

Connecting Online: Creating A Successful Image on the Internet
www.connectingonline.com

The Internet Public Relations Plan

by Greg Sherwin
greg@connectingonline.com

March 9, 1998 — Version 1.0

I. Document Audience

The initial phase of your Web site or Internet initiative lifecycle focuses on research and planning. The first part of Chapter 10, *Web Site Research and Specification*, in our book identifies a number of questions that you will need to answer when formulating your Internet PR plan. This document presents many of those questions in a format that will lead you through the process of effectively planning your Web site or Internet PR efforts.

The successful completion of this document should reflect the success of your Internet PR planning, and it should not be your primary goal of this exercise. Think of this document as the meeting minutes that record your key Internet business decisions.

The audience for this document may include marketing, public relations, business development, Web developers, outsourced consultants, quality assurance/testing, and future Web team members.

In specific, the Connecting Online Internet PR plan was created with ourselves as the intended audience(s). As the primary document audience, the roles we played for our Internet PR plan included the following:

- *eventual Web site developers*
- *public relations and marketing — for both the book and Web site*
- *business stakeholders*

This document was also intended to document our Internet business decisions and the beginnings of our eventual Web site development process. We intended it as a means of recording business requirements decisions and, later, revisions. We also planned to use it for comparing our Internet effort and Web site achievements with our original goals.

II. Image Analysis

Existing Public Image

In two or three sentences, describe the type of image your company currently has with its publics.

We both had ten years of experience in our respective fields of public relations and the Internet. Furthermore, our expertise was acknowledged by peers and other established experts in these fields. However, we both largely lacked more mainstream recognition.

We were both first-time authors. Our credentials, expertise, and careers made us stand out among the authors of related books. However, most other authors have backgrounds better suited for book promotion tours and engagements: career authors, marketing consultants promoting their own services, and professional seminar and conference speakers.

Also, while we valued the complete editorial control that our small business publisher provided us, their distribution and name recognition did not sufficiently rival that of other major business publishing houses.

Desired Public Image

In two or three sentences, define the type of image you would like for your company. For example:

- responsible
- professional
- experts in your field
- innovative
- fun
- family-friendly

The authors are recognized experts in the combined fields of public relations and the Internet. The book is a comprehensive reference to Internet public relations. The book provides expert advice from hands-on experience and yet manages to be fun to read.

III. Business Requirements

Goals and Objectives



Define the primary purposes — or business requirements — of your Web site or Internet presence. For example:

- build awareness
- encourage preference
- maintain customer loyalty
- streamline customer service
- obtain sales leads
- generate profits through online sales

Also consider the following:

- Do you wish to influence behavior? If so, how? What kind?
- Will your Web site be a source of news and information for the media?
- Is your Web site an extension of a customer service program?

Initially we launched our Web site specifically with distributors as our audience. Then the sole purpose was to generate distributor interest in carrying our book. Once this goal was achieved and the book neared completion, our goals changed to meet a new audience.

First and foremost, our Web site — and overall Internet PR efforts — must help sell our book. They must build awareness of the book, its subject, and ourselves as the authors. Our Web site must demonstrate our combined expertise on Internet public relations by example — demonstrating the principles we outline in the book. We must also demonstrate the same through postings on Usenet, key mailing lists, Web-based forums, and articles submitted to other Web sites.

Furthermore, our own Web site must companion the book by taking advantage of the Internet's strengths as a medium. It must provide us a means of addressing timely issues where the book cannot. It must provide updated information and news for the community interested in Internet public relations. It must provide a means of continued two-way communication with our publics. It should also enable communication among our publics — through vehicles such as online discussion forums.

Mission Statement

Using your goals, objectives and requirements from above, determine a mission statement for your Web site or online presence. Your mission statement should provide your Web team with a focus and the media with a simple means of classifying you. Keep it simple and concise — you should be able to use it as a sound-bite with everyone.

The ConnectingOnline.com Web site practices what its companion book preaches as the definitive Internet PR reference.

IV. Audience

Internet Audience

Define the audience for your Web site or Internet efforts. Examine your publics, and pick two-to-five groups. Be as specific as possible, and prioritize your audiences if possible. This will help you to better target your goals and messages, and it will help you make decisions when different audiences may have conflicting needs — for example, employees and investors during a general strike.

For example, your targeted publics may include the following:

- media/journalists
- current customers
- prospective customers
- investors
- government
- employees

After initially targeting book distributors, we targeted book buyers seeking to integrate the Internet into their business communications plans. Our publics for the book therefore included small business owners, self-employed entrepreneurs, public relations practitioners, marketers, and college instructors and students of business communications. Our publics for the Web site included colleges, people who have purchased copies of our book, people who were considering purchasing copies of our

book, and the media. Our publics for our Internet postings elsewhere primarily focused on the media and those who considered purchasing our book.

Strategies and Tactics

Using your PR plan from Chapter 1, *Introduction to Public Relations*, identify your strategies and tactics *online*. For example, if you would like to expand your business in another country with the help of the Internet, one tactic could be language translation of your written materials for your Web site.

Strategies	Tactics

For example, the Internet strategies and tactics we used for our book are as follows:

Strategies	Tactics
<i>Gain recognition as Internet public relations experts</i>	<i>Participate in online forums and Webcasts aimed at Internet business and Web developers (e.g., Barnes & Noble online chat; WebMaster/CIO Magazine, Seidman's Insider, WebReview, Ragan, Mainspring, and NetPreneur forums; PRForum and NPRN mailing lists); write and contribute online and offline articles (e.g., Web Marketing Today, NETResults); create a Web site that demonstrates our principles</i>

<i>Increase book sales</i>	<i>Establish relationships with online bookstores; link the book's Web site to online bookstores for direct sales; offer content through the Web site that is tied to book content (e.g., this document)</i>
<i>Increase media awareness of book</i>	<i>Include the Web site URL on all correspondence; issue press releases through online distribution services; offer content for journalists on the Web site</i>
<i>Use the Web site to complement book content</i>	<i>Add online news feed, articles, discussion forum, glossary, and contact information for further questions</i>

V. Business Opportunity

What is the business opportunity for your online efforts? Given other Web sites and online initiatives in your field and the state of the current online business environment, what business opportunities lie ahead that you would like to exploit?

For example, if you're a home fashion designer, you might note that your business is not yet well represented on the Internet. If you are a bookseller, what unique qualities about your business model will set it apart from the many other online bookstores?

- *Web sites have become highly strategic for book sales in general.*
- *Online bookstores have created a new and popular medium through which consumers buy books.*
- *CD-ROMs are waning as a desirable complement to computer-related books, and yet the use of Web sites for complementing printed books largely remains unexplored. Most book Web sites don't take advantage of the medium, choosing to throw up a static site that is largely abandoned. Our continual career involvement with the Internet can be leveraged as a strength.*
- *We could demonstrate our proficiency at the medium by creating a Web site as both a platform and example. Applying our skills and experience effectively, we could both demonstrate our expertise while illustrating key concepts identified in the text.*

VI. Information Sources/Content

Examining your audiences from **IV. Audience** (see page 5), identify information or content that would be of direct and appropriate interest to each of your defined publics. They may include existing content you have and content you would like to develop.

This information could be shared with your publics — for example, product offerings, news, tips, and helpful how-tos. Alternatively, this information could be shared *among* your publics — for example, by hosting message boards, chats, or even accepting suggested offsite hyperlinks.

For example:

Audience	Content
journalists	interactive press kits, news releases, fact sheets, photos and graphics, experts directory, news tips
investors	speeches and presentations, annual reports, announcements of events, quarterly earnings reports
employees	policies, benefits, news, features on employees and community involvement
customers or the general public	newsletters, catalogs, how-tos, FAQs, maps and directions
government	positions on political issues; support for trade, labor, legal, or other business policies
community	charitable contributions, fundraising events, community programs, employee volunteering sponsorships

Audience	Content

This section has particular significance if you are planning to launch or redesign a company Web site.

We identified the following content sources for each of our audiences:

Audience	Content
<i>book distributors (only for first Web site version)</i>	<i>book excerpts, definition of the book's market, competitive analysis of related books</i>
<i>small business owners, self-employed entrepreneurs</i>	<i>book excerpts, Internet PR news headlines, Internet business articles, discussion forums, reviewed bookmarks, worksheets</i>
<i>public relations practitioners, marketers</i>	<i>book excerpts, Internet PR news headlines, Internet business articles, discussion forums, reviewed bookmarks, worksheets</i>
<i>college instructors and students of business communications</i>	<i>sample course syllabus, course slides, worksheets, book excerpts, discussion forums, Internet PR news headlines, reviewed bookmarks</i>
<i>media</i>	<i>press releases, book excerpts, contact information, reviews of the book</i>
<i>potential book buyers</i>	<i>book excerpts, reviews of the book, press releases, links to online bookstores for book purchasing</i>
<i>book buyers</i>	<i>Internet PR news headlines, Internet business articles, discussion forums, reviewed bookmarks, book supplements (such as this form)</i>

VII. Messages

Determine Your Messages

Determine your five most important messages. They should be precise and specifically target your different audiences. Highlight your top three. Take note how the content you identified in **VI. Information Sources/Content** (see page 8) can be used to support or convey these messages.

Here are our top five messages, listed in order of preference:

- 1) Connecting Online is the definitive book about public relations and the Internet. Learn from the authors' combined expertise.*
- 2) Being successful on the Internet requires a careful business plan, a clear vision for design, and an understanding of the technology.*
- 3) Whether you manage it or not, you may already have an online image.*
- 4) Online public relations lays the foundation for all online marketing and sales efforts.*
- 5) Like radio and television that came before it, the Internet is a new medium that requires a new set of public relations skills for managing a company's image.*

VIII. Metrics for Success

Once your Internet initiative is underway, how will you measure your success? How will you know if you are any closer to attaining your business goals than when you started? How will you know if one approach or idea you try online is more effective than another?

Define measurements or metrics by which you will judge the effectiveness of your Internet efforts. These should give you an idea of how well you are achieving the business goals you defined in **III. Business Requirements** (see page 4).

In some cases these may not be apparent, and you may need to develop a system for measurement. Example metrics include the following:

- Number of visitors to your Web site
- Citations in the press, both online and offline
- Sales leads
- Quality and quantity of e-mail feedback or customer survey data

The metrics we chose for determining our effectiveness were as follows:

- *Total traffic to the Web site and its features*
- *Books sold through the Web site*
- *E-mail feedback*
- *Number of Web sites that linked to our site, especially Internet business/marketing Web sites*
- *Citations on other Web sites and online news services*

IX. Exclusions

Identify any plans or ideas that were initially considered but were later removed due to complexity, cost, time-to-market, risk, etc. Some of these ideas may be postponed for a future iteration of your Web site lifecycle, or it may be abandoned entirely. Regardless, if it's significant, it pays to itemize it here so that this document will reflect that you haven't overlooked these possibilities.

For the first phase of our Internet PR efforts, we addressed only book distributors and not potential buyers.

X. Business Risk Analysis

Note any business risks recognized at this point here, for example:

- low internal level of computer and technical knowledge
- extremely limited budget, human resources, or timeline
- very aggressive ambitions and/or schedule with little relevant experience

XI. Contacts of Authority and Approval

Identify the person(s) who can approve your Internet public relations plan, make strategic decisions, and have the authority to allocate resources and see it through to completion. To ensure that all key stakeholders have reviewed your Internet public relations plan and commit to its objectives, obtain signatures here.

By signing, you acknowledge that you've read, understood, and approve of the plan. Your signature is a measure of your commitment — this is not intended as a legal document.
