This is particularly important for small businesses, as they require a different approach to PR than bigger brands that's more rooted in people, personalities & points of view than positioning, products & propositions.

And a compelling leadership story doesn't only live in PR but in all business dealings, whether that's seeking investment, making hires, closing sales or securing partnerships.

Identify and communicate the points of traction

If the Hero's Journey narrative captures the vision of a business, the points of traction represent opportunities to tell that story.

Vision is critical for winning the heart. But traction is just as important, as it provides proof that you can deliver.

Points of traction may be; a new hire in a new role, the launch of a new product or service, a pivot in operations, a user or revenue milestone, a fundraise or M&A, a certification or award, or a major new contract or partnership.

If you don't show progress, in tangible steps, people lose faith. If you deliver, momentum builds. As a former boss of mine once said "vision without execution is delusion".

Traction events are an opportunity to explain the vision, and show how you are moving closer to it.

Think about thought leadership

Smaller businesses struggle to create news, which is why thought leadership is the best route for most to start to earn media coverage.

It's probably useful to define what it is. It's when someone thinks, and then leads.

I have seen PR briefs in the past that say "we want to profile our thought leadership" but they really mean "get journalists to print our sales content".

🧠 By thinking, I interpret this as bringing something new to an issue. It could be a new angle, example or case study, or fresh data. Perhaps the reframing and branding a problem (pointing at your North Star as defined earlier). Something creative and unique. A new idea.

👤 By leading, I interpret this as offering agency. A specific course of action to a specific group of people with the aim of coalescing allies. Having defined a problem, help people identify with that problem and convince them through heart and head that they must act with practical steps for them to help solve the problem.

If you can identify a specific and powerful driver of the problem (or barrier to a solution) such as a political policy, or abuse of corporate power, a campaigning position can bring people together to challenge it.

Critically, thought leadership is less about what you have achieved as an individual or business - but the issues that frame the context in which you operate.

Not all opinion-led communications has to be 'thought leadership' as I have defined it here. A campaigning position doesn't work for everyone. Sometimes you may not bring new ideas to the table but champion those of others. Sometimes you may not offer agency to a specific audience and play a more impartial, observational role. Mixing up roles of analyst, curator and pundit can all work well in media relations - and in social media.

My business uses two methods to help individuals find opinion-led positions.

The first is a PEST analysis. This seeks to identify events and topics that might impact the audiences you are trying to reach. You might have one within your business plan, as it identifies external forces that set market context. It's useful as these are also the things that journalists are interested in.

P&E (political events and economic activity) set the news agenda. These are media talking points, such as legislation and big company results. Examples in tech may include mooted changes to privacy law, tax breaks for investors or big tech news such as the sale of Twitter or slowing growth at Netflix.

S&T (social and technology trends) set the features agenda. These are megatrends that journalists often revisit and write longer pieces on. Again, in the world of tech this may include remote working, the great resignation, Web3 and the metaverse, 5G, or IOT.

Taking a point of view helps you grow your authority as an expert on the topic, raising the spokesperson's profile and, by proxy, the profile of the organisation they represent.

To shape the point of view we use a method called 'Six As' - six questions that can structure the point of view;

Audience: are we absolutely clear on who we are talking to? This may also carry a 'test', a metric that can help the audience identify whether the story is relevant to them, and helps the journalist assess whether a story is relevant to their audience.

Arc: what is the wider change/ transition in that audience's world? This describes the topic. All stories have a journey or change and this tension makes the story engaging. This might be one of the PEST topics identified above.

Action: what should the person do, or how should they change? This won't be 'buy my product' but a more-subtle suggestion or an articulation of the problem.

Argument: what proof points exist?. These may be previous news stories, public data - real world examples that may indicate the size of the problem.

Authority: why trust you? Experience, whether personally, or the business.

Attention: where is the audience, and what are they paying attention to? This is where the PEST analysis is used. For example, media attention is on Snap when it reports its annual results. It's on legislation as laws and policies are reviewed and debated. This sets the timing, and provides a topical hook.

Audit your best case studies and work hard to surface them

Case studies are a powerful tool in the marketing tool kit, as they create real-world examples of how a business can solve its customers' problems. They are an endorsement of your brand - deferred trust is incredibly valuable.


From a PR perspective, they can unlock PR opportunities in new areas where you might not otherwise be able to earn coverage - for example in a client's own trade press.


Question is, where to start?

In practice it can be hard. The bigger the client and/ or number the more likely it is that a corporate press office will block you from talking about it. Case studies without names (people or the company) are not useful. Getting them done may take perseverance.


So start with a client audit, using the criteria below:


🔥 Topical: anything 'of the moment' gives you an angle to talk about hot topics in the news - these are of more interest to journalists.


 Measurable: anything with numbers, demonstrating the before/ after effect.

 Impactful: anything involving a bigger brand and/ or well-known people. These brands/ people will always have more media interest (and reach) than smaller ones.

 Visual: anything that can give a journalist an excuse to carry an interesting image. No picture, no story!

 Unusual: anything in the case studies that is new, different or weird. Maybe it's a 'first' or confirms/ rebuts a stereotype?

 People: getting numbers (and press office approval) for a written case study can be hard. But a client/ customer eager for publicity may be able help you get the plaudits without getting a written case study through official channels.

 Tension: anything that might create a bit of friction or a story of change. Something that suggests an old way is dying, that something new is not working, or shows how one company/ person is beating another.

Prioritise the case studies that have as many of these factors as possible.

PART 3 // TACTICS

Having outlined how to assess whether PR makes sense, and how to construct compelling messages, I'll turn to tactics.

To extend the architect analogy I referred to earlier, PR people need materials in order to create coverage by bringing the messaging to life - listed below.

Interesting spokespeople

A business leader needs a clear leadership narrative, a strong, tightly written biography, and great photos (more on that shortly). This is because journalists are more interested in people than products.

Some elements of PR can only be done by the business leader; typically news announcements and profile interviews. But there are other opportunities available for others where seniority is less important.

Experts in niche fields, whether that's a particular role within the business or experience from a particular sector, can create coverage but there are opportunities for people who are neither senior, or expert.

Media organisations are focused on diversity of spokespeople; gender and ethnicity. Media organisations may pass on proven experts with decades of experience in favour of relatively junior people for this reason. Different beats 'best' when it comes to PR.

This is a fantastic development for so many reasons, not least the wider societal implications. But smaller companies who have invested in diversity can now punch above their PR weight.

Diverse, junior people may be less likely to be in board meetings when you need them for PR. Being able to make someone available, at very short notice, is a major plus - as you can move quicker than bigger, more famous rivals to meet PR opportunities.

So yes, get the business leader visible. Capitalise on your experts. But also look within the ranks to see if there's other spokespeople you could call on.

Great photos

Great photos don't guarantee you'll earn media coverage. But having no photos will guarantee that you'll punch below your PR weight.

The first and most important photo is a hi res *wide-angle* image of the founder/ business leader. This should be a portrait-style image and, if possible, convey what sector the business is in and the personality traits of the person. This of course is harder for an accountancy firm than say, a space rocket manufacturer - but aim to find something quirky or colourful that can be added to make you look different from everyone else.

Many executives have close-cropped corporate style images but these do *not* work for profile stories, by which I mean interviews that focus on you and your company.

Look at the most recent ten business interviews in a national paper and you won't see a corporate headshot in sight. If the person isn't important enough to take a good photo of... why would anyone interview them?

News announcements *also* need photos to convey what has happened - and help carry the story. Depending on the story this may be a picture of a product or location, but it certainly also needs people in it - particularly if any other people in the photo are more famous than you are.

It sounds obvious, but if you merge with another company, or launch a product, the agents in the action need to be in the picture. Again, if it's worth reporting, it's worth photographing.

Press Releases

I'll start by defining them; documents that put facts on the record for journalists, a thing has happened.

A key thing to understand here is that news reports on impactful events.

Reporters will use a range of criteria when deciding whether or not to cover a given event but by far the most important is impact. And smaller businesses tend not to do impactful things because they lack power.

So while not all things a business does will generate news, these moments *are* important to communicate as they mark steps on the company's journey and offer proof that the vision is getting closer.

If there has not been an event, or there are no new facts or numbers - it's likely to be an opinion (so not a press release).

But if it is a press release you need, keep it short, put the big names and numbers right up the top and include the key message in a quote. Add photos, and links, at the bottom. Send in raw text, in the body of the email.

Key tactics; never blind copy a massive list of journalists. They will not thank you for "spray and pray" mail merge distribution.

Journalists respond better to a personalised approach. Look carefully at the companies they write about - are these companies about the same size as you (using the benchmarks I described before). Where are your competitors and peers getting coverage?

Consider exclusives. Offer one key journalist the story first under a reporting embargo and give them a few days to reply and consider. Move on to plan B if they pass, until you get a yes.

A wire distribution can help in terms of SEO, and will be sent to lots of journalists on your behalf, but will be unlikely in of itself to directly earn coverage.

On some occasions, an event might be enough to secure a profile interview.

This is when the 'Hero's Journey' Q&A that I mentioned above can help because it saves the journalist time in establishing whether they want to invest in speaking to the business leader.

Opinion Pieces

Opinion pieces are typically 600-800 word articles on an issue or topic, pegged to a PEST event or theme, as identified earlier. They build on news ie "a thing has happened" to outline "what it means".

Not written by staff journalists, they are sometimes called 'OpEds', a legacy term from when guest columns would appear in newspapers opposite the editorial. Many publications now request payment to publish articles, and these are usually badged 'contributed/ partner/ sponsored content'. These 'advertorials' can be more overtly branded and salesy in nature.

Many titles accept guest articles provided they are good, and by *good* I mean they meet the Six A criteria I outlined above. Some will say yes based on a summary pitch for an article (so you can seek a 'yes in principle' to publication before writing and tailor it to fit)... while others may need to see a full draft, before they consider it.

One mnemonic you can use to write a pitch is the TRUTH test.

Five lines to say why the article will be topical (mention the topic), relevant (refer to a thread in that publication you are picking up from), unusual (a line on what you think and why it's different, or anything eye catching), tension (what's changing) and human (who is impacted and why - real world relatability) .

We prefer to write articles first, then pitch them. This is because, worst case scenario, every one says no, the content can still be used as a blog/ article on your own channels.

Features

Features that take a broader look at a topic. Reading what was in the target publication or station this time last week/ last month will give you a flavour for the format.

Big global events can drive the features agenda.

For example there will be lots of features on environmental issues, for example, as we approach COP - the big global event where world leaders agree policy on climate change.

It can be hard to find out what features are planned or who will be writing any given feature. You can sometimes squirrel-out this information, by asking the title for an advertising rate card, if the features list isn't published.

Formatted Features to fit a certain format. Examples include 'day in the life' or 'what I learnt' type interview and each will have its own qualifying criteria (don't expect to hear me on Desert Island Discs anytime soon). So look for what these are.

The "And finally"

Impact is the most important consideration when it comes to news. But a story that is unusual and prompts a strong emotive response can make national news even if the people involved are low profile.

This is called the And Finally.

Like the waterskiing squirrel in the film 'Anchorman', a lighthearted or heartwarming story can finish an otherwise gloomy programme on a light note.

These stories also work well for 'sofa-based' infotainment news, where individual personal stories matter more than broadly impactful hard news.

The element that makes these stories work is the 'twist on the familiar'. A normal person in a strange situation. A fish out of water.

Local papers have a lower editorial bar when it comes to impact; and unlike national news or vertical press, your location alone makes you qualified.

And if it's a story that is particularly remarkable or heart warming (and this is particularly true with the BBC) it might make a jump to the national news or BBC Online - is quite possibly the top of everyone's PR wish list due to its reach and authority.

Go broad, and think about what happens after the coverage appears

Don't be overly picky about where media coverage appears, particularly when you're getting started. Everyone wants to be in the best, most relevant publications, but competition is fierce.

It's an unfortunate fact that the media are more likely to write about companies that already have some profile and you have to start somewhere - featuring in "lower tier" titles will mean there is already a footprint for you when journalists Google you.

If the FT is reviewing similar pitches from, say, two different venture capital firms with similar market power, they are more likely to publish the one from the person who wrote an opinion piece for Sifted. And so it goes down the food chain. Lower tier titles are a foundation.

Also, consider to what extent you learn about new brands and services through articles in media titles you 'proactively read', versus those you 'reactively feed', whether through social media, newsletters or others.

And if you do proactively read a favoured title - do you read it all every day?

In other words, we're often reading an article not because we've 'tuned in' but because it's been chosen and sent to us - either by an algorithm, or another person who has curated it.

Social curation of media coverage through a platform such as LinkedIn can have a huge impact, even if no one *actually reads it*.

Simply sharing the link or a screen grab can serve as social proof - a publication decided *you* were worth featuring - an earned accolade in of itself that your network will likely engage with more than they otherwise would. Engaging on your own posts, commenting on the journalist's post - it all adds up.

SUMMARY

PR is incredibly valuable, as the social proof afforded to you - by virtue of being written about by a journalist - can be huge. It refreshes reputational parts that paid marketing channels cannot reach. But it's expensive to do well, takes time, and is a bugger to measure.

If you do want to do it, think about the message. Bear in mind there will be few opportunities, initially at least, to get journalists focused on your brand or product. Find points of view on issues that matter, and interesting people to express them.

There's much more to PR than press releases. If you do go DIY (and not hire a PR professional) start to follow journalists on social media, engage meaningfully on the articles they publish. Look at all the other places you'd like to be featured and consider the criteria. Look at all the other places you don't think people 'read', especially where your peers are, and think about how that could work for you. And get photos! Good luck!