
ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNICATION

The demands of contemporary architectural practice require a range of skills beyond those applied to the making of buildings. One necessity that is often overlooked is the need to communicate, whether that is to current clients, potential clients, professional peers or

the general public. In the first article of this new series, Communications Consultant Annette Nugent gives advice on PR and making sure that you are heard by the people you are trying to reach.

> ARCHITECTURE & PUBLIC RELATIONS: HOW TO GET MENTIONED IN THE PRESS

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What is Public Relations?

The goal of public relations, PR, is to get favourable visibility and to gain credibility for you and your company. Like other forms of marketing, it seeks to inform, educate and persuade to action.

Unlike other forms, however, it is:

- earned, not bought – you don't pay for coverage
- vetted by journalists and other experts
- not 100% controlled by you

Public Relations is an essential part of your communications, but if you've never approached or worked with a journalist before, it could be a little intimidating. Where do you start? Who do you reach out to? What should you say? Thankfully, PR isn't rocket science, but it does take a little planning and commitment. Here are seven steps to start building your PR potential and your media presence.

Take note and take part. You might not think that what you're doing is newsworthy, but often it is. I can't count the number of times architectural practices have won substantial contracts, particularly public, civic, and educational projects, and not even bothered to note their success on their website. Also consider taking part in architectural competitions, exhibitions, school projects – or in high profile events such as Open House Dublin – to generate 'stories' about your work that can be easily told in newspapers, on radio and online.

Create a media list. Your media list doesn't have to be long; it just has to be relevant to you and your business. Ideally, you should have a list of the key journalists, print and broadcast (and online), in your industry, in your community, and covering business nationally. To set one up, first read and listen. Identify the journalists who cover your area of expertise, record their email address and phone number, and make a note of articles or topics they've covered.

Write a press release. A good press release answers the five questions at the heart of journalism: who is involved, what is it, where and when is it happening, and why should I care? It is best if it is short – one page is usually enough – with a short headline (no more than 12 words), and three or four paragraphs. Journalists

edit from the bottom up, so vital information should be at the top (the who, what, where, when, why), useful information next, and anything 'merely interesting' towards the end. Don't use technical architectural terms and try to keep the industry jargon to a minimum.

Take good photos. A picture paints a thousand words, nowhere more so than in media. The power of the image in PR, particularly for the architecture sector, cannot be overstated. If you have a selection of good quality professional images, both portrait and landscape, to support your story, you will multiply your chances of getting coverage.

Build relationships with key media. Journalists are busy professionals too; so don't waste their time. Focus on their needs, not yours. When contacting them (generally by email first), get to the point quickly, offer a unique angle/view and provide contact information. Make it as easy as possible for them: 'pitch' your story, pinpointing in a paragraph or two why it should be of interest to their publication or show. Don't necessarily expect a response. Check in once or twice, be ready for rejection and questions, and respect their deadlines. Don't give up if you aren't covered the first time: develop your relationships with key media by reading their work, commenting on it, following them on social media and being friendly and professional always.

Don't forget local press. While the property and architectural media are your first port of call, it is important to get off the property pages too. Being featured in local/regional media is a great way to gain profile around the country; so be sure to include regional media and journalists in your press list.

Use your own media. You can also write your story yourself. Put your press release up on your website. Write a blog. Post a photo of a model you've just finished on Facebook. Tweet about being at an exhibition opening.

It doesn't work like the movie *Field of Dreams*, in which, "If you build it, they will come." What really makes an impact is getting the word out. The key is to make the first move and start communicating.