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Public Relations: Should You Insource or **Outsource PR?**

Social media makes do-it-yourself PR easy and affordable. Outsourcing, however, might make more sense. Here's how to choose the best route for your business.

In the age of free social media, public relations—traditionally outsourced to PR firms and publicists—can be insourced easily and affordably. The question is: Should it be? Here are some insights to help you decide.

When to Insource

New York-based renewable energy company Urban Green Energy handles PR in-house. One reason is the cost: For the price of a PR agency, companies can hire one or two employees that do more than just PR, according to co-founder and CEO Nick Blitterswyk.

More important than money, however, is messaging. "The culture of our company is really important, and you have to be a part of it to truly understand and communicate it," Blitterswky says.

Frank Strong agrees. PR firms are a mile wide and an inch deep, he explains. You and your employees, however, are an inch wide and a mile deep. Therefore, if your No. 1 PR priority is communicating who you are and what you do-your mission and your brand-insourcing is ideal. "Small business owners are very passionate about what they do," says Strong, director of PR for Vocus, owner of the press release distribution company PRWeb and the media lead service Help a Reporter Out (HARO). "They have something PR professionals don't, and that's a level of authenticity and emotion [that customers

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When to Outsource

and reporters respond to]."

If passion is the reason to insource, practicality is the reason to outsource, according to Ben Hubbert, co-owner of Champion AC, a San Antonio-based heating and air-conditioning company. He outsources PR for two reasons. The first is reach, as PR agencies typically have networks of journalists and bloggers with whom they've already established relationships.

"We initially tried to do as much as we could in-house," Hubbert explains. "As hard as we tried, though, I had limited contacts. My reach wasn't as good as it needed to be."

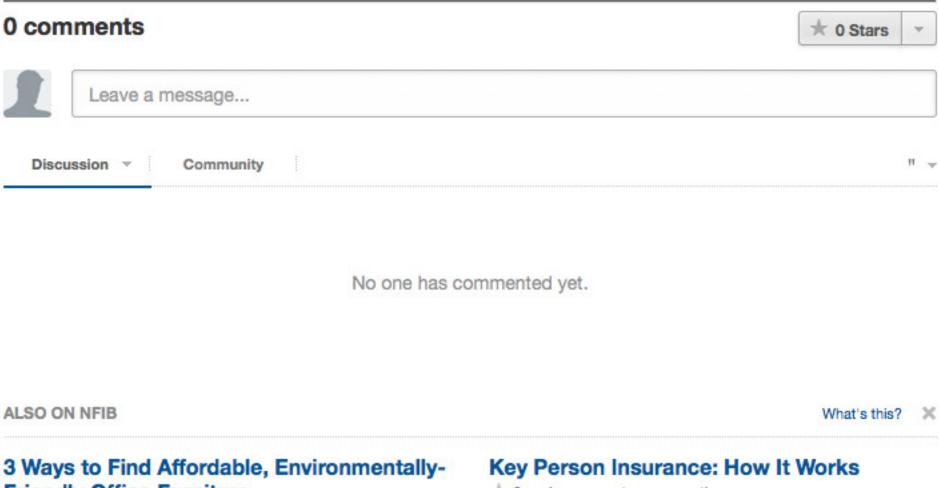
Then there's time. "It's a no-brainer for me to outsource because I don't have 20 hours a month to focus on PR," Hubbert says.

Social Media vs. Traditional PR

Whether you insource or outsource, social media shouldn't replace traditional PR. That's because they reach two different audiences—the former, existing customers; the latter, new ones.

"Most small businesses get customers through referrals, and most referrals come from word of mouth," Strong says. "So, using social media to foster the community you already have—your existing customers—is important. If you want to grow your business, you have to reach people who aren't yet aware of it. Traditional media is a good way to do that, be it through PR or advertising."

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