

The small fish in a big public relations pond

 By [Liesl Simpson](#)

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The importance of creating a favourable impression is hard to overstate in all walks of life - in business it's vital to achieve strategic goals. These were the words of Cees B.M. van Riel, a professor of Corporate Communications at Erasmus University in the Netherlands.



Photo by [Ricky Davis](#) on [Unsplash](#).

In his book, *The Alignment Factor*, he talks about leveraging the power of total stakeholder support. For any corporate, stakeholder support is crucial. However, in order to achieve this, the organisation needs the assistance of various communication channels, especially a PR agency that understands the company's industry. But does it really matter if the agency is a small, medium or micro-enterprise or a large multi-national? In addition, how does the organisation know if the PR agency is the right fit for the business?

I'm big and you're small...

The general mindset, when it comes to choosing PR agencies, can be based on a quote from Roald Dahl in his book *Matilda* – "I'm right and you're wrong, I'm big and you're small, and there's nothing you can do about it." This is because just like in any industry, one assumes that smaller companies are not as effective as larger ones.



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Are all agencies defined by size?

When embarking on the journey of finding a PR agency, many businesses start by Googling to get an idea of which agency 'pops-up' first on the screen. As a result, the selection process is based on the promotional material they have out there, the size of business or its footprint – national and global. So, organisations looking for a PR agency often gravitate to those that are quickly found on online platforms and that looks larger than the rest.

This might sound critical of what a PR agency actually does for its clients', and this is by no means a 'do as I say but not as I do' attitude. Promotion is how we gain visibility and in turn, creates sales prospects. However, it is also important to dig a bit deeper and get an idea of the results the agency has achieved for the promotion and reputation of their clients.

Organisations, therefore, need to take the time to read customer testimonials, obtain an idea of the frequency of client turnover and speak to existing clients. In a nutshell, does the agency actually deliver on its promises?

Deliverables are everything

The goal of the PR agency is to obtain positive exposure for its clients' in the media through a number of tactics and activities such as media interviews, thought leadership pieces or press releases. Yet if these activities are not generated and executed, this means no coverage. Even if activities are generated and executed, yet the coverage is not obtained, what is the point? PR agencies often bill according to hours spent on a campaign, using timesheets to prove that they have worked on the account. In spite of this, it does not necessarily mean that deliverables are being met i.e. exposure obtained in the media.



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Retainers based on time or deliverables?

It is therefore always best to question the outcome of the hours billed for. In addition, it is also good to bear in mind that perhaps it is preferable to have an agency that bills for deliverables rather than time, as it ensures that the ultimate goal of PR is achieved – positive exposure that reinforces and creates awareness of the brand, highlights the company's value it delivers and enhances its reputation.

At the end of the day, you need to do your research

Whether the PR agency is large or small, organisations need to ensure that when choosing a PR service provider that they do their due diligence. They need to look out for an agency that is concerned about the end result. This means looking at the type of coverage the organisation can expect and if their share of voice in the industry can be increased.

Word of mouth is one of the most credible forms of marketing. Conversely, it means that their reputation is not based on the Google ads they pay for or the size of the organisation and its global reach. Smaller, local agencies should not be overlooked as they offer great value through a personalised, tailored service that is geared towards results and outcomes.

ABOUT LIESL SIMPSON

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