

Top 10 Public Relations Mistakes

The goal of public relations is to portray A.B.A.T.E. of PA in the best possible manner. This can range from establishing our organization as the premiere source for motorcycle rights issues in Pennsylvania, to responding to an editorial calling for mandatory helmet laws.

Unlike advertising, our goal is not to pay for space in the media but to persuade the media to take an interest in what we are doing and to take action by writing or reporting on our organizations activities. Below are some of the common errors to watch out for when handling public relations.

1. **Poor timing.** Timing is very important and too often the individuals handling public relations do not get a head start on their tasks. You need to consider lead time for television, newspapers, and other media.
2. **Poor choice of language.** Buzzwords do not impress editors who have little time to read all the press releases that flow across their desks. Get to the point in plain and simple language.
3. **Poorly written press releases.** Errors, omissions, poorly worded sentences, lengthy copy, and poor structure are all mistakes that may land your press release in the trash. You need to grab the reader, get to the point quickly, and follow up with information about the event. Keep it concise and include all pertinent details.
4. **Poor follow-up.** If you are trying to reach out and be heard, be prepared when someone calls with follow-up questions.
5. **Assuming journalists are your friends.** Journalism is a very different business from public relations. While each professional is trying to tell a story, we are trying to position A.B.A.T.E. of PA in the best possible light, while the journalist is trying to tell a story regardless of who looks good. Somewhere between the spin and truth, lies a common goal. That common ground is the straight good story in which our side is reflected accurately and the public is served by a truthful story that clarifies the issue.

6. **Press releases for the sake of it.** If you send out press releases every time there is some minor development, when something really important occurs, editors will already be in the habit of throwing your releases in the trash.
7. **Doing public relations in a vacuum.** Reading the newsletter and our state website will keep you abreast of what is going on in A.B.A.T.E. of PA.
8. **No plan.** You cannot do public relations by winging it. It is hard to know what to do next if you have no plan of action. You need to determine where, when, and how you are going to proceed. You also need to be flexible and have backup plans should all else fail. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
9. **False allegations aren't damaging.** According to the "four credible hit theory of belief formation," if a credible source makes an allegation about you four times, without a reasonable explanation from you, the public tends to believe it. Therefore, whenever members of the medical community publish calls for mandatory helmet laws, we must respond vigorously.
10. **The media has to agree with you.** The overwhelming requirement of most journalists is to tell a story in an interesting way. Make sure you know what your message is and actively seek out opportunities to get it across. Don't just think of news items. Think of programs on radio and television, feature items in newspapers and magazines. These can provide far more opportunities to position our organization.

Every mistake is different, but each mistake contains lessons that can be applied to future situations. What was learned can be put into place to avoid the same problems recurring. In fact, if the mistake isn't too large or costly, it could prevent even more serious problems down the road.