

To Hire or Not To Hire? Why PR Agency Support Is a Necessity, Not a Luxury

By Grace Leong

Pondering whether or not to engage a PR agency?

Then ask yourself not "if," but rather, "when" and "why." PR agency support is vital for forward-thinking businesses, providing an external solution for just about every communications need. You can even hire an agency to manage your agencies. Here are just a few of the many benefits of adding a team of agency professionals to your communications arsenal.

Expertise: By the time you read this, most of what I've written will be obsolete. I'm actually only partially kidding—that's how fast the PR and communications landscape is changing today. The most basic reason to engage an agency is that by doing so you are engaging their expertise. An agency of one brings the expertise of one. An agency of 100 brings the collective expertise of each and every one of those 100 individuals to bear to serve your business in ways big and small. Those 100 experts can help you stay on top of everything from new technology and media outlets to best-in-class measurement practices and regulatory changes. And if one of them doesn't have the answer, they call on the expertise of their colleagues on your behalf. Agencies are a community of communications experts. By tapping these professionals, you become a part of that community.

Scalability: In addition to salary, internal head count costs include taxes, benefits, perks, real estate, time off and technology. And staffers don't manage themselves—that's your job as the manager. Having an agency partner can allow you to augment your own efforts on an as-needed basis without adding overhead. For example, it can help you scale up to add arms and legs during an important launch or event initiative or scale back services during quieter periods. Even if a set monthly retainer is required to engage your desired partner, with advance planning most agencies are willing to "bank" time until it's most needed. In addition to staff, the services themselves may be scalable. For example, many of Hunter Public Relations general market clients tap Hunter Hispanic and Hunter Digital experts for short term, supplementary services in these areas as needed.

Connectivity: A true PR agency partner is a conduit connecting you, your business and your news to the people for whom it is most relevant. PR people make connections for a living. When you engage an agency, you are tapping into their network of hundreds, if not thousands of relationships. Beyond the obvious media contacts, these might include industry experts, opinion leaders, potential strategic partners, charitable organizations and celebrities. In the age of social media, this has become exponentially more true.

Impartiality: No one knows your business as well as you do. Sometimes, that's the problem. One of the most difficult, yet most crucial roles of a PR agency partner is to offer you impartial, professional counsel, even (especially!) when that advice isn't what you want to hear. A good agency partner is able to get close enough to

an issue or challenge to understand it while keeping enough intellectual and emotional distance to maintain impartiality. Importantly, remember your agency's understanding of what is newsworthy and what isn't is in large part what you are paying for, and their impartiality is only as valuable as your willingness to accept their counsel.

Creativity: It may be counter-intuitive, but encouraging creative thinking actually requires a regimented, institutionalized approach. To get out of the box, you have to get out of your own way, and let's face it—it's hard to devote the internal resources necessary to create the time, space and freedom that fosters creativity. At Hunter PR, we go off-site three full days a year for creativity training, and not a day goes by that an interdisciplinary team isn't using that training to brainstorm against our client's challenges. Creative minds are drawn to dynamic agency environments where they can push boundaries to get to the big idea. By engaging an agency, you can borrow those minds without having to create the environment day-in, day-out.

Smart companies and savvy communications managers know that agency support is no longer a luxury but rather a necessity in this rapidly changing communications world. You can continue to debate the merits of an agency or you could just make a call to an agency partner. But if you don't have time to make the call, don't worry. Your competitors will do it for you.

Grace Leong is CEO + Partner at [Hunter Public Relations](#). Follow Grace and Hunter PR on Twitter: [@GraceTLeong](#), [@HunterPR](#).