

Challenges with being a PR agency exclusively to SMEs

By  Thoriso Kolobe

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I made a decision a while ago when I started my PR agency to offer my services exclusively to SMEs. It was both an altruistic and strategic business decision. Though it provides a number of opportunities, it is definitely not without its challenges; some of which I have listed below:

1. Very tight budget

PR practitioners are no strangers to the idea of limited and sometimes none existent budgets, however very few of us have made and sustained a business from this method. A large percentage of my clientele consists of SMEs. The only way I sustain my business is by limiting the product offering. By offering the client more product options, at a variety of price options, I am able to still give them quality service at a price they can easily afford.



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2. There is an even lesser demand from editors for PR pitches

The sometimes-shaky relationship between journalists and PR practitioners is stretched even harder with more editors vying for sponsored articles as opposed to news articles. I have found it very difficult having to go back to a client and tell them that instead of a free media placement, we might need to pay to advertise before we get a news release placed. This is something a tight budgeted client isn't always happy to hear.

3. Clients still expect more from you

Tying in with the first point, though I do my best to offer clients products at a price range they can afford, they still demand more from me. Even in the year 2017, with PR basically dominating the headlines, there are still some clients who seem to misinterpret PR as "free marketing." Clients will come to me with a list of demands, asking for this and that and then drop a nonsensical budget along with it. I sometimes laugh it off to stop myself from cursing.



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4. Digital doesn't always mean easier

Yes, the advancement of digital and social media has made it rather cheaper to run a campaign. However, no one ever said that it would be easy. It is much harder to track ROI through digital media. There are countless apps that offer the Holy Grail but deliver only silver debilitated cups of nothing while other apps do assist in the tracking process, but require money that the client just isn't willing to pay.

5. It's more work

I have found it much easier to conduct work for clients with a reasonably higher budget to spend than I do for clients with understandably lower budgets. The latter requires more creativity, more energy, more time spent on newer, more creative ways to receive reputable coverage. Though this doesn't require much cash spend, it definitely requires more hours than billed to make the client happy. I spend more time researching newer, much more creative opportunities for my clients to receive reputable coverage than I do actually implementing any plan I have drawn up for them.

I know it seems like it, but I am not complaining. I enjoy the creativity that comes with serving my clients. It is incredibly rewarding to receive the kind of approval I receive from my clients; knowing how difficult it is to compete in this industry on their tight budgets. It validates time and again how right I was in my decision to focus my efforts on the SME sector. I know my business will continue to grow, because the fact of the matter is that there really will never be a shortage of SMEs, and for as long as I master the creativity of this niche market, my clients will remain with me for years on end, this I know for sure.

ABOUT THORISO KOLOBE

Thoriso Kolobe is a passionate communicator. One of her preferred methods of communication is through writing. She is a PR lifetime student and a Managing Director of her own PR agency; RFR Agency.

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