

Reviews

News Brokering, News Placement/Delivery/Contact Services and Public Relations Consultants

Whether you just need a little help, are thinking of large-scale outsourcing, or are just interested in what the competition is doing, you should pay attention to the growing number of services available to communicators. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a representative sample of what is available. This is a growth industry and by the time you read this, some of the services and prices may have changed.

News brokering is sometimes called “performance-based public relations.” These firms have few higher education clients. The client pays nothing unless media placements are made. When they are made, payment is based on a percentage scale of advertising space. For instance, one column-inch on page five of the Salt Lake Tribune might be \$50 while one column-inch on page five of the Wall Street Journal would be \$500 and the cover of Time would be \$50,000. News brokers require that you put money in escrow (typically \$10,000 or more) with them when you sign on for their services. One of these brokers, News Bureau Inc., states it this way:

Performance fees are based on a fixed percentage of the equivalent advertising rate of each medium in which client publicity is attained. This fixed percentage, known as the performance fee quotient (PFQ), customarily ranges from about 40-85% of the equivalent print or broadcast advertising cost of each publicity placement.

Another similar service is Primetime Publicity and Media:

Clients who meet three criteria may qualify for Pay-Only- For-Results Publicity©. These clients pay for media placements after they have been published or aired. Either we deliver publicity or the client does not pay. This system makes us fully accountable to our clients and provides an extraordinary incentive for us to achieve spectacular results.

The argument for both these services is that media placement is more effective than advertising. The hitch is that it is almost as expensive as advertising to use these services. Most clients commit to a budget of \$100,000 or more. Eureka Alert, QuadNet, PRNewswire and Newswise are all news placement services that promise delivery of news tips and releases to lists of reporters in various subject matter areas. The advantage is that the reporters are “self-selected,” that is, they subscribe to the service so they are expecting story pitches that have been screened by the delivering agency. Most reporters prefer this to anonymous contacts. The disadvantage is that reporters still don’t feel like they are getting an exclusive.

This is the price structure for QuadNet:

The standard price structure is a \$500 annual membership fee plus a charge of \$30 for each release transmitted. Compared to postage, that's a bargain. We also offer an alternative pricing plan of \$100 annual membership plus \$50 for each release. At that rate, the price per release is less expensive than the standard plan up to 24 releases per year. Above 24, the standard plan becomes more economical.

ProfNet helps universities and other organizations make contact with reporters. We have been using ProfNet for about 10 years, and it is sort of "inverse" public relations. The idea is to connect reporters with experts based on the reporters' story needs for that day. We get 30 to 50 queries for experts per day. Our office reads these and sends a pitch (including contact information and credentials of the expert) to the reporter, if we have an expert that fits the request. It is then up to the reporter to contact our expert. ProfNet also operates PRNewswire and compiles experts' lists. The cost is based on university enrollment (about \$800 a year for Utah State University at 21,000 students).

There is also the venerable Writer's Market that is now on-line for \$3 per month. It is a good place to pitch stories that have already been written by our staff.

PRPowerbase and Media Map are slightly different in that they allow the client to create mailing lists based on the company's database. In a competitive environment, these companies are changing their software monthly. I can only say that at the time of this evaluation, MediaMap was much more user-friendly for media relations work, though it lacked some of the report-creation capabilities of PRPowerbase. There are a lot of variables in the price structure, but PRPowerbase is about \$15,000 for the initial sign-up and training, costing substantially less per thereafter. MediaMap is about \$3,000 per year, but again the price structure varies depending on the size of the institution and added bells and whistles. Dobisky and Associates and Gehrung Associates are two public relations firms specializing in higher education. They work on a traditional retainer fee system. For a major land-grant university, that is about \$25,000 year. Most of their work, though, is with private college and universities.

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