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PR PLANNING PROCEDURES

Develop a PR Plan That Supports Goals and Objectives

PR practitioners share a common struggle: They forget to set specific and measurable goals. Launching an aimless campaign is like setting off on a road trip without a map. Only a defined path will ensure time and resources are well spent and that the final destination is success.

"Objectives are critical, and research is required to identify what those look like for your organization," says Stacey Smith, senior counsel and partner for Jackson Jackson & Wagner (Rye, NH), a behavioral PR and management consulting firm. "You must determine who it is you're communicating with, and this goes beyond simply collecting their demographic information. You must also understand what brings them to a point of action, and what could move them toward a new behavior."

Scott Ward, principal at Fifth Estate Communications (Takoma Park, MD), a full-service, mission-driven firm focused on strategy, storytelling and stakeholder outreach, agrees that research both propels and supports goals. He thinks PR communicators are inefficient goal-setters because they are inherently subject to "trap-thinking."

"They think about outputs instead of outcomes," Ward elaborates. "An output may be getting a piece in The New York Times — which is great," he continues, "but unless that article led to an increase in membership or an advancement in policy goals, it doesn't really mean anything." To avoid this pitfall, he suggests setting what he calls "mama goals." These are goals that are:

- Meaningful: *Does the goal support the organization's mission?*
- Achievable: *Can the goal be met within reason or adjusted if necessary?*
- Measurable: *Are there clear metrics to confirm the PR campaign performed as intended?*
- Actionable: *Will the goal move each audience segment to take clear next steps?*

Smith adds that audience research will lend insight to what customized "mama goals" look like for a campaign, as well as future applications. "Once you set research-based objectives, you have a foundation to build from," she explains. "This is your baseline — you will continually revisit these goals to determine the best way to move them forward and how to make them more reasonable or actionable based on the situation at hand."

Commenting on the dynamism of this process, Ward emphasizes the importance of knowing a campaign's ROI. "There's this whole cottage industry based around the question, 'How do I measure the ROI of PR?', and to me, it's simple — your organization should have a strategic plan. You're either helping to advance it or, let's face it, your comms plan isn't working," he says. "If you don't have a strategic plan, that's your problem in the first place." ◆

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