



Public Relations & Strategic Marketing

Advancing ALLIANCE NETWORK Members in the New Media Age

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Why Public Relations?

Increasingly, public relations (PR) is seen as the essential component of the marketing mix. In a recent study, 89% of executives considered it essential to their success, higher than any other marketing discipline.*

*2006 survey conducted by the Association of National Advertisers

PR relates to consumers and end users more effectively in the fragmented media environment. Credibility — through media attention, influencers, testimonials — is enhanced. Whereas advertising is a “controlled” message, PR fits naturally in the rapidly uncontrolled media environment. PR also gives the client an array of marketing tools that can be used to expand awareness. Last but certainly not least, PR typically gets a far better return on investment than advertising and takes far less money to produce consistent results.

Al Ries is one of the most widely-respected marketing consultants of the past three decades. In his recent book, The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR, he clearly sums up the value of public relations, particularly in a business-to-business environment:

Advertising...is the self-serving voice of a company anxious to make a sale. PR allows you to tell your story indirectly through third-party outlets, primarily the media. PR has credibility; advertising does not.

Ries is not suggesting that advertising has no value. He’s simply saying that PR needs to take the lead, and advertising needs to follow. PR creates the awareness and the call to action; advertising reinforces and enhances it.

When I served as chief marketing officer of the largest public relations and creative marketing agency in the southeastern U.S., I often would use my real estate background to explain it to clients this way:

PR is to marketing what leasing is to real estate...and advertising is to marketing what property management is to real estate. PR expands the awareness, proposes the value, differentiates the product/service, and changes behavior. Similarly, leasing promotes the building, outlines the amenities, targets certain prospects, and closes the deal. Advertising reinforces behavior, sustains it, expands it, and creates an emotional bond to the product/service. Similarly, property management works for a renewal, takes care of the tenant, creates an environment for expansion, and works to establish a good long-term relationship.

Making PR Work for ABCN Members

Particularly in a business-to-business environment, and even more particularly where the business or industry does not have broad awareness and understanding of the value proposition, public relations is essential to change behavior and create the foundation to sustain the change. This is where the office business center industry, the ALLIANCE NETWORK, and ABCN Members find themselves.

Several factors contribute to the challenges facing ABCN Members in broadening awareness and having it transcend into changed behavior (migration of more business to ABCN Member centers):

- Competition from two directions — Regus and traditional office space
- The lack of significant funds for national/international advertising and promotion, particularly as compared to Regus and traditional office space developers
- The ability to increase the quality of clients and not rely as much on web brokers for unqualified leads
- The dichotomy between a) the less significant external recognition of the industry and ABCN Member centers vs. b) significant internal industry recognition
- The need to leverage the value of the connected NETWORK of ABCN Members in order to establish “brand” or “ABCN Member center” loyalty in addition to Members’ local or regional market “reputations”

To address these challenges, the ALLIANCE NETWORK is proposing to its valued Members a four-pronged approach:

- A Focused and Strategic Public Relations & Media Relations Campaign
- Promotion of ABCN Members’ Value to Target Audiences
- Leveraging Interactive & Direct Marketing
- PR Tools to Increase Members’ Proficiency and Expertise

Each “prong” of the approach has associated *Strategies & Deliverables* serving as the initial foundation of the plan. This proposal has been developed through careful review of “best of breed” public relations/strategic marketing programs, related experiences of the ABCN public relations team, and consideration of the most cost-effective methods that could produce the best return on investment. A thorough marketing communications plan, including tactics to be associated with all *Strategies & Deliverables*, will be developed in the thirty day period after commitment and approval of this proposal by the appropriate number of ABCN Members.

These *Strategies & Deliverables* relate to the four prongs above as follows:

A Focused and Strategic Public Relations & Media Relations Campaign

- A true media relations plan with tactics to support the strategies (e.g. detailed editorial calendars, targeted media lists, specific publication and influencer targets, regular distribution methods, etc.)
- Competitive media analysis/media monitoring—paying close and critical attention to how issues affecting ABCN Members are being reported by various news sources in order to more effectively target those news sources
- Key message development — developing vision and positioning statements and tag lines, ensuring consistency of the media message and more credibility with media contacts and target audiences
- Proactive over reactive media relations — active pitching vs. exclusive use of newswires
- Targeting of mainstream media, trade media, and real estate media for articles/coverage of ABCN Members
- Positioning ABCN Members as leaders in the outsourcing movement; real estate-related services; using technology effectively; globalization
- Concentration on US Major Media Markets as well as Toronto, London, Paris, Munich, Amsterdam; possibly one or two others

Promotion of ABCN Members’ Value to Target Audiences

- Targeting of strategic regional and international business audiences to enhance awareness of ABCN Members and their value proposition
 - CoreNet Global
 - IFMA
 - ULI
 - Outsourcing associations
- Linking to other business services, potential partners for cross-promotional purposes (e.g. joint media attention with current marketing and purchasing program providers)

- Promoting ABCN leadership and ABCN Members as consistent industry and media resources
- Release of white papers from ABCN leadership and Members on topical issues affecting the office business center industry or solutions provided by ABCN Members

Leveraging Interactive & Direct Marketing

- Online press room — effectively using the ABCN web site as a repository for press releases and making press contact easier; transferability of releases to ABCN Member web sites
- Availability of RSS (really simple syndication) — allowing downloading of news feeds for Members, media, and interested parties
- Webcasts — streaming internet broadcast to media and interested parties of newsworthy programs, events, or issues involving ABCN or ABCN Members
- Podcasts — downloadable broadcasts (media files) accessed via subscription or RSS (e.g. online “radio” show)
- Viral marketing — “opt in” press release distribution, newsletters, white papers; “pass along” links for all
- Blogging — including monitoring, tracking, planting, optimizing (i.e. ensuring that we are providing good information in blogs, connecting with others strategically, and planting comments to increase our credibility and competitiveness)

“Another big phenomenon is building communities around Web sites, around products. And virtually every company ought to have on their Web site the ability for their customers, their suppliers, various people, to interact and their employees to see the dialogue taking place there and jump in and talk to them and help them.” Bill Gates, Microsoft

All these interactive strategies serve to increase “buzz” about ABCN Members, promote the value of Member centers, and drive traffic to ABCN and Member web sites through potential for more backward links, increases in search activity, and more consistent web site viewing.

PR Tools to Increase Members’ Proficiency and Expertise

- Additional development of the internal ABCN PR/communications program (e.g. enhanced ABCN information to center managers)
- PR list management and Member access to PR distribution processes*

- Press release distribution program for local and national use*
- Consistent distribution of internal press releases from ABCN to Members announcing new programs, activities, events (as needed, working in conjunction with e-Flashes and such resources as *Officing Outlook* as additional communications tools)
- Development and distribution of a “how to” primer for center PR (serving as a lead-in to the *ALLIANCE Academy* PR/marketing curriculum)*
- Webconferences for media training included, showing Members techniques for dealing with the media, interview skills, and positioning*
- Providing links to Members’ web sites for global/national media hits*
- Inclusion of Members in local/regional articles/interviews*

*only for those Members participating in the PR program

The NETWORK’s Public Relations Team

- **David Middleton, ABCN Executive Vice President**
David formerly served as chief marketing officer of French/West/Vaughan, the largest independent public relations agency in the southeastern US and as CEO of Mid-Eye PR & Marketing. His responsibilities included new business development, initial client strategy development, agency public relations, and marketing counsel for consumer, b-t-b and real estate accounts. During his tenure, FWV was named the National Consumer Agency of the Year and received notable recognition through David’s efforts. David speaks internationally to a wide variety of audiences on marketing and strategic branding issues and has chaired a variety of regional, national and international organizations. His previous experience as an entrepreneur, multi-center OBC owner and commercial real estate executive gives him valuable insight and an ability to successfully link marketing strategies to business objectives.

- **Ruth Sarreal, ABCN Communications Manager**
Ruth graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with degrees in English and Corporate Communications. She has served in various marketing and communications positions and has been the Communications Manager for ABCN since June 2005, where she manages NETWORK publications and website content.
- **Esther Szasz, ABCN Web Productions Manager**
Esther has served as Web Productions Manager since December 2003, overseeing the layout, design, and workings of all NETWORK websites and publications. She earned her Business degree in Hungary, and has over 12 years’ experience in layout and design. She works in both traditional print and digital media.
- Other ABCN executives, key ABCN Members, and outsourced PR consultants as needed
- European PR team members to be finalized prior to WorldView Forum

The Campaign Begins...

To be successful, the activities as outlined require resources beyond the scope of the current ALLIANCE NETWORK framework. ABCN Members will benefit from in-house PR/marketing expertise, creativity, and industry knowledge, large agency experience, and focus at a much-reduced cost to Member centers.

The launch as described requires the following:

- A total investment of \$50.00 per month per center divided among participating ABCN Member centers
- Monitoring, input, and consultation from an ABCN Public Relations/Strategic Marketing Committee comprised of select ABCN Members
 - Input would include ongoing development of performance measures and key metrics to determine campaign effectiveness and increases in ABCN Members' (and industry, as a by-product) market awareness. The committee also would evaluate some mainstream media advertising strategies that are affordable and potentially effective for ABCN Members or regional subgroups of Members.
- Willingness of ABCN Members to participate in media events and webconferences for media training
- ABCN Members allowing centers to be used in media coverage, events, or promotional activities

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PR Proposal to ABCN Members

- ABCN Members' consideration of "key messaging" concepts to be developed, so the media understands and communicates the ABCN Member value proposition

Provided the appropriate number of centers commit to the program, the North American launch is scheduled for Monday, February 19.

The announcement of our European PR team and associated activities will be announced at the ABCN WorldView Forum in late April. Provided that the appropriate number of European Members commit to the program, launch of the European plan is scheduled for Monday, May 14.

Two webconferences have been scheduled to discuss the plans and answer questions from ALLIANCE NETWORK Members. These webconferences are scheduled for the following times:

Tuesday, February 6 1:00 p.m. EST
Thursday, February 8 11:00 a.m. EST

You can register for one of the webconferences by simply contacting me at dmiddleton@abcn.com or (949) 273-4350. Prior to the conference, you will be sent call-in and link information.

With appropriate resources in place, a sophisticated, multi-pronged public relations strategy is a marketing function that Members should expect from an international network serving as their outsourced marketing partner. The ALLIANCE NETWORK is the largest, organized group of independently-owned business centers in the world. NETWORK Members represent the best of the industry and uniquely blend local attention and dedication with a global footprint and exposure.

In other industries, many networks use leverage to promote awareness and differentiation in order to change customer behavior and push new business. The Members of the ALLIANCE Business Centers NETWORK have that sort of opportunity now.

The true power of any business network resides in the commitment of its members to effectively multiply and leverage their own value through strategic connection with others...and to communicate that value to influencers and target audiences. In the final analysis, that is what a NETWORK public relations campaign is all about.