

PR Advice to Travel Marketers

BY PAMELA JOHNSTON

You don't need a PR firm, you need a PR strategist.

You want to create buzz, so your PR strategy is to bring attention to your company/ product/technology/CEO/ book. But generating buzz is not a strategy: it's the outcome of many strategies. Applying a PR strategy – whether for exposure or as a solution to a problem – is essential. Whatever the budget, the most effective ideas are ones that apply the message of the brand, but with a new approach. In the following example, you'll see the vast difference between attracting customers and attracting the right customers.

For example, take the Catalina Hotel, a cheap-chic boutique hotel in South Beach. The property was rightfully concerned about negative online reviews citing noise, late parties and lack of luxury services. The answer was not to simply contact some happy guests and ask them to post complimentary reviews.

Instead, the strategy had to start with the core problem: these complaining customers weren't the "right" customers in the first place. Our solution was to match the right customers with the hotel. We made lists of the typical happy customers by subgroup – The Rock Star, The Action Seeker, The Partier – and decided on a campaign that centered around matched and mismatched language key words for SEO for the greatest impact. What would potential customers see online and in print that would let them know that Catalina was or wasn't the right hotel for them?

And thus, Pimp My Fridge was born.

We came up with special minibars that guests could preorder in five categories: the "Get it On" minibar, the "Rock Star" minibar, etc...with customized ingredients including Visine, chocolate body paint,



cigarettes, a Barry White CD, etc... We publicized Pimp my Fridge as the ultimate in customization from Catalina and the press release would contain key words to support valid customer subsets. The Pimp My Fridge name would become the lead mismatch key phrase.

A whirlwind started with the front page of USA Today, an AP syndicated piece and a flurry of blogs and online newspapers created the desired electronic trail. In addition to reaching an audience of 1.5 billion in 12 weeks, the customized fridges actually added another revenue stream for Catalina. At the end of the day, the campaign took less than \$8,000 to execute.

Before you get into execution and using the services of a PR firm, make sure you and your partners understand the strategies that are shaping the campaigns. That knowledge translates into capitalizing on opportunities and turning on a dime when executing. PR for today's companies is a moving target.

Pamela Johnston is the President of Pamela Johnston Inc. an award winning, full service PR firm known for creativity and results. Having crafted images and campaigns for well known corporations, tourism destinations, luxury goods, technologies and retail companies – PJ Inc. mobilizes customers, gets client messages heard and has proven expertise in both traditional and PR 2.0.

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SIDEBAR SOUNDBITES:

- Just because it's in PowerPoint, doesn't mean it's a plan.
- Run different campaigns for different goals and different media targets, not one single campaign for all.
- Layer PR campaigns with the right mix of offline, online, broadcast, and social media.
- Don't be afraid of real creativity – pushing the limits is where innovation takes place.