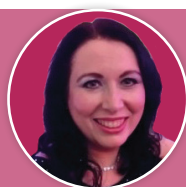


Ten Top Tips for Effective Pet PR

Owner of a PR company that specialises in the pet sector, Alison Gallagher Hughes shares the benefit of her years of experience.



Alison Gallagher-Hughes

Journalist and PR expert who owns Tillymint Communications, a marketing communications agency which specialises in a range of B2B and B2C industries, including the pet sector.



The pet industry is a growth market internationally and within the UK, where 51 per cent of households own a pet.

Categorised across food, veterinary, grooming and accessories (food and veterinary taking the lion's share), our love of animals in the UK is expected to see the value of the pet products and services market reach £2.1 billion by 2023 — a 25% increase from an estimated £1.7 billion a couple of years ago.

This is hardly surprising given that 24% of the nation's households now own a dog and 26% a cat, equating to 10.1 million dogs and 10.9 million cats in the UK (source: PDSA). Furthermore, pet ownership throughout 2020 has increased, spurred on by the desire of lockdown companionship and people having more time at home. Consequently, demand for pet products has surged, aiding recovery of the sector amid the pandemic.

Competitive

The pet business, however, is an extremely competitive one. Every year, new players enter, with creativity and innovation leading the charge, from raw and cold pressed food processes to rucksack pet carriers and grooming products. The extensive nature of our industry reflects the needs, interaction, and growing relationship of customers with their pets and how they perceive them as an integral part of family life.

The fact that the pet sector is such big business has not been lost on the corporates. Rapid growth requires pump priming and the ambitious plans of small to medium manufacturers rapidly require financial investment from 'angels' or major shareholders. Global companies, such as Mars and Nestle, have targeted the pet sector for acquisition.

That isn't to say that independents can't make their mark. Pet care is an emotive issue and conscientious pet owners, who put pet welfare and good nutrition at the heart of their buying decisions, will remain loyal to smaller brands whose values and ethics set them apart. These ranges offer something different to the supermarket and are a great option for independent retailers.

With all that in mind, it's important to make yourself seen and heard and public relations (PR) is an excellent way of making **that happen. Here's are my top tips to help you get underway:**

1 Use public relations (PR) to build and enhance your reputation — convey this through storytelling by creating content that you can share with the media, online, or via social channels. This will make your company more visible and help people to relate to the things that you are doing.

2 Include PR as one of the essential ingredients of your marketing mix. By doing PR alongside your other marketing activity, you can get more bang

for your buck, creating wider opportunities to find out about you — a vital springboard to driving sales.

3 Inform, educate, and entertain — it's important that PR doesn't just become a vehicle to push products. Although product/brand launches may be part of your PR plan, it's important to create 'added value' that reflects what you are about and will help position your shop and its credentials.

4 Audience, audience, audience — write with a specific target group in mind: a pet owner who wants to choose the right food, treats, supplements, or accessories; news for a trade title that could help promote your new store or refit; the local community that may be interested in supporting a special event. If you're not a natural content creator or just need some inspiration to get you working towards an editorial plan, consider working with a PR specialist or agency. This doesn't have to cost a fortune.

5 A picture paints a thousand words... and a strong image should always accompany your PR. It can make your PR standout, apply context, and perhaps demonstrate products or services in action. Attention spans can be limited, especially when reading content online so a photo is ideal for grabbing and holding your readers' interest.

6 Turn on the tap — ensure that your PR pipeline flows by mapping out opportunities in the short, medium, and long-term. Manufacturers will start promoting their Christmas goods half-way through the year to ensure they make retailers aware of their offer, providing sufficient time to give their customers the maximum opportunities to buy — and perhaps buy again. Replicate this: look ahead and plan diligently, but add a bit of flexibility to reflect topical issues and sales opportunities, such as town centre promotions.

7 Don't overdo the puns — we all love a bit of word play and promoting pet products and services can seem like a bit of a gift for a scribe. However, it's better not to apply the 'pawsoemes' and 'pawfects'



too liberally as it can become tiresome if overused.

8 Evaluate and review — consider monitoring to measure your success. Set up Google news alerts to capture any media coverage and link your website to an analytics package to identify content that has the best pull.

9 Make best value of your content — once written, your 'story' can be segmented, re-used, and reapplied using a variety of channels: media, blogs, social media, website, email newsletters, and marketing collateral. Reapplication will provide a consistent voice and set of messages.

10 Be authentic — PR is about enhancing and protecting your reputation and increasing the visibility of your company and the product ranges you sell. Stay true to yourself: demonstrate your personality, your team, and your achievements. 🐾



Don't forget traditional media channels.

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