

EAASI Webinar: HOW TO ELEVATE AERIAL SURVEYING PROFILE

The Role of PR, Robert Peel, Spatially Aware

Introduction (SLIDE 2)

Robert Peel, Senior Partner
Spatially Aware
'We put your business on the map'
Formed 1992

PUBLIC RELATIONS (SLIDE 3)

"I've heard lots of good things about this company."

The Role of Public Relations:

- PR is not a quick way to generate sales leads.
- PR has a more embedded, long-lasting impact.
- PR provides an independent endorsement of your company.
- PR creates a positive perception about your business.
- PR raises the profile of your company and your brand.
- PR will ensure sales leads are good leads (prospects will have already decided to deal with you).

RESOURCING PR (SLIDE 4)

"I'm having to re-write everything."

Should you outsource to an agency or handle in-house? Whether you do PR in house or not depends on your skills, resources and budget.

Large organisations have traditionally used big city-based PR companies but this is changing as companies realise they are paying a premium for the overheads and are not dealing with people who understand geospatial technology and markets. Account managers and their PR associates rarely have the very specific market knowledge needed and cannot write easily about relevant topics. They don't have good relationships with the appropriate media. It means they don't provide value for money and can be a burden to deal with.

If employing an agency, you need to find a specialist. It's not so much about understanding the technology; that's not so important. What is important is that they are familiar with the market sectors that you sell into and in turn, they have well established relationship with journalists and editors in these sectors. Most likely the agency will be small, even just an individual person. These people are hard to find but ask your associates, partners and also editors. EAASI could potentially build a list of recommended organisations.

If the agency route is taken, someone needs time to engage with them properly, otherwise it won't work.

Doing PR in-house is a possibility if marketing budgets are small and you have the right person. It can work, but only if the person be considered meets certain criteria:

- Has a gift for writing and a creative mind (they will be making up news!).
- Understands your products and services.
- Has empathy with your customers.

- Understands the market (or is a quick learner).
- Is going to be with the company a long time.

Even if you have the right person, there is one very important condition and that is that their time is 'ring-fenced' so they don't get overloaded with other tasks. Ideally, they should do nothing else. They could work part-time. If they do other work, it should be closely related such as writing content for social media or writing customer case studies. Often companies start PR in house and the person soon gets called on to deal with more pressing tasks such as organising trade shows, arranging webinars and supporting sales.

PR needs a regular 'drip feed' to be effective; every one or two weeks, every month, every year.

MEDIA STRATEGY (SLIDE 5)

"I want more sales."

....or "I want investment."

You may want to raise your profile for a number of reasons but for most it is because you want to generate more business – or at least better business. Other reasons for raising your profile could be to attract investors or to attract new staff. It's not just about raising your profile but increasing the 'feel good' factor and that will help to motivate and retain both staff and customers.

It's impossible to assess the impact of PR in purely statistical terms. You may be able to track the source of a hot sales lead down to the fact the prospect visited your booth at a show, responded to an email promotion, or went to the website. However, there will have been a reason that they did that and it was unlikely to be purely down to chance. It might be a result of a personal referral but it's also likely they'd heard about you. It's that content you are pushing out whether it be via PR, social media or more directly. Research has shown that long-lasting, embedded, awareness comes from things people have seen or read.

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT (SLIDE 6)

"Get dating, you'll need to get married."

Once you have identified the relevant outlets you'll need to start regular communication to key journalists and editors – and also freelancers. Don't worry if they appear to ignore you; the fact they are hearing about you is good and they will become more receptive over time. However, be sure to send them news that is relevant to their publication. Send news about the aerial mapping high voltage electricity networks to utility and power titles but don't send it to water and sewerage titles.

Building relationships is very important. It's not easy to meet the press in person and they are usually very busy so don't have time to meet or join meetings. However, they will attend exhibitions and conferences that are in their areas of interest. This is a good time to meet them; if you do meet in person it will make them more receptive to future communication. It will usually lead to greater pick-up of your press releases and they will contact you for opinions and information when they are writing features.

PR & ADVERTISING (SLIDE 7)

"Don't get conned."

Advertising is expensive and rarely provides a tangible return on investment but there are other reasons for allocating some budget to advertising:

- Advertising will help further raise your profile.
- Advertising will normally ensure greater pick up of your press releases.

- Advertorials (paid editorial) can be good value.

However, if you get approached to advertise be very cautious. There are some very aggressive (and clever) media sales people that will approach you. The chances are that their publications are NOT the ones you should consider. Many people get conned into spending money in the wrong place. The best media outlets don't need to hard sell as their reputation carries them and they have loyal, repeat advertisers.

Exhibitions and conferences often have media partners and they are usually safe bets. To be absolutely sure of the best places to advertise, ask your customers what magazines they read and what websites they visit. Where do they go to learn about products and services that they are interested in?

FREE EAASI OFFER

We subscribe to a global media directory. It provides information on virtually all media outlets including statistics such as print circulation and online subscribers. For any EAASI member we can look up any publication, so if you get approached for advertising, email Robert Peel robert@spatiallyaware.co.uk. We can also provide press lists for your country as well as global titles in the geospatial arena.

PR PICTURES (SLIDE 8)

"A picture tells a hundred words."

Editors are desperate for good images as they enhance their publications. So, it is important to support your PR with suitable images.

- A good picture will not only tell the story better.
- A good picture will significantly increase the pick-up (by 50% or more).
- A good picture will ensure the story get a prime position.

In the early years of aerial photography, before Google Earth, the press were wowed by the imagery but today it's more difficult to make that impression with conventional aerial photos. Providing an interesting image will certainly help, for example a solar farm, and interesting new development, castle or a harbour. However, you may need to be more creative and provide striking images; not just aerial views. Colourful LiDAR images, thermal maps tend to do well and 'made-up' montages are usually well received.

PRESS RELEASES & ARTICLES (SLIDE 9)

"Don't send me a sales pitch."

This is very important. The press do not like sales pitches. Most of us (in marketing) are used to writing content for brochures, websites and sales presentations. That is very different to writing PR. Here are some guidelines:

- Short factual headlines - think of a newsworthy angle to capture attention.
- The first paragraph must be very concise; a summary of the whole story.
- 'What's the big deal? The first paragraph must explain the main point of the release.
- Don't sell yourselves - avoid statements such as 'market leader'.
- Avoid industry buzz-words.
- Avoid too many technical terms.
- Avoid mentioning product names (at least minimise).
- Where possible add quotes from third parties...that endorse you.

If the editor doesn't need to change what they've been sent, then you've done the job correctly. Give them what they want; make their job easier!

PR APPROACH (SLIDE 10)

"I don't believe what they say."

GET YOUR CUSTOMER TO SELL FOR YOU

This is important. Editors (and your prospective customers) won't believe you if you tell them you're great. We're all cynical when someone tries to sell to us. It's much better to get your customers to say you are great. Editors will also not change quotes in a press release. So, use customer quotes effectively to endorse you. This should apply to all marketing communications and we recommend most press releases are about your customers and how they use and benefit from the data and services you provide.

However, you may have very few customers; perhaps you just provide aerial mapping for national public authorities. That's make the customer-led PR trickier. However, within your main customer there are likely to be different departments and different applications; for example development planning and control, flood risk, urban forest planning, heat and pollution mapping. Each application offers an opportunity for publicity.

PR CREATIVITY (SLIDE 11)

"Wow, that's amazing."

You make think 'but we've got nothing to say'. You will have lots to say but you'll need to apply some lateral thinking and be creative. For example, in our work for Bluesky in the UK, they had already announced the completion of a nationwide map of trees. Someone suggested analysing the data by county to reveal the greenest counties. This made a great news story that hit the national press - the suburban county of Surrey was incidentally the greenest! So, think about how your data is being used.

THE MARKETING MIX (SLIDE 12)

"PR isn't working for us."

Done correctly PR should work but to be most effective, and especially to increase your sales, it needs to be part on the marketing mix.

- PR should be posted immediately on your website (make sure you have a news site and even better a home page stream for latest news).
- PR and social media should work in tandem. Social media is simply another channel to communicate.
- PR should be coordinated with exhibitions and conferences. The media run previews and reviews of 'what's on show, what's new at the show'. Always 'launch' something and get it out to the press 6 to 8 weeks before the show.
- PR should be coordinated with vertical sector marketing and sales; one element of a campaign.
- Sales need to follow up leads; if everyone is too busy you'll waste your investment in marketing.

CONTENT CONTENT CONTENT (SLIDE 13)

"I've heard lots of good things about this company."