

# Building a PR Plan for Your Startup

# Session Goals

1. Understand the basics of building a PR plan
2. Block out a PR plan
3. Walk away with concrete next steps on executing the PR plan

# Agenda

1. What is PR, and why do it?
2. Outline main components of a PR plan
3. Talk through how to execute the plan after you've built it
4. Commonly asked questions

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- Developed and executed media relations, social media and writing programs for hundreds of B2B and B2C companies, ranging from Fortune 500 organizations to venture-backed startups.
- Named on AdWeek's PR 30 Under 30 List for 2015. In 2013, won the Publicity Club of New England Striker Award, which recognizes New England's best young PR professional of the year.
- Every year, work with companies across industries on hundreds of media placements across industries.



What is PR, and why  
do it?

# PR is...

- “The professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company or other organization or a famous person.” Oxford dictionary
- I like to think of it as reputation management (via press)

# Why do PR as an early-stage startup?

1. Getting the word out!
2. Third party validation
3. Staying ahead of the competition

The components of a  
startup PR plan (and  
starting to build one  
**RIGHT NOW!**)

# Three points to keep in mind

1. Keep it simple
2. Build a plan that aligns with your time constraints as a founder
3. Having it be a living document that you refer back to and revise regularly



# There are (at least) three parts to a PR plan



**Decide what  
you want to  
be known for**



**Decide what PR  
activities you  
can pursue to  
help build this  
reputation**



**Decide on  
metrics for  
success**

What do you want to  
be known for?

# Reputation exercise

Open a blank document, and name it “2024 PR plan.” At the top, write the following:

1. My startup does [X].
2. Since my startup does [X], I want my startup to be known as [Y] (you can have more than one Y, but I’d keep to three tops).

*For example... My company provides PR services to startups. I want to be known as a PR firm that truly understands what startups need for PR, and delivers great results.*

# PR activities

# There are (at least) four activities PR plan



**Publishing  
company  
news**



**Commenting on  
relevant topics**



**Applying for  
awards in your  
industry**



**Speaking  
at relevant  
events**

# Company news

# Decide what news you want to share

Between now and end of September (approx. six months), make a list of when the following activities might happen:

- Company launch
- Product/service launch
- Published research
- New hires
- Funding
- Expansion/new office
- Partnerships

# Jot down 2-4 news updates you might be able to share over next six months

For example:

1. April: Launching our first product
2. June (tentative): Research paper being published in X outlet
3. September (tentative): Closing pre-seed funding



# Commenting on relevant topics

# Write down a few topics you'd be willing to comment on

- For instance, if you're a computer scientist starting an AI company, what AI topics could you offer technical expertise on?
- If you're starting a fintech company and are an expert in personal finance, would you be willing to comment on personal finance topics?

# Awards

# Make a placeholder for awards you want to apply for

- Jot down awards you're already planning to apply for in 2024
- If you're not planning to apply for any (yet), leave blank for now (we'll talk about researching and applying for awards later).

# Speaking

# What conferences/events are you attending for the rest of 2024?

- Think big and small (from local meetups to larger events like TC Early Stage in Boston)
- Industry-specific conferences/events
- Startup specific conferences/events (and pitch competitions!)
- If you're attending any events that you know of, add them
- If you're not planning on attending any, leave blank for now

# Metrics

# Set a few goals for each area of your campaign

- News: For each news campaign, you could have the metric of 1-2 articles per campaign.
- For every four awards you apply for, winning one.
- For every four speaking spots you apply for, being accepted to one.
- For every 10 times you pitch yourself to a reporter as a thought leader, getting one interview request.



# Executing a PR plan

# Points to keep in mind

1. News is the most important, and drives everything else!
2. You do not need to pursue all of these areas as once.
3. Doing something is much better than nothing.

# Company News

# Steps

1.

Write an  
announcement about  
the news

2.

Identify reporters to  
share the news with

3.

Ask reporters if  
they'd like to preview  
the news

4.

Distribute the news

# 1. Write an announcement about the news

## Examples

- Funding — <https://acelabusa.com/articles/what-s-new-at-acelab/acelab-announces-5-3m-in-funding-for-building-product-selection-platform>
- New hire — <https://www.novo.co/blog/novo-hires-brad-paterson-as-evp-of-business-development>
- Product launch — <https://innovationlabs.harvard.edu/about/news/the-harvard-innovation-labs-introduces-membership-model-to-provide-more-flexible-inclusive-support-to-student-innovators-and-entrepreneurs/>

## Tips on writing announcements

- Keep it to under 500 words
- Keep it buzzword free (eg. disruptive, innovative, etc.)
- Clearly state in the headline what you're announcing

## 2. Identify reporters to share news with

- Build your media list manually, instead of relying on a media database
- Here are a series of Google News searches you can do to start building your list
  - [insert city your company is headquartered] and “startup”
  - [search terms related to your industry] and “startup”
  - search competitors in your industry, even if they’re larger, and “startup”
  - Seeing how your peers are being covered (LinkedIn homepage)
- Keep Google News search to last year

# 3. Ask reporters if they'd like to preview your news

## Writing a pitch

- Keep it under 150 words
- The first paragraph should be 1-2 sentences tops. Something like “I’m the founder of Xx, and I’m writing to ask if you’d like to learn more about our 4/1 product launch”
- In the second paragraph, write 2-3 sentences about what the news is
- In the third paragraph, write 2-3 sentences about you and your company
- In the final paragraph, ask a question, like “Would you be interested in an advanced look at a press release?”

## 3a. A note on etiquette when email pitching

- If a reporter does not respond to your preview note, you can send them the announcement the day you publish it
- Do not follow up with a reporter via email more than once
- Do not cold call reporters
- For some TV and Radio, they have tip phone lines. You can email TV and radio stations, and call the tip lines if you don't hear back



## 3b. A reporter wants an interview! How do you prep?

- Most importantly, any prep is better than no prep! Even if you're an experienced speaker, take 5 min to prep.
- Jot down a few key points you want to make before getting on the phone, and make sure you make these points!
- Be ready to answer the questions “What’s your background? Why did you start this company? What are you announcing? Why is this important? Is there anyone else out there doing this? How are you unique/different? Is there anything else you’d like to add?”
- Reporters may also ask you questions like “What’s your revenue? Or, how many customers do you have?” If you don’t want to answer a question, you can simply say “We’re not sharing that at this time.”

## 5. Distributing the news

- Make a news page on your site, and post it! (Here's an [example news page](#))
- Share the post on all your social media channels
- If you have an email list, send an email to it sharing the news!
- Send emails to all the reporters you pitched asking if they wanted to preview the news with the release in the body of the email
- You can consider paying for a wire distribution, but I wouldn't recommend it

# Wow, that's A LOT! Can I get help with this the first time around?

- Yes! If you'd like to do an announcement, schedule time to speak with me ([alex\\_parks@harvard.edu](mailto:alex_parks@harvard.edu)). I can almost always have these calls within one week of you reaching out.

# Commenting on relevant topics

# Where can you find out what reporters are writing about?

- <https://www.helpareporter.com/>
- <https://www.qwoted.com/>
- X: #journorequests
- X: Do a search for “[insert name of your industry] reporter.” See who pops up, and start engaging with them.
- Reaching out to reporters for intro meetings

# Awards execution

# How should I look for awards

- Qwoted has a great awards search
- Local business journal awards
- Search [industry name] awards

# Speaking execution



# How do I identify conferences

- You can do Google Searches and Eventbrite searches, but the best way is by talking to other people working in your industry.
- A few bigger events that you could look into are SXSW, Collision Conference, TechCrunch Disrupt, and Fast Co Innovation Festival. Local events could be the Boston New Tech Meetup, StartupBoston, and more.

# How to I apply for speaking spots?

- Looking at website
- Emailing conference director
- Note: Speaking spots are booked at least 6 months in advance (often 9-12). So, reach out early!
- Keep track of it in a spreadsheet

# Commonly asked questions

- How much time should I spend on PR?
- Should I hire a publicist?
- Who should do my PR internally?
- How does social media fit into all of this?
- How can I use ChatGPT to help with PR?
- Should I be worried about reporters writing negative stories?

# Additional resources

- [Article/recording of i-lab panel with reporters on how to engage with the media](#)
- "This is How you Pitch" by Ed Zitron
- Attend my 3/13 workshop, which will be a deep dive on pitching reporters!

# Questions?

Please drop in chat