

In December, I attended several holiday functions and networking events. While at these events, a common question about what to look for when hiring a PR, marketing, advertising or communications firm or consultant consistently came up.

Business owners also shared with me that they are reluctant to invest their money and resources to hire a professional to assist them to build their business or take their business to the next level because they are unsure about how to determine who is qualified, and whom they should hire and why.

In an effort to address this question and their concerns, I would like to share our company's condensed list of what we believe you should look for when hiring a PR, marketing, advertising or communications firm or consultant.

- Ask for a detailed account of the professional's and/or firms credentials, past work, and references
- Evaluate their connections in the community and what and whom they are associated with and ask them why
- Look for a professional that is energetic, versatile, accountable, and that has a good understanding of business building & development, the media, the community, and technology
- Ask about their knowledge of the art of communication and their writing skills
- Ask what their client media coverage success ratio is for print & broadcast media and press releases
- Ensure that they have been a prior spokesperson on more than one occasion for an event, business, or organization
- Ask about their company resources and how they perform their services
- Compare their price against the market standard to ensure it's inline with the "going" rate for such services
- Evaluate their ability to approach people and their knowledge of human behaviour, industry trends, judgment, and ability to identify specific publics or target audiences
- Research their business in the community and evaluate their brand, brand identity items and marketing and communications materials

Doing your homework before you hire a professional or firm will ensure that you will not waste valuable business time and resources.

If the professional is reluctant to answer your questions, is unable to quickly identify and clearly communicate to you who is in their target market then you should ask yourself "if they don't know who is in their target market then how can I be assured that they can help me to identify and communicate with mine".

Or, if their marketing and communications materials (including their website) are not properly branded, informative, well written, visually stimulating and able to clearly communicate to you exactly what you can expect from them, then chances are they are not equipped to handle your branding, marketing, advertising or PR needs. If the professional or firm hasn't or is not prepared to properly and consistently invest in their own business and community then why should you invest in them?

This is South Simcoe wants to hear from you. Send your questions or share your positive consumer experiences with us via email to dmhpr@dmhpr.ca with the subject line *This is South Simcoe*.
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