

## *Book Review*

### **You Need PR: An Approachable Guide to Public Relations for Early-Stage Companies**

Reviewed by  
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#### ***You Need PR: An Approachable Guide to Public Relations for Early-Stage Companies***

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<https://anincoriginal.com/titles-authors/>

<https://www.youneedpr.co/>

<https://imgpublicrelations.com/>

According to the Census Bureau, more than 5 million new businesses filed for IRS tax IDs in 2021, the highest number in 20 years and a 53% increase from 2019 pre-pandemic applications (Newman & Fikri, 2022). Despite these large numbers, the vast majority of start-ups fail, typically in the first five years. Among the reasons for these failures are misjudging demand, insufficient funds, stronger-than-expected competition, and – as Jenna Guarneri’s book *You Need PR* argues – ineffective marketing (“106 Must-Know,” 2022).

Guarneri’s easy-to-read book is part of An Inc. Original’s leadership book series, the same organization that publishes *Inc.* magazine. She adeptly brings her professional expertise into the pages of the book, interspersing her entrepreneurial experiences creating a start-

up agency seven years ago. As CEO of JMG Public Relations in New York City, Guarneri identifies herself as a publicist, a position under the broader public relations umbrella and generally related to media relations and events. Her firm received several recognitions in the last five years, including the 2021 Most Outstanding Startup-Focused PR Firm, awarded by digital B2B magazine publisher Corporate Vision. She also shares her expertise as a member of the Forbes Business Council and a Forbes magazine contributor.

### **Structure and Organization**

Guarneri breaks the 12-chapter book into four sections that mirror a business start-up process: Establish (chapters 1-3), Build (chapters 4-6), Launch (chapters 7-9), and Deliver (chapters 10-12). The book includes a brief glossary of terms, from advertorial to wire service, and a six-page index. Each chapter begins with a poignant quote to set the stage. For example, “The Competitor Landscape” (chapter 6) starts with, “A horse never runs so fast as when he has other horses to catch up and outpace” (p. 95). My favorite quote starts chapter 10, “Follow Through,” attributed to realtor-turned-sales and leadership coach Michelle Moore: “Not following up ... is the same as filling up your bathtub without first putting the stopper in the drain” (p. 167). The author wraps up each chapter with an “Innovation Station” to summarize the main points and pose questions for the reader to consider based on their organization’s publicity needs.

Guarneri kicks off the book discussing the significance of perceptions, focusing on the company’s core values and delving into brand differentiation. She employs simple descriptions without technical terms. The “Competitor Landscape” chapter describes what constitutes environmental scanning and issues management, for example. The PR Pitching Cycle (p. 212) synthesizes an effective process involving

essential research, outreach, and follow-up, and media catching options available from resources such as Help A Reporter Out, ProfNet, and Qwoted (p. 164).

*You Need PR* also advocates for an oft-used strategy of third-party endorsements gained by media coverage, despite recent evidence that trust in news media continues to drop. According to a July 2022 Gallup poll, only 16% of Americans have considerable trust in newspapers, with a mere 11% holding trusting views in television news (Brenan, 2022). But the text is not behind the times; it also points to the value of creating connections and sharing media coverage via social media channels.

#### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The book effectively backs recommendations with campaign examples from the likes of Patagonia, FedEx, T-Mobile, Warby Parker, TED Talks, and Oreo. The publication also reinforces the why and how of its suggestions by interlacing research findings from prominent organizations such as Gallup, Edison Research and Catalyst, Pew Research Center, and University of Chicago.

Today's public relations and publicity also must have grounding in diversity, inclusion, and equity, issues not featured in *You Need PR*. These elements do not necessarily require a separate chapter, but could be reinforced if woven throughout the text. For example, the subsection "Types of Media Outlets" (p. 108-110) might refer to the value of scanning a wide range of diverse publications to learn points of interest and the potential to pitch relevant story ideas. In addition to a notable branding success story such as Patagonia's Don't Buy this Coat campaign (p. 26), the book might also feature the Starbucks UK (2020) campaign, "Every Name's a Story," which showcased the significance of a trans person hearing a barista say their chosen name. There's also value in sharing teachable moments, such as Barnes and Noble's 2020 Black History Month debacle, in which it recovered classic books with "new covers that

reimagined protagonists as characters of color” (Cornish, 2020).

Publicists and public relations practitioners must have a strong grasp of inclusive language, as well. A link – perhaps in the chapters on storytelling, content, or brand materials – to a resource such as the Conscious Style Guide [<https://consciousstyleguide.com/>] would provide readers guidance about how to refer to the breadth of diverse stakeholders – from race and ethnicity to age, disability, gender expression, religion, and socioeconomic status. These issues, plus reinforcing the profession’s ethical standards to eschew misinformation and potential conflicts of interest (Bortree, 2022), would provide essential context for students and novice practitioners.

### **Contributions to Public Relations Education**

Overall, *You Need PR* is an easy-to-read overview of the role publicists play in creating memorable, brand-focused media content, particularly, as the title reinforces, for start-up ventures. The book outlines the value of a number of tactics that professionals expect entry-level employees to have mastered (Edwards-Neff, 2020), such as media pitches, posts on popular social media platforms, news releases, blogs, and podcasts. The author also includes briefs about newsletters, press kits, fact sheets, bios, boilerplates, features, and media lists. As a result, a more-apt title might be *You Need Publicity*, to delineate media strategies from the additional keys to effective public relations when building relationships with other stakeholders: investors, employees, multicultural communities, and government organizations.

Overall, some instructors may find this book useful for media relations classes or some public relations writing courses that focus primarily on writing for news media. Guarneri’s book also is a valid go-to resource to provide students, recent alumni, or other novices with a media relations primer or refresher, particularly when working with start-up organizations.

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