

## Choosing a PR Consultant

With the size of the UK PR industry now being second only to the US, the choice when it comes to selecting the right consultant has never been wider! For every organisation, several factors need to be considered:

1. The organisation itself: Before looking to consultants the organisation needs to identify its objectives and goals, and define what needs to be accomplished. The clearer these are the more successful PR activities will be.
2. Recommendations: When choosing a PR consultant it is advisable to use recommendations from associates who have used them previously if possible. Often, several consultancies are suggested and these can be evaluated to make a suitable choice for which suits your individual organisation best. Using recommendation ensures that the consultancy is going to be reliable, trustworthy, and most importantly, good at what they do.
3. Consultant Qualifications: On the whole most consultants largely offer the same services. However – as with any industry – some are better than others, and this can usually be determined by their qualifications, although many PR practitioners will operate without any at all. At Grapevine, all staff members hold at least one recognised qualification and senior staff have been in the industry for many years.
4. Size: As in life, the bigger the better is rarely true! With PR consultancies the service from a small consultancy is often favourable. Why is this?
  - On the whole a large company will equal large overheads, and these will be reflected in fees charged. Naturally, smaller companies have smaller overheads and smaller fees!
  - When dealing with a large consultancy the pitch team can often be formed of

more senior, experienced staff. However, it is usually not these individuals who actually handle the account on a daily basis. Within other consultancies, such as Grapevine, which are smaller and more focused, senior staff will continue to manage and work on all client accounts.

- Hiring a large consultancy may mean that you find yourself merely a small fish in a big pond! Despite paying larger fees you may discover that in fact, your business is not as important as it would be within a smaller consultancy.

5. Experience: Many people prefer a consultancy to have experience in their industry, whatever it may be. Obviously this is ideal, but is not *always* necessary and in fact, a consultant who has worked alongside many different industries may bring a fresh approach. The process of working with journalists is similar regardless of the industry and a consultant who has not been restricted to just one industry will always have a wider selection of contacts within the media, which can be very beneficial to your organisation.

6. Proximity: It is advisable to hire a firm within close proximity to your organisation, enabling regular face-to-face meetings where necessary, providing the personal touch and keeping travelling costs to a minimum.

7) Past experience and results: Past performance is the only indicator we have of future results. Therefore, it is advisable to examine the coverage achieved in past campaigns and evaluate the quality of this work in relation to the available budget.

8) References: It is still advisable to speak to some of the agency's current clients. This will give you an insight into the type of working relationship that could be created with the new agency.

9) Chemistry: When choosing a consultant for the first time, it is vital that you choose one you can work with. Regardless of the quality of the work, if you don't 'get on' then this will only raise difficulties in the future. A good working relationship makes it easier to discuss

goals and objectives and in turn will produce positive results.

10) Getting a good result: What does your consultant see as a good result? Some PR consultants believe a good result is simply plenty of column inches or increased publicity, and this is not enough. A good PR consultant will evaluate a result in terms of your goals and objectives, and will always have these at the forefront of their campaigns in order to achieve them.

Choosing a consultant is rather like selecting a prospective employee and requires appropriate thought and effort. However, with clear objectives, an insight into working with the agency and a suitable trial period it is possible to achieve a perfect match!