

# Wow!

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**fresh**  
**pr**

**fresh** (adj):  
1) novel, new, current;  
2) bold, invigorating, different;  
3) **pr** for your business *like you've never experienced it before.*

----- Smart advice in PR for Authors & Business Women in all Professions.

By Angela Mackintosh

**J**ust what does a PR person do? That's what I wanted to know when I pulled up to the swanky [Park Ave.](#) restaurant: a former client of Jeannine Schechter's company [FreshPR](#) and one of her favorite dining spots.

I could easily see the fringe benefits of PR, and would soon find out how tasty they were, but I still hadn't a clue of what the whole PR business was about.

Jeannine and I have been close friends since high school, and although I know almost everything about her personal life, we just have never broached the topic of her day job. I guess that's what it's like with old friends. You get together to escape the daily grind, catch up, share a few laughs, and by that time you've forgotten about everything else.

So, when *Wow!* decided to call our first issue, “The Fresh Issue,” it only made sense to schedule an interview with the owner of [FreshPR](#), and my long-time friend, Jeannine Schechter.

After enjoying a delicious Smoked Salmon Benedict breakfast, (compliments to the Chef: David Slay) I got a crash course in PR that was so jam-packed with information that I was kicking myself for never having consulted Jeannine before. In the short amount of time that the tape was rolling, I learned tons from this knowledgeable, outgoing and professional woman, Jeannine Schechter, and I’m positive you’ll learn a lot too.



“I think a good publicist is one who also understands the balance and interaction between people, and knows when it’s not working.”

**Wow: What does PR consist of? Is it a package of promotional advertising, press releases...or?**

**JS:** Public relations consists of strategic planning and development of materials to help garner media attention for your client—through articles written and stories that run on television and radio (media relations). Through media relations, visibility of your clients is raised among consumers and potential business partners. Media Relations is essentially how to garner the most visibility possible with broadcast, print media, and online media.

**Wow: You do online media too?**

**JS:** Yes. I reach out to media outlets online as well.

**Wow: Sorry to sound naïve, but what’s a Press Kit?**

**JS:** It’s a package distributed to the media that consists of various documents on a company; whether it’s a restaurant, an art client,

design company, a consumer electronics product that tells, more or less, the story of how the company came into existence.

**Wow: Is a background document like a business plan?**

**JS:** No, it's not a business plan. It's two or three pages that tell the story of how the company came to be, who they are, and what they stand for, and so forth. It's one of the components of the press kit. Additional documents in the press kit include bios of the key people or the key executives involved in the company, an FAQ (frequently asked questions) sheet that media and/or consumers might ask, copies of recent media hits, etc.

Sometimes press kits will also include testimonial pages from satisfied customers and partners. If it's a restaurant, it could be a little one-line quote from a customer or celebrity that says, "This restaurant is the best." Shots of the key principles involved in the company can also be included in the kit, as well as shots of the product and/or storefront, so that the media has a strong idea of what the company's vibe and presence is.

**“I’ve been doing this for fourteen years now, so I’ve established a lot of relationships over the years and I’m always establishing new relationships.”**

**Wow: So once you get the press kit together, do you send it out to a special mailing list? Or how do you do that?**

**JS:** Well, depending on what sector it is. Is it food, art, design, healthcare, is it technology?

The first thing you want to do is figure out what their trade is and build up a media-list of appropriate trade publications. Then you want to pursue local media, where the client is based, and reach out to journalists at print, broadcast, and online outlets who cover that particular beat (trade focus). Also, you want to be sure to reach out to national media outlets, such as dailies, monthly magazines, etc.

By reaching out to the media, you're hoping to get feature stories on the company, its products and/or, all, or some, of the key principles involved in the company.

If it's not a full story about their company, then maybe one of the key principals of the company will be contacted as an expert. For

instance, “Well, we’ve got this story about so-and-so, and this company we know works in this area. This person would be a great resource to use to comment on this trend.”

In regards to sending out press kits... now that things are digital these days, you’re not really sending out hard press kits like you used to. Quite often, all the essentials of a press kit are being sent out via email. But it also depends on your client’s budget and if they are willing to pay for the production of press kits, as well as for the pricey postage.

“Once the press kit is developed, it’s also good to have a press release go out with it that has a great *story hook* to grab the attention of the media for feature story consideration.”

**Wow: How do you make sure you’re strategic in your media outreach?**

**JS:** If you don’t have a press release to go out first announcing something, such as a new partnership, a new hire, or a launch of a new company, you can still go out with a pitch first just talking about the company, who they are, and maybe even suggesting some story angles. Send out that pitch letter to a target list and media list and start doing follow-up.

Then depending on what the feedback is, send them additional press materials. And if they want more information... then you send out the background document, the bios, and then hopefully from that, you lock in interest that will lead to an interview, and in turn, a feature story.

**Wow: With sending out this information through email, how do you get around spamming?**

**JS:** The main thing to be effective in PR, is not just to send out an email and that’s it. There’s a lot of follow-up calls. I’ve been doing this for fourteen years now, so I’ve established a lot of relationships over the years and I’m always establishing new relationships.

So when you follow up with journalists to find out if they received your email, and they’ll say, “What? I never got it.” And it’s not necessarily because it’s been put into the spam filter, it’s because

maybe they didn't get a chance to read your email as of yet or, if it's a new contact, they didn't recognize your name and threw it into their trash bin. That's why the follow-up is so important, to see if they reviewed your press materials and, if not, find out if they're interested in having the materials resent to them. Also, it gives you an opportunity to talk to them a bit more about what you're pitching and to find out if it's something they would be possibly interested in covering.

**Wow: But as far as...not what the computer does, but what people consider it?**

**JS:** Well, that's why you do the follow-up calls. Once you start establishing relationships over the phone, and even later if you don't talk to them as much, they'll recognize your name through the emails and they'll know who you are and read them.

When I work with the media, I don't just send out a bunch of emails, or faxes, or whatever it is, without building a relationship. The whole thing about PR is building relationships with the journalists.

**Wow: So mostly you're contacting journalists then?**

**JS:** Yeah, unless I'm working on announcing a partnership, then whoever is partnering up with one of my clients, I'll be working with their PR person.

When I worked at an agency, we did a little marketing and advertising... meaning that, we'd look for product placement on shows, or actually seek out potential partners for clients...which is much more strategy driven.

So, that's what I used to do, but what I do now is more oriented to the amount of exposure I can get for my client in the media.

For one of my clients we did a "Back to School" segment, and she's a consumer electronics expert, so she picked out certain products that she thought were good to highlight. So companies lucked out, because she really believes in their products.

**Wow: Do you go through another company to find media lists?**

**JS:** I've created my own. The thing is, there are wire services and some clients want to use that, but using a newswire service could cost you six or seven hundred dollars, depending on the word count. They are good if you have the money to spare.

For smaller companies, it's better to go through a targeted media list and if they're willing to spend the extra money, that's great. Then do it!

From my experience with smaller companies, I haven't garnered journalists calling me saying, "We want to do a story," from putting it out on the wire. I've garnered media attention and feature stories from my targeted media list.

Plus, I know who it's going out to and they hopefully know me, and if they aren't familiar with me or my company, the subject of the email is of interest to them.

**"It's just a conversation. Don't over think it. Because if you over think it, *you'll start freaking out.*"**

**Wow: Then what happens after that? Do your clients have to take over and do interviews?**

**JS:** I'll help them with some media training and develop key message points, to make sure their messaging is consistent.

A lot of times it's nicer and easier for them to get into print as opposed to broadcast, because print is easier to maneuver around. In broadcast a lot of times people get really nervous having a camera on them.

**Wow: Yeah... I can feel that!**

**JS:** So it's trial and error. You can only do so much media training, so hopefully when they go out and do that first interview, you hope that you've basically safeguarded them and that they don't say anything that they shouldn't say. Like if you don't want to talk about your annual revenue or whatever it is.

Journalists are good if you want to get a great story, but you need to be careful you don't say anything you don't want made public. Because there are certain questions that people want to know and will keep asking in different forms, hoping that you'll give them that bit of information.

With media training, it's been pretty good with all of my clients. Again, we'll go over key messages beforehand, things they should and shouldn't wear if they're doing broadcast, things that they should or

should not say if they're about to do an interview. I always tell my clients, "It's just a conversation. Don't over think it. Because if you over think it, you'll start freaking out."

**“My suggestion would be to keep in contact with that publicist at that publishing house, to see what they're doing, *to not be all over them*, but to find out what their plan of attack is.”**

**Wow: Do you have any thoughts or advice for an Author who's promoting her book? Because a lot of publishing houses are leaving that up to the authors these days.**

**JS:** Most publishing houses do have in-house PR, but in regards to how big the department...it can be a really small group or maybe one person...handling media outreach for multiple books. So, in regards to where an author stands in getting PR on their book, it's a matter of where that book or where that author stands in the hierarchy. And if you're a new author starting out, it's like...

**Wow: It's like how much money are you going to bring me?!**

**JS:** Right. How much attention are they really going to give to you if you aren't going to make them a lot of money? And if they've got a well-known author who is going to bring them a lot of revenue, then they'll put all their PR efforts initially into them.

My suggestion would be to keep in contact with that publicist at that publishing house, to see what they're doing, to not be all over them, but to find out what their plan of attack is. When are they going to be issuing a press release, what media are they going out to, are they going to do any sort of media alert to announce book signings and events around the country? And when they are reaching out to national media, what kind of publications and broadcast outlets are they going to be reaching out to as well?

If the author feels like there isn't really that much of a push that's going to be given internally, at the publishing house, and if they have money to spare, then they should consider hiring someone to help out with publicizing their book.

I'd say to start out four months prior, because with monthly magazines, they usually work with a three to four month lead time. By

starting four months in advance, a publicist will have enough time to have press materials developed and work on publicizing the book.

**Wow: Are there any inexpensive ways that the authors can promote their book?**

**JS:** Of course, authors could always get something on MySpace.com and other social networking sites, and maybe locally, if they can find what kind of media is near them and create their own kind of press release. There are different formats that authors can find online, and if they don't know how to structure a press release, I'm sure they might have friends in PR who are willing to send them a couple of examples of press releases to see the format, and then they can write something on their own.

If an author really had no money, or if the publicist at the publishing house wasn't going to do anything, then I'd suggest that they go out to local media and see if they can get anything.

The key thing with these authors is that when you're doing these book-signing parties, you really want to push that, and if you're not getting anything from the publishing house, then find out from the venue what they're doing to promote it as well. Are they going to be getting Calendar listings in the local media to really promote the event? And find out if they're really being proactive that way.

**Wow: What about speaking engagements? A lot of times authors will do that to promote...**

**JS:** That's what I'm saying, like the book signing parties... depending on what the publishing company is going to do... but if they feel like the publishing company isn't doing too much, then they could approach different bookstores or do some event highlighting the new book coming out, combined with maybe an art show and a musical performance...making it a fun event. Where you get these different communities coming together, because there are, let's say, two other things that aren't competing with you... like a painter and a musician. And they all come together for this event...

**Wow: And bring there own guest list! Good idea!**



**JS:** (laughs)

*“If you’re an author looking to promote your book, that’s great if they’re a publicist, but if they haven’t had ample experience in promoting a book and don’t know the ins-and-outs of what it actually takes to get exposure for an author, then don’t take them on.”*

**Wow: When is it advisable to seek a PR firm?**

**JS:** Well, there is PR agencies, boutiques and consultants. It’s a matter of what you’re willing to spend.

**Wow: What do you mean a “boutique?”**

**JS:** Like I’m a boutique. I have several freelancers working for me...but the client deals mainly with me. A PR agency offers multiple services, may even have multiple offices and has a large staff which is broken down into various divisions such as consumer and technology, healthcare, arts and communications, etc. But, because they are so large and have a large staff to work on projects, their retainer fee might start at maybe \$10-\$15,000 a month. So it’s a matter of what you’re willing to spend, but not only that, a lot of people do PR, so it’s about finding someone who deals in your specific area.

If you’re an author looking to promote your book, that’s great if they’re a publicist, but if they haven’t had ample experience in promoting a book and don’t know the ins-and-outs of what it actually takes to get exposure for an author, then don’t take them on.

If you’re going to spend your money, make sure that they have a lot of experience in promoting a book. You can see press clippings of where they’ve placed their clients, what publications... ask them for that. Definitely be proactive in finding out where your dollars are going to be spent. See press materials that they’ve written, check out their press releases, bios and backgrounders, and check out the way they convey a story or present an image. Make sure that it’s something you think works well with the way you want to be presented.

Before you sign on a publicist, whether it’s an individual publicist, a boutique agency, or a big PR agency, make sure you see their press materials. And if you feel like, “Hey, this is someone that I might want to work with,” then have them put together a PR plan for you to find out what they would do to promote you.

**Wow: I should hire you!**

**JS:** Aw...

**Wow: Whether it's a company or an individual, like a writer, how do you think out of the box, so people can distinguish your client from their competition? And when do you know when too much is too much?**

**JS:** Obviously, you definitely want to distinguish yourself from the competition, and it's a matter of creating the story. That's where the backgrounder document comes in, because the backgrounder document that you initially create will have the elements that you'll take and pitch verbally.

The backgrounder document allows you to be prepared, so that when a journalist comes to you and says, "That's great, but what makes you different from so-and-so?" Then you can immediately say, "Well, let me tell you what it is..."

It's not only a matter of what's written, it's a matter of being able to spin things with the snap of a finger when a journalist throws a question your way. To be where you can immediately say, "Well, this is what the difference is..." and break it down that way.

And when do you know too much is too much? I think a good publicist is one who also understands the balance and interaction between people, and knows when it's not working.

At that point it's good to say, "It's been great talking to you and I'll let you know when the next announcement comes out."

There's only so many spins you can do on a story, and if a journalist isn't feeling it, then they're not feeling it, and you don't want to push them.

**Wow: Jeannine, it's been so wonderful to talk with you. Now I have a total understanding of what PR is and what you do during the day!**

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