

How EAPs Can Use Public Relations to Communicate Value

White Paper



BackBone Inc.

Executive Summary

EAP practitioners are continually required to communicate and prove their value—particularly in a business climate where every service provider needs to demonstrate ROI—not just this month or next, but at regular intervals. To business executives, value is defined by the correlation between EAP services and productivity. To end-users, or employees using the EAP, it's defined by the efficacy of the counseling and the speed with which the individual is able to mitigate or remove barriers to performance and personal well being.

EAPs typically use several communications vehicles to convey value, from utilization reports geared to senior management to brochures, e-mails, and HR intranets targeted to end-users. However, few EAPs look toward standard public relations to communicate—indeed validate—their business model and the efficacy of the services they provide.

Effective public relations—which is to say, getting broad, sustained, and positive media coverage—can be beneficial to both external EAP vendors as well as internal EAP organizations. If you're an **external EAP**, it provides a vehicle for obtaining third-party validation of your services, programs, or business model. This goes a long way in establishing credibility with prospects—indeed, we've found that many organizations vetting outside service providers often visit the service provider's media page to gauge press coverage and read not what the company is saying about itself, but what others—in this case, respected publications, writers, and analysts—are saying about it.

For those of you who handle **EAP internally**, you can use media relations in ways that are just as beneficial. First, it can raise awareness of your organization as a "Best Place to Work." We know that balancing work/life issues is a primary concern for employees and benefits remain an important component in recruiting and retaining valued employees. That's why it's important to communicate that message to end-users so they better understand the value of EAP benefits and how to get the most out of them—employees are more likely to take notice when their organization is profiled in a national publication. A favorable write up about the company's EAP program or a particular aspect of it, is an effective way to get the word out to the workforce...it's obviously also a great recruitment tool as it showcases your forward-thinking and the value you place on your staff.

The objective of this white paper is to convey the value of Public Relations to EA organizations seeking to differentiate their services and their business model.

Public Relations: A Definition

A woman was in a park wheeling her granddaughter in a stroller when a passerby paused to offer a compliment.

“My, what a beautiful baby!” said the passerby.

“Thank you so much, but wait,” said the proud grandmother, as she fumbled for her cell phone, “let me show you her picture.”

Now *that’s* what you call spin! Public Relations (PR) is often misunderstood, when it is understood at all. Ironically, it is public relations itself that could use better PR. To many, public relations is synonymous with spin – a highly selective collection of information used to advance a particular story and viewpoint. Fair enough, but there’s spin...and there’s *spin* (aka, fake news). On one hand, there’s the obvious but innocuous “gilding the lily” variety as practiced by the proud grandma. On the other, there’s the “who are you gonna believe, me or your lying eyes?” variety that all-too-often rears its head in our politics.

Other forms of PR - investor relations and crisis management - are specialized and follow established approaches and methodologies; these forms are more about “disclosure” than outright “spin” (there are, as always, exceptions)...and hoping to turn lemons into a refreshingly tart beverage.



Edward L. Bernays, a legendary PR practitioner, wrote that, “Ideally, PR is a constructive force bringing to the public facts and figures resulting often in accelerated interest in matters of value and importance, to the social, economic, and political life of the community.” The operative word here is “ideally,” as even the most buttoned-up Corporate PR operation is in the business of creating public-pleasing narratives that airbrush over inconvenient truths. Putting an organization in the best possible light, and positioning it against its competition, does require salesmanship – but it can still be ethical, truthful and credible...or not.

This paper focuses on the day-to-day practice of corporate PR, which, at its root, is about projecting a positive, credible image to the organization’s “publics” – the influential third parties (media and analysts) whose opinions and pronouncements shape perceptions and influence purchasing decisions. Whereas political PR is adversarial and “zero sum,” corporate PR is competitive in that you’re vying for editorial attention and “column inches” (see next section). It’s about framing information or, if you will, shaping a narrative that tells your story in the most compelling manner possible to get reporters, bloggers and analysts to take notice and provide third party validation for your brand, product and/or service. Unlike advertising or sponsored content, which is a form of

“telling,” PR is a form of “showing” through force of a persuasive argument and convincing story told on your behalf by a respected, objective expert. It’s why Bill Gates once said, “if I were down to my last dollar, I would spend it on PR.”

Making News

Competition for media coverage has gotten more fierce as there are simply more media outlets and media “entrepreneurs” (aka, bloggers) than ever before. Bear in mind that there are 5 PR people to every reporter. This means two things: your audience is harder to reach, as it tends to be spread across an ever-widening media landscape, and you are competing with many other PR practitioners to reach them. Getting exposure – a mention or quote in an article, to a feature piece - requires persistence, finesse and the ability to tailor a message that stands out from the dozens, even hundreds of press releases and story pitches the average editor receives on a weekly basis. Each placement or mention or retweet is hard won. There’s a reason PR is also referred to as “earned media” (vs. paid media, aka, advertising and sponsored content).



News can take a variety of forms: a new product launch, a company milestone, a big client win or partnership, an earnings report, a significant hire. If you have something pointed or provocative to contribute, you might be quoted in an article or profiled as a “thought leader.”

A Note on Thought Leadership

While some dismiss the term as “business jargon,” there is great value in associating your company with an expert perspective or trend. Thought leadership can be achieved via any combination of white papers, bylined articles, speaking engagements, or podcasts, written by or featuring your organization’s chief executive. It’s a powerful way of establishing your brand, your insights into shared challenges and your vision.

Successful public relations does not happen overnight. It's a process of relationship building over time. Editors need to know that they can depend on you to consistently deliver—whether it's a bylined article or an expert source to comment on an industry trend—on time and on target.

An effective media relations program or approach will:

- Establish and enhance your reputation
- Establish you/your EAP as subject experts on specific topics
- Affirm your organization's authority in its given industry or field
- Profile your organization's brand, services, and/or products among target audiences
- Create new business opportunities
- Improve staff morale
- Promote sales and program utilization



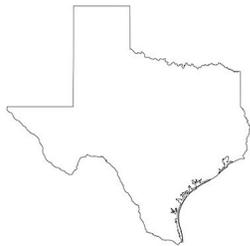
Case Study 1: EAP with a Presence in Latin America, Europe, and Asia

Challenge: To raise awareness of the EAP provider's innovative service model that combined centralized management—and quality control—with “in country” resources provided by local service providers. EAP issues obviously don't stop at our borders; multinational organizations with locations around the world have an even tougher time providing EAP resources to workforces that are culturally heterogeneous—made up of locals and expatriates. It was this EAP's goal to gain exposure for its innovative program in order to attract new business among U.S.-based multinationals. In addition, as a corollary benefit, to shore up relations with existing clients, particularly those with offshore locations.

Solution: The strategy was to issue a series of press releases and media queries, supported by a white paper, that introduced the EAP's model and described how it addressed current challenges and an unmet need—in this case, the growing number of expatriates, as well as locally employed workers, working for multinationals, for whom EAP services were either unavailable or poorly deployed. Existing out-of-country EAP services seldom account for cultural differences and often impose a U.S. model on all locations. In some cultures, seeking assistance is in itself to risk exposure and is frowned upon—to name but one of a number of cultural issues that require sensitivity—and are resistant to the U.S. models we're familiar with.

Results: After some three months, this approach resulted in bylined articles, including a client case study that appeared in several prominent trade and general pubs. The resulting articles were posted to the company's website, excerpted in an e-mail to the client's customer and prospect database, and reprinted as marketing collaterals (i.e., press kits). The EAP successfully raised awareness of its innovative business model and received all-important media validation...which enabled them to expand existing relationships and resulted in a succession of inbound inquires from interested HR administrators from several prominent multinational firms.

In addition, the multinationals featured in some of the published stories used them to promote their organization as a "Best Place to Work," as it underscored their efforts to tend to the needs of their employees.



Case Study 2: Regional Non-Profit EAP

Challenge: EAPs were seeing increases in "high risk" or "crisis counseling" (which can include suicide, domestic violence, extreme emotional distress, etc.), placing greater importance on the proven ability to address these behaviors in a timely, efficient and, ultimately, effective manner. The challenge was to raise awareness of the quality, depth, range and consistency of services offered by the EAP's "Crisis Center," and their proven ability to effectively address life-threatening behaviors.

Solution: The strategy was to tout the EAP's accreditation from the Association of Suicidology, and the rigorous year-long evaluation process that went into attaining it. AAS accreditation assures that service delivery programs for persons in crisis meet nationally recognized standards. The goal was to reach a C-level audience and establish the business value of the EAP's service for the at-risk segment/s of their workforce.

Results: The PR campaign focused on regional and national media, securing national coverage in top HR and vertical markets (i.e., Call Center Magazine), and in prominent regional media outlets (i.e., Texas CEO, etc.). The coverage and ensuing attention put the Crisis Center "on the map," and heightened broad awareness of the company's proven model in delivering responsive, appropriate and evidence-based service to persons in crisis.

Conclusion

EA organizations and programs run the gamut. There are large, global external providers, internal providers, and an assortment of union/labor/peer/member assistance programs. There's also a wide range of approaches to program evaluation; metrics can vary, as can definitions or measures of utilization. But all stand to benefit from a well-coordinated, focused media program. For external EAPs, a customer-facing campaign that secures "earned" media provides high visibility validation of your business/delivery model and the efficacy of your services. For internal EAPs, it can help raise your profile within the organization, helping improve engagement, lower barriers, increase utilization and broaden/deepen senior executive buy-in.

Regardless of your model, market or core business/organizational objectives, applying PR principles to EA is fundamentally about one thing: clarifying your mission and communicating your value.

About BackBone, Inc.

BackBone, Inc. is a public relations, marketing communications, and business development specializing in Information Technology (IT), Healthcare, and Human Capital Management (HCM). BackBone's HCM expertise includes recruiting and retention, benefits communication and enrollment, compensation and total rewards, payroll processing, worker's compensation, work/life services, behavioral healthcare, and employee assistance programs (EAPs). BackBone is headquartered in Boca Raton, Florida, with offices in New York and Philadelphia. For additional information, visit www.backboneinc.com, or e-mail che@backboneinc.com.

Chestnut's Dr. Dave Sharar: "As our long-time PR partner, BackBone has been successful in telling our story to business and specialized audiences, underscoring the business value of evidence-based EAP."