



The Inside Scoop: PR for Remodeling Companies

[daily5Remodel](#) Q&A with Nora DePalma, principal of [O'Reilly/DePalma](#), a public relations and marketing firm specializing in building and architectural brands.

d5R: For small remodeling and/or design firms, what's the business case for public relations?

NDP: Connecting with influencers in your community and garnering media coverage builds awareness, credibility and trust. Good PR counsel can help remodelers and designers explain their creativity, workmanship and how they are different from their peers.

d5R: When to outsource PR and when to handle it in-house?

NDP: One of most misleading terms in business is “free publicity.” There is a time commitment to garner media attention and a skill set required in knowing how the media tells a story. In many cases, a remodeler will be well served with outside counsel, dedicating a set number of hours each month to achieve measurable goals within the budget.

Remodelers who are natural-born salespeople, power networkers and fun storytellers might do quite well handling PR in-house, along with support from a team member who can help identify places and opportunities to connect.

d5R: What "deliverables" and performance metrics should you expect from your PR team?

NDP: The Public Relations Society of America ([PRSA](#)) advises success metrics that are relevant, realistic, specific, measureable and timely. You want PR counsel committing to results, not just deliverables. Here are examples of how those might apply to a remodeling firm:

- Success metric 1: Attain coverage in 40 percent of targeted publications that includes at least one key message.
- Success metric 2: Attract a minimum of 25 qualified customer prospects to an open house.
- Success metric 3: Win up to two design contests from targeted list of opportunities.

Here's what is not relevant: a pile of clippings or an "advertising equivalency" value. Both are meaningless measures that have no relevance to driving new business or growing your practice.

We provide thumbnail case studies on our site. [Here](#) is a link to a [showroom special event](#) where we used success metrics to generate attendance.

d5R: Can the PR counsel control what gets printed in the newspaper or who wins a design contest?

NDP: Not directly, but you can measure the effectiveness and aggressiveness of your PR counsel in indentifying relevant opportunities, the skill at weaving your key messages into stories and the care taken in targeting and preparing contest entries.

d5R: What should a remodeler expect to pay for good PR counsel? Is a retainer necessary? How long of a contract should you sign?

NDP: The PR field has its share of dog-and-truck contractors. You know the drill about proposals that sound too good to be true. Seasoned independent PR professionals in the top 20 markets are usually between \$125 and \$150/hr. Boutique agencies in those markets are typically between \$140 and \$185/hr.

The investment compensates the practitioner's time to follow your target media outlets and identify new opportunities. We look at the upcoming publishing schedules and try to anticipate ways our clients can help reporters and editors. We email them. We meet with them. Of late, we Tweet with them.

That time can be accounted for in either a flat monthly retainer or an hourly rate. A retainer can be easier for cash flow forecasting, but you can achieve the same idea by setting a monthly limit on hours.

The contract should allow you to stop or slow down with no more than 30 days notice.

d5R: You've covered the remodeling industry for many years, as a journalist as well as a PR and communications consultant. In your opinion, what qualifies these days as truly newsworthy (or "PR-worthy") about a remodeling business?

NDP: Dramatic before/after transformations are always good stories. Remodels that delivered demonstrable energy- or water-savings are also good stories. Volunteer work often leads to coverage. Providing a local angle on a national story is a terrific way to be seen as local industry leader. Use survey data from NAHB, NARI, NKBA and other associations and customize it for local market trends.

d5R: What do you say to a remodeler who isn't getting sales from PR coverage?

NDP: While it can generate leads, PR is not the strongest lead-generation component of a remodeler's marketing mix. Many design firms have told me that after scoring a hit in a national consumer magazine, "I didn't get one call from that placement."

PR is a credibility builder that gains momentum over time, not a one-time splash. The impact comes from showing a sales prospect your coverage in a presentation binder or framed on a showroom wall. It provides a degree of credibility that nothing else in the marketing mix can match.

d5R: What media should you expect your PR professional or agency to know and use to promote you?

NDP: Your PR counsel should be able to demonstrate a track record of success promoting similar services to your target market. Part of what you are hiring is someone who is on top of your marketplace and has the skill to build new relationships to support your communications goals.

d5R: Press releases -- really, is there any point anymore?

NDP: Well, define "press release." Sharing company news or new service offerings in a format that is user-friendly for journalists is still the way to go. The key is to write the news as a journalist would write it.

d5R: Print advertising -- really, is it justifiable anymore?

NDP: The marketing mix is built on business goals, so we wouldn't advise any blanket no-go without first defining those. But for most local businesses, the best investment you can make is in a well-optimized website, a strong presence within your target audience community and a well-managed business reputation.

Increasingly, your target audience community is an online community: fans on Facebook or followers on Twitter.

d5R: What are some major PR red flags?

NDP: A major red flag is PR counsel that won't be pinned down to measurable metrics. Another big warning sign are onerous contracts that hold you hostage for six to 12 months.

Nora DePalma is principal of [O'Reilly/DePalma](http://oreilly-depalma.com), a public relations and marketing firm specializing in building and architectural brands. Senior leadership is a mix of brand experts and brand journalists, all with deep industry roots. Learn more at oreilly-depalma.com.