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the Internet

# PR on a Shoestring

## Online PR...

*...using Social Media*

*WSI White Paper*

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## Introduction

**“A good reputation is more valuable than money.”**

**-Publilius Syrus**

*Latin Writer and Mime Artist*

*85BC to 43BC*

**Publilius is the Latin word for PUBLIC**

This whitepaper is aimed at giving you the knowledge to increase your brand and business reputation online. Traditional PR methods and Online PR methods can work hand in hand, although online methods can also be used on their own.

The Internet has been around for many years now, and the people coming into the workplace consider the Internet as an integral part of their lives. It is very important, therefore, to understand how you can use online Social Media to get the very best for your business, keep up and even get ahead of the times.

This whitepaper goes through a few social media methods that can help grow your online presence and can be used as a guideline and checklist for your own social media PR campaign.

## How much does reputation really matter?

Would desperate first-time buyers actually shy away from a mortgage deal because of the banks' bad reputation?

When asked how important it is that a company, from which they are considering buying, shows a high degree of social responsibility, around 29 percent of the general population would say it is 'very important'. But among the brand influencers, around 43 percent would find corporate responsibility very important (source: PR Week).

So what about YOU? What does your REPUTATION say about you? Your reputation is key in public relations. When you are out visiting potential customers, your reputation possibly made it to the appointment first!

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### Public Relations

For PR, firstly we need to identify who our “public” is. Consider the people who we would want to think good things about us and our companies:

- Employees
- Customers
- Prospects
- Investors
- Colleagues
- Suppliers
- The local community

Perhaps it is all of those groups...

It really is very important to remember that PR is not just Customer Relations but encompasses everyone we meet or are involved with. PR is all about the impression our companies give, and remember it's the people that make a company. This is all about us and our REPUTATION.

Using social media can enhance your profile, your communication and add to your credibility online, and all for a very small budget.

### The difference between PR and advertising

With public relations, a company does NOT pay directly for the exposure it secures. It's this third-party endorsement that gives PR its power and credibility; again it's what people say about US.

The aim of PR is to promote your products or services, show off your brand, and make people aware of the good things about you, your business, your company services or products. We all know that business is not a level playing field. Your competitors may use everything in their power to make sure they are seen more than you are, and so you may have no choice but to fight back.

The thing that should make you stand out from the crowd though will be your reputation. You may have the same offering at the same price as Joe Blogs down the road, but you have the experience and the knowledge. You have standards and testimonials; you have YOUR reputation. That's what makes you special, and that's what often closes the deal.

Online PR is no different and social media should be considered an integral part of your marketing mix.

This whitepaper will hopefully give you some inspiration and motivation to use social media PR in your own business.

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### What's the benefit?

Public relations can play a critical role in achieving a competitive advantage no matter how big or small. For example:

- **Opening new markets** – for our smaller companies, this could be the lifeline you need to grow and survive.
- **Creating a high value for products and services** – If your reputation is valued, then you become more valuable.
- **Attract high-calibre employees** – This could be vital to sustain your business growth.
- **Access funding and investors** – Cash flow could be an issue, but if you have a great reputation, then you are more likely to get the investment you need to take your business to the next stage.
- **Protect your businesses in times of crisis** – There is no guarantee, but if you are a reputable company, then you stand more chance of surviving.

**All organisations**, whether local or international, **big or small**, benefit from public relations. There is a real **GAIN** to be had from using PR. On the other hand, if you do not have good PR, or you don't take advantage of the opportunities that come your way, what are you missing out on? What is the **PAIN** caused by not getting involved?

- **Limiting your markets** to only what is in your comfort zone
- Attracting employees that **may not be 100%** enthusiastic about working for you
- **No confidence** from funders or investors
- **Cheapening** your products or services
- Worst case scenario, **no business** at all

### How is it done?

Public relations professionals use many different techniques as part of their PR campaigns, things we all know work:

- **Networking**
- **Public Speaking**
- **Freebies**
- **Sponsorship**
- **Media Relations**
- **Viral Campaigns**

The thing with PR is that even a calamity can often be used to create good PR, just look at Gillian G-string, remember the Bob Sleigh competitor whose latex suit split at the seams. The sport was very pleased with her "exposure"; it raised their profile ready for the Winter Olympics 2010. It did Gillian the world of good too; she carried on regardless and laughed it off.

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And have you heard anything about the company who made the suits? Of course not, because the spin was played on the good news.

On the other hand of course, negative PR can do a lot of damage if it is not addressed quickly. The Internet is full of places where people can comment, positively or not, about products, services, companies and people. Being able to respond, correct or sometimes eat a little humble pie is very important for a business.

The aim of PR is to handle the bad news, but to promote all your good news in such a way that all you can see and hear is the good news.

So how can we use social media to help our PR efforts? Let's have a look at the traditional methods one at a time and look at how social media fits in with these.

## Networking

Networking is a long term relationship building activity. We like to trust in the people we buy from. Traditionally networking is face to face.

Your elevator speech (60 seconds) for example, is a very brief opportunity at a networking event, where you are the focus of attention, and when it is your turn to speak, you have to make that first impression count. It could be that this is the 100<sup>th</sup> time you have spoken to the same group of people, but it still matters and they still need to see you as upbeat, confident and capable.



Online, as with offline networking, there are many places that we can meet people. Social media groups such as Facebook, blogs and Twitter are great examples. Here you must understand the "rules of engagement", but generally they are the same as offline; you must always be seen as professional, but authentic too.



Sometimes this is a difficult balance to achieve online, when everything is written down or recorded for playback. Online you are open to public scrutiny. Forums, blogs and social sites have been the ruin of many a reputation online. It is important, therefore, to teach yourself and your staff the importance of acting responsibly online so as not to engage in any controversy. After all, it's the people who make a company, and also the people who can let it down. It is also important to monitor what is being said about your business online. Your WSI Consultant can help you with this.



Although we would never suggest you stop meeting with people as face to, online networking does have its advantages and these are detailed below:

- **Time** – travelling to and from an event can take up time in your day that could be used for working on or in your business.
- **Costs** – networking groups often charge a fee. Online networking is generally free, and there are no travelling expenses to be incurred.

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- **Fear** – some people are a little nervous about meeting people for the first time, and online networking eliminates that totally.
- **Speed** – this is different to time in that you may be able to respond fairly quickly to a question online, because you are more likely to have all your resources at hand.



LinkedIn is the professionals' choice of social media, and is something that you should consider using in your business if you do not already do so. All the Fortune 500 Companies are there, and they are there for a reason. LinkedIn can be optimised for the search engines and is a great place to get introduced to people through their site. It is also a great place to pitch yourself as the expert that you are, by simply asking and answering questions.

Furthermore, LinkedIn is a great place where you can showcase your testimonials, add videos, share files and so much more. We would recommend you explore the possibilities with your WSI Consultant.

## Public Speaking

Public speaking is face-to-face, but you are the focus of attention for a length of time. You are literally the face for your company, the representative. Generally, for these events you prepare well, you make sure you look your best, you create great presentations and you practise what you are going to say. So overall, your public speaking event should be you, representing your company at your best.



Regarding how you would integrate public speaking into your social media PR, as long as you have appropriate permissions, there is no reason that you cannot videotape your speech. Once you have a recording, it is there for people to refer back to, and there are many places where you can post your video recording in order for others to watch whenever they have the time. This way, even if someone you really wanted to attend your event could not make it, they can still benefit from what you had to say. LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube are the obvious choices for video upload.

There are huge benefits for uploading videos to video sharing websites like YouTube, and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is one of them. With each video you upload you get the opportunity to add relevant keywords about your video to help them be found. Keywords play an important part in any SEO campaign, and YouTube is no different. YouTube is one of the best at this and is free to use, with one limiting factor - your videos must be 10 minutes or less. If you are looking to add an infomercial online, or a sales video, then you really need it to be short and snappy. So for business users in general, 10 minutes is more than enough.

Furthermore, once you have your video you can embed this onto your website for additional benefits. A video on your website will:

- Increase the length of time a visitor spends on your page
- Generate feedback and comments which could be useful in your business
- Help with conversion from visitor to paying customer

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### Freebies

One of the most cost-effective ways of promoting yourself and your business is giving some free advice. We often do this automatically when we are in a face-to-face situation, and again with networking and public speaking, we are generally offering hints and tips to help other people.

When we are listening to people who are giving us good free advice, we usually get a nice warm feeling about the person. If they have explained themselves well, you will think of them next time you are in a situation where you need similar advice. They will be the people you turn to, and others think the same about you and your business if they are on the receiving end.

Face-to-face is one way to help others out, but there are many other ways you can do this as well. Online, there are many opportunities to help other people.

We have already mentioned LinkedIn's section dedicated to asking and answering questions; where if you answer a question, the asker can vote on how well you answered the question. This can elevate your status on LinkedIn.

Blogging is another great way of offering hints and tips, and because your blog will most certainly be a wealth of information on a particular subject, your blog will be indexed well by the search engines. In fact, Google has a special search area just for blogs. The more advice you offer, the more content and keywords your blog will have, and the better it is likely to be ranked.



Commenting on forums where appropriate is another great way of dropping a few hints and tips for people to read. All these comments, answers, hints and tips help to increase your relationship with your public online. Again, there is the added bonus of the keywords you can use within the content and the title to ensure your blog and website can be found more easily. In fact, even the comments other people make on your blog can be found by the search engines, so the more correspondence you have with your audience, the better.



Alternatively, you can organise a webinar. This is very similar to standing up and giving a presentation, but it is done online. You just need a screen sharing software, a computer with microphone, you and your presentation. It takes a little organising to get the attendees, but it is well worth doing as it really helps engage your public and set you apart from the crowd of others in your field.

To help get attendees, you can also use social media. Twitter is great for getting news out there quickly and often, and there are many delivery sites that

**FREE WEBINAR!** Combine PR and Social Media To Generate Publicity on a "Shoe String" Budget

TUESDAY JULY 27, 2010  
11:00 AM EDT OR 1:00 PM BST  
**Generate Publicity with PR and Social Media**

**REGISTER NOW**  
2 SESSIONS AVAILABLE

### WSI in the News: Franchisees in Colombia Now Have an Area Representative!

POSTED BY MARIBEL GUISTE ON JULY - 9 - 2010 0 COMMENTS AND 0 REACTIONS

I'd like to officially congratulate Hugo Valderrama who was just appointed to be the Area Representative for Colombia. As this region's Area Rep, he'll be responsible for developing region-specific business strategies and coordinating regional "think tank" sessions. Since joining the WSI Franchisee network in 2005, Hugo has actively mentored many franchisees in the area and still works closely with them to expand the WSI brand in Colombia. As a long-standing franchisee, Hugo possesses the... (more...)

Category: Franchise Development, WSI In The News  
Tags: Area Representative, Colombia, Digital Marketing, think tank, WSI Franchise Network,

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help you with “tweeting” and then monitoring the traffic you get back. It is important to make sure you understand your traffic, where it comes from, how it got there, etc. Testing and measuring is as important online as it is offline, but in general is far easier to manage.

### Sponsorship

Sponsoring a local charity, school or sports group can really raise your profile. You can donate products, services, money or just time. The benefits of sponsorship, no matter how small, are very real.

Of course you have the benefit of increased exposure to all the people within that community, and then you have their extended communities too. For example, if you sponsored a local school, their community would be the children, teachers, parents, governors, etc. Their extended community includes relatives of each of these, other suppliers, and if they have a newsletter that goes out to the local area, then potentially all of those people too.

But the biggest personal benefit you get is a feel good factor, knowing that you and your company have acted with social responsibility - that what you have given has benefited others who really needed your help.

This is an area that most traditional PR companies advocate. Look at the big names on our television screens. They all support a charity of some description because it increases their visibility and makes them appear to be caring and considerate. Whether it is a personality or a large company, they all support a charity of choice. The charitable sponsorship is a small part of the PR campaign. The word of your good deed is then promoted through various mediums to gain a good reputation for you and your business.

Online, you can do a similar thing. Once you have the correct approvals from our chosen charity, you can issue an online press release. Once written, this press release can be posted on many press release websites. More about online press releases can be found further on in this whitepaper.

In addition to this, you can announce your good deed on your choice of social networking websites, and also to your blog. You can see that we are starting to build up a checklist of things we can do in addition to traditional techniques.



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### Media Relations

When you consider the media, we automatically think of television, radio and newspapers. Online, there is an opportunity for all businesses to own their own television station, their own radio station and publish press releases online as well.



With video download websites such as YouTube, we can all post videos online to increase our exposure on the web and enhance our credibility. A good quality video can also be embedded into your website to showcase what you do. Some people are lucky enough to have the opportunity to appear on television, and can use that footage on their own video channel, as long as they have the appropriate written approvals in place. Video upload websites also offer the opportunity to use keywords in order that your video can be found. This in turn increases the opportunity of your business visibility on the Internet.



Similarly, we can do the same with audio files, by creating a podcast. The beauty of a podcast is that it can be downloaded and the listener can tune in to your “radio station” whenever and wherever they want, and as many times as they want. Mobile phones and MP3 players mean that podcasts are the choice of more people than ever before.

### Media Relations - Press Releases

Online press releases are a great way to gain notoriety. Journalists are always looking for a new story, and if they don't have to write it themselves, it really helps.

The press is looking for a story that perhaps has a feel good factor and may offer something of value or interest to their audience. Remember, journalists are not just from the national papers, but could be from specialty magazines, like “Go Fishing” or “Women and Home”. Your story could well be of interest to someone, somewhere.

Journalists and publishers subscribe to online press release website as standard. In addition to a great story, they are looking for a really catchy headline and great images to go with them too.

There is no guarantee that your story will get picked up and a lot of them will not. But you are pretty much guaranteed additional online exposure, because all these stories are jam packed with keywords and keyphrases that are indexed by the search engines.

The screenshot shows a press release from WSI. The headline is "WSI Franchisees in Colombia Now Have an Area Representative". The text discusses how WSI, a global digital marketing solutions provider, has appointed Hugo Valderrama as the Area Representative for Colombia. It highlights the benefits of the Area Representative program, such as increased profitability and regional market penetration. The release also mentions that WSI has a 6.7% forecasted growth and offers a "New Business Opportunity" for those interested in running their own energy-saving business. Contact information for Valerie Brown-Dufour is provided at the bottom.

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### Viral Campaigns

Traditional PR can include a viral campaign, sometimes called a “word of mouth” campaign. This relies on people to pass the word around to get a product or service known. It generally starts with major news on the traditional platforms.

Of course, with the Internet, emails and social media, an online viral campaign is so much easier to do and gets great results too. There are many examples of many companies creating viral campaigns that use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.



Twitter is great for spreading news quickly, with re-tweeting of a post being the simplest form. Twitter is just like texting, but instead of sending one text message to your friend, you can send one tweet to the whole world! Social sites, chat forums and blog owners really understand the power of viral marketing using Twitter, and often add the “Re-Tweet” symbol to the site in order that you can easily pass it on.

RSS feeds can be added to your Twitter page so that people can receive your news directly into their inbox. So not only do you have the ability to tweet and re-tweet your news, but you can also forward your news via emails. If you are really clever you can also add SMS texting into the mix. Sanderson and Associates (a Specialist Franchise PR company) does just that with great effect.



Facebook is great for viral marketing and competitions can really fly if the prize is good, or the competition is unusual. Facebook is also great for communicating an event; if the settings are in your favour, then your event can appear on your friend's pages and their friends' pages too. This means your event can spread very quickly indeed.

Your Facebook page can also be redesigned to be more in keeping with your company branding. Online statistics directly from Facebook can tell you about activity that is happening with your page online.

Again, YouTube is also good for viral campaigns. Certain videos gain notoriety very quickly, and generally they are witty but informative. So, when you are uploading your video onto your channel, you may want to add a touch of humour if it is appropriate for your business. If nothing else your video will be humanized.

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When you are considering your PR, social media really is as viral as you can get! With apps to integrate Twitter with LinkedIn, LinkedIn with Facebook, Facebook with your blog, etc... managing your campaign can be a very simple process too. There are websites especially designed to make life simple by delivering your news to more than one place at a time, and this is called syndication. Where with traditional PR, you may have to make lots of individual contact, with social media you press a button just a few times and off it goes.

The next stage in the process is to monitor your efforts, and again there are online tools that can help you see exactly where your news has ended up. This is important in case you receive feedback and you need to respond. Again, with social media you have more opportunity to test and measure. There is far more traceability than traditional PR and this can really help to see what exactly works best for you and your company.

## Conclusion

Traditional PR is a great way to get your company noticed. But with the trend of using social media growing more and more, it is important to know how to use them together to maximize the impact and effect they can have. After all, the Internet is here to stay and is a very integral part of peoples' lives.

If you can do something to increase your PR offline, there is at least one Social Media equivalent online. Below is a checklist of things you can do to promote the good news that is happening within your business. It is not exclusive, and we do not endorse them. They are simply useful tools that you could consider:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Blog
- Press Release
- Online Forums and Social Sites
- Webinar
- YouTube
- Podcast

## About the Author



Born in London, but spending most of her childhood in Bedford, Tracy studied hard at school and college, gaining an OND in Business studies, with top grades achieved in Marketing and Communication. Tracy used this knowledge working within various industries, including working with British American Tobacco and also as a consultant in the newspaper industry in Fleet Street, London.

With two growing children, Tracy decided it was time to go it alone and concentrated her efforts on general marketing. Research was showing a trend towards the Internet, so Tracy decided that this was the way forward. With WSI, Tracy went through intensive training and qualified as an Internet Consultant in early 2005.

Tracy uses online PR in her own business and also for her customers and has achieved many successes on their behalf.

Tracy has since helped many companies with their online marketing strategy, ensuring this is in line with their offline strategies. Tracy believes the two should work hand-in-hand to get the best return for your business.

If you have any questions, please email [education@wsicorporate.com](mailto:education@wsicorporate.com).