

Be careful what you wish for

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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I was with a colleague who's in the communications industry and she mentioned a problem that often occurs in the field of public relations. The over eager consultant who decides that their boss/department/company's story mustn't just land up in the corner of page five, or inserted at the end of a day's online news, but must make it on to page one of *The Sunday Times*. Seriously, would you want to be on the front page of that publication?



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Most people shiver and shake at the mere mention of such a placement. I've had totally terrified clients calling me to ask what they should do as they've just had a call from *Carte Blanche*... Yes, they have a fantastic viewership but do you want to be there?

There are two factors at play here. Firstly, is the story even remotely newsworthy - bearing in mind that if it's an online story it has to be seriously good for anyone to read it from beginning to end. Statistics show the average time spent on a webpage/news page - over a certain period of browsing time - could be as little as five seconds, or less if the headline doesn't grab them.

In the case of traditional public relations, where the company is on a retainer from the client (a hefty one at that these days) it's often difficult to argue for a one paragraph release. In reality you know that the media receiving the release is unlikely to read more than one or two sentences - that is if you're lucky enough for them to even open your email.

Which again brings us to the question of - are releases still relevant. If the story is indeed front page news then a simple call to the media concerned will generate the right level of interest. That is of course if the consultant has a relationship with that media.

The second issue is be careful what you wish for. If a story gets major coverage just be careful there's nothing hidden in any closets that the client assumes won't get out there. I once did media training for an inventor/entrepreneur. He'd invented a novel plastic surgery device for breast enhancement. Being a journalist the first thing I did when I heard his name was obviously to Google him. The result was a story of how he'd ripped off the government for around R1m on a crazy scheme he'd got them to buy in on.

When I mentioned that maybe this could be a problem when he went on national television and radio, his reply was 'That was ages ago, no one would remember that'. He went on the breakfast show and you've guessed it, the very first question out of the interviewer's mouth was 'About that R1m spent on ...'

So major coverage is great - but is it as simple as that? And is the story a major one?

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ABOUT MARION SCHER

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