



SELLING YOURSELF

DIY public relations could be a winning formula for small firms as the credit crunch deepens. But what's the best way to send an eye-catching message about your brand without breaking the bank?

When IT solutions specialist SAS UK started to handle its own public relations, rather than using an agency, it boosted the media coverage it was receiving by 182 per cent within two years—and lopped £65,000 a year off its PR bill.

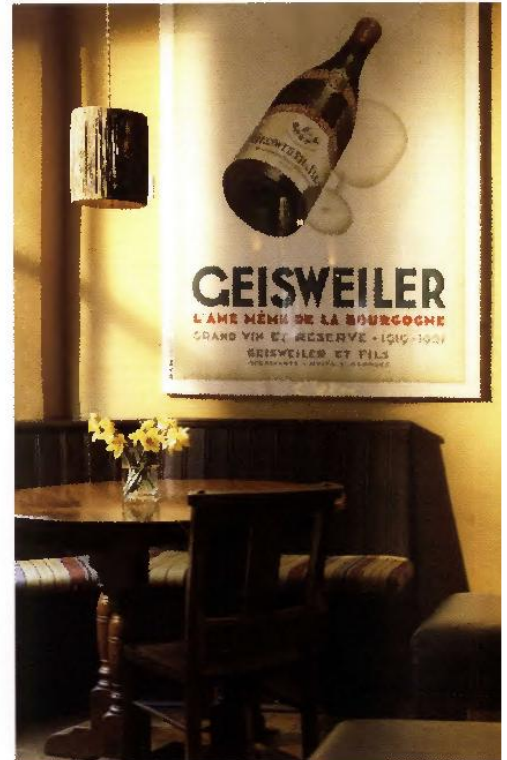
Boutique hotel-guide company Mr & Mrs Smith spends £100,000 a year doing its own publicity, but reckons it would have to part with three times as much to get the same results from an outside consultant. And Mamas & Papas, the baby goods retailer, has cut the number of marketing staff from 12 to seven, but increased its media coverage by at least 50 per cent.

These companies have found that it's possible to get good results from public relations without overspending. It's a formula that more businesses, especially SMEs, will be seeking as the credit crunch

bites deeper and marketing budgets are cut. Some will organise their own PR while others may seek help from a consultancy, or even adopt a hybrid approach.

"Many consultants will work alongside an organisation helping to empower existing staff and support as appropriate," says Elisabeth Lewis-Jones, president of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

But whatever the approach, when cash is short the emphasis should be on value for money. SAS UK has employed just two PR people since it took the job in-house two years ago. Sheila Parry, head of corporate communications, says having PR people on the inside means the company knows more about what works and what doesn't (see panel). "We understand far better what we are doing. We measure everything precisely and are able to do that because we have control."



Parry says that it's been easier to make good contacts with the journalists who matter. "I think the fact that they can get hold of us quickly and we don't mess them around is important," she says. Parry agrees that as well as delivering results, keeping a lid on costs is important. "We have to cost-justify everything we do and we don't spend unnecessarily," she adds.

At Mr & Mrs Smith, the key brand name for Spy Publishing, managing director

GOOD PUBLICITY?

Three companies handling PR campaigns tell *Director* about their triumphs and (not quite) disasters

SAS UK

Who Sheila Parry, head of corporate communications.

Business Computer software.

What worked Managed to get a senior manager interviewed on BBC TV in connection with the banking crisis. Was able to move fast, clear the executive's diary and get him to the studio in time.

The lesson Seize the moment.

What didn't Press releases that managers insisted on issuing even though there was no story that would interest the press.

The lesson Public relations can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse.

MAMAS & PAPAS

Who Gill Kingston-Warren, head of public relations.

Business A leading provider of baby goods and nursery furniture.

What worked Placing a gold-coloured pushchair with singer Gwen Stefani. She's a consummate media professional and paparazzi pictures of her wheeling it circled the globe.

The lesson Great personalities are good at grabbing headlines.

What didn't Working on a campaign with Emma Bunton was a "delightful experience" and produced some publicity nuggets,



but she announced her pregnancy just as the Spice Girls were reforming, so the tabloids were dominated by "salacious gossip" about other group members.

The lesson A big story always overshadows a smaller story.

WEBCREDIBLE

Who Jon White, PR and marketing manager.

Business Web design and development.

What worked Pitched launch of T-Mobile G1 Google phone to journalists and received great coverage, including national press.

The lesson Move fast to grab headlines before rivals.

What didn't Sent out press releases about new training courses that failed to gain coverage because there was no real story.

The lesson In press releases, no news is... well, bad news.