

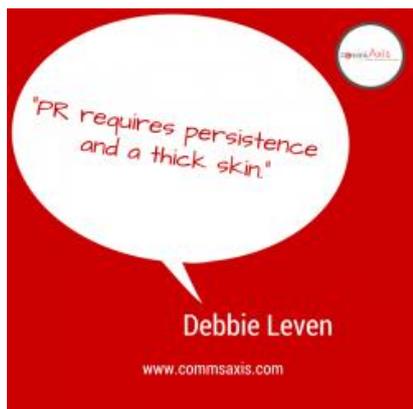


Lilach Bullock

## How to do your own PR: Q&A with @debbieleven

Getting yourself seen in the press can be a tricky and often impossible task for many small business owners. In the past entrepreneurs and SMEs had two choices – to do their PR themselves or to hire a consultant or an agency to do it for them. In reality, there's a need for more of a balance between the two so that clients can choose where on the spectrum they fall in terms of the support they want and need to get their messages across, and to get noticed.

We love running our Q&A series blog posts so it's with great pleasure that this Q&A is with a PR guru. Debbie Leven is a **PR Coach** and has worked in Public Relations for more than twenty years. Debbie (who set up her own PR agency in 2006) helps entrepreneurs and SMEs by providing PR services as well as contacts, tools and **resources** to enable clients to do PR themselves.



Not only is Debbie an expert when it comes to everything to do with PR, she is also one of the nicest and most approachable people in the industry.

So how can you do your own PR and why does a business even need PR? All will be revealed in our insightful Q&A below where Debbie Leven spills the beans on the what, how and why.

### 1. Why should businesses think about PR?

I think that understanding of Public Relations has become hazier than ever. For many people it was always about getting featured in the press and media. Now, the overlap with social media adds to the confusion. I'm a PR purist and think that Public Relations has to be seen as part of the big picture.

Every business is doing PR whether they label it as that or not.

The more you understand about what PR is, and how it can tie in and support your other activities, the better the decisions you'll make about getting your messages out there – whether you do that yourself or hire someone to do that for you.

And, crucially, in today's fast paced business environment where information and misinformation can spread so quickly on social media then having a core understanding of PR and how to manage your reputation with the media is more important than ever.

### 2. What is PR?

PR is about what you do, what you say and what others say about you. It's all about getting your messages across to the audiences you want to communicate with and to – and that could include customers, potential

customers, peers, representative bodies, membership bodies, general public, special interest groups, charities, the local community, other businesses.

PR can cover any number of activities – from speaker opportunities and newsletters to being featured in the press and media. Effective PR is about finding the right communication channel and the right tool to get your message across to your key audiences.

Most people focus on the press and media side of things and that's often an important part of a PR campaign because when you get featured in magazines, newspapers, on websites and on television and radio then you get profile and reach but you also get the added credibility of third party endorsement and that can be incredibly powerful. As a business owner you have many stories and great insight to share and journalists want to hear from you about that.

### 3. Why should businesses do their own PR?

When it comes to connecting and engaging with the media many journalists appreciate that direct approach and having access to entrepreneurs and SMEs. Doing it yourself puts you in control and you can respond much more quickly to opportunities that come up – whether that is by providing a comment in response to a news story or

The PR Coach logo, featuring a small red icon of a person's head and shoulders next to the text "The PR Coach".

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answering a journalist's request for help via Twitter.

#### 4. How can businesses get started with PR?

The first step in getting started with PR comes down to clarifying three key aspects – objectives, audiences and messages. It sounds simple but it takes time to unpick. Where a lot of businesses get unstuck is on racing ahead with output – getting stuff out there in the hope that they will get coverage. It's not press and media attention that counts in itself, but being featured in the right places where your key audiences hang out.

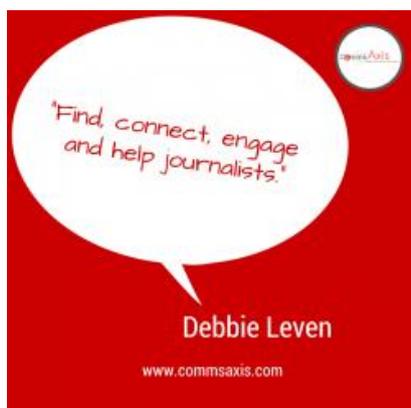
I remember speaking to someone who was delighted to be interviewed by a journalist but the interview was going to be featured on a programme being aired at 2am in the morning on a cable channel when their target audience was unlikely to be watching.

The other trap that businesses fall into, whether they are doing their own PR or getting help, is to want to target as many journalists as possible with their news stories or ideas for contributed articles. That's just 'spray and pray' – you'll get something from it, hopefully, but it's no way to build relations with the media.

A much better approach is to **follow and analyse** the key publications, programmes and websites and then to build relations with a smaller number of journalists. That way you'll get to know what they want and you'll be able to give them the help and support they need to make their jobs as easy as possible.

#### 5. What do businesses need to be successful with PR?

It takes **planning**, time and patience. And a thick skin too. Like everything in business you have to stick at it but it's important to not to take it personally.



I've come across more business owners than I care to mention who have become disillusioned with PR because they've had an uncomfortable conversation with a journalist or just been ignored altogether and that's a real shame.

If your story or idea doesn't get picked up then that could be for any number of reasons – many of which will have nothing at all to do with you or what you have sent them. You just have to be persistent and keep going.

#### 6. How do you do PR if you haven't got contacts?

The key to successful PR is not so much contacts as having a plan for consistent messages and understanding what journalists want. A journalist won't use a duff story or article idea because they know you. You still have to tune in to what they need and for journalists that comes down to understanding what their readers, viewers or listeners want. That comes from watching, reading and listening to the relevant press and media day in and day out. If you do that you'll find the contacts that are relevant to your niche.

It's also about getting the balance right rather than relying on just **one tool** – being proactive with ideas and news stories, reacting to news stories, riding on the back of coverage achieved by competitors and being where journalists are looking for ideas, comment and help.

And, most importantly, always thinking about the human interest aspect of your news story or article idea; always focusing on how your target audience will benefit. People are at the heart of news – as a friend and colleague used to say, "it's not that your widget is five times faster than the last one, it's that it will half the checkout queues at the supermarket."

#### 7. How do you get the balance between vanity and results?

This can be a tricky one to square. Often clients say they have a good idea of the press and media they want to target but then other publications, programmes and websites appear on the list and you can tell it's not just about targeting their key audiences.

Vanity PR isn't an issue as long as it's clear from the start that that is a desired outcome. Credibility amongst

peers, family and friends can be just as important but it needs to be set within the context of the wider PR activity. I've done it myself with *The Huffington Post* – where I felt that being featured by such a big name would enhance my credibility.

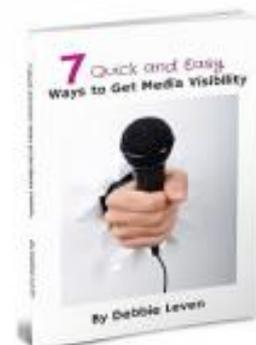
#### 8. What are the biggest challenges for businesses doing PR?

When it comes to media work, in particular, the biggest challenges for businesses doing PR is around having a constant flow of ideas, knowing the journalists to contact with those ideas and the best way to pitch them without looking out of their depth. Lack of confidence and the **fear** of speaking to journalists also plays a role.

So, for those businesses wanting to do their own PR I give them the ideas for contributed articles and guest blogs to pitch, pitch emails to send, press releases to issue, with the named contacts to send them to. Whether it's a **package** or a tailored programme, it gives them clarity of direction and confidence. It enables them to do PR in a way that feels doable and puts them in control.

#### 9. What's your one personal 'must have' you wouldn't be without?

When you run your own business you wear a hundred and one hats and so it can be tricky to take time out. But, I'm tough with myself and make a point of having at least 30 minutes of 'me time' during the day. Often, that's a walk through the park or taking time out to meditate. It's not much time but that break away really does make a difference to productivity and clarity of thinking too.



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*A very big thank you to Debbie for taking the time to let us interview her. It's been a delight working with her on this Q&A as well as numerous projects over the years. Debbie is a true gem and incredibly passionate and enthusiastic about helping entrepreneurs and SME's get results from doing their own PR.*

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### About the Author

Highly regarded on the world speaker circuit, Lilach Bullock has graced Forbes and Number 10 Downing Street with her presence! She's hugely connected and highly influential serial entrepreneur – the embodiment of Digital Intelligence.

Listed in Forbes as one of the top 20 women social media power influencers and likewise as one of the top social media power influencers, Lilach is one of the most dynamic personalities in the social media market, she actively leverages ethical online marketing for her clients and for Comms Axis.

A business owner, social media consultant, internet mentor and genuine digital guru, Lilach is consulted by journalists and regularly quoted in newspapers, business publications and marketing magazines (including Forbes, The Telegraph, Wired, Prima Magazine, The Sunday Times, Social Media Today and BBC Radio 5 Live). What's more, her books have achieved No 1 on Amazon for Sales and Marketing and Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

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