



northernireland
tourist board

VIC PR Planner and Top Tips

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Introduction

This guidance note is designed to help you plan your VIC's PR (public relations) activity. It starts with some "top tips" to help you make the most of PR, followed by a suggested format to assist with planning.

Please note that the planner is not intended to be prescriptive. We recognise that busy VICs may only have limited time to invest in PR, so you will want to pick and choose the elements that are most relevant to your situation. If you are able to access PR expertise in-house then they should be your first port of call for advice and assistance. If this isn't available to you locally, or you need to call on extra support, please do get in touch with us at NITB.

10 top tips:

- 1. Work with and through your partners:** if your Council/organisation has a corporate PR function, make the most of it but don't assume they will do everything for you. You will need to be proactive to feed them stories and news. Do you have regional tourism partners? In particular, contact Pauline Gormley, NITB's PR Officer for advice and support (Tel: 02890 441650. Email: p.gormley@nitb.com). NITB can help with drafting and distributing relevant news releases to their database of contacts across NI. They can also help find photographers, and assist with placing any competitions you run in the wider media.
- 2. Prepare a "news release calendar":** this will give you a structure and focus for issuing regular releases throughout the year. You can build this up by using key dates for local events, important anniversaries and seasonal opportunities – Valentine's Day, Easter etc. Think also about the key product themes for your destination, e.g. music, food, sport and activity, and how you can tell these stories visually (e.g. through costumed characters – sportsmen, hikers etc, or perhaps seaside bucket and spade?). This will ensure you are contributing to wider destination marketing. You should also check NITB's PR calendar to see if there are opportunities to "piggyback" your news.
- 3. Make the link to your VIC:** whenever you issue a release, make sure there's a clear "call to action" to visit the VIC. You might do this by saying "come and buy your tickets from us" or simply "find out more by visiting your local VIC". If it's a local event taking place in or near the VIC, make sure you include simple directions of how to find your service. Don't forget to give your contact details.
- 4. Build your media contacts:** if you have an in-house PR department, they will have a media database but don't assume they will know all the most appropriate contacts for your industry. You'll probably need to do a bit of digging of your own to identify the most relevant to your VIC and your target audiences. Contact them to introduce yourself and your service (but make sure you liaise with your corporate PR office to avoid any duplication).

- 5. Research local media opportunities:** contact the most important local media for your VIC to find out when they're planning to run features on tourism. Offer yourself as an expert source to provide information, contribute an article, or participate in a radio interview.
- 6. Make the most of satisfied customers:** there's nothing like a good news story involving happy customers – be they your local trade or visitors. The media find "real world" examples very attractive, so talk to your customers and ask them if you can report your successes. It should offer both them, and you, a chance to shine and provide scope for creative photo opportunities.
- 7. Don't ignore speaking opportunities:** If you're an enthusiastic, confident speaker, this can be a very good way of getting your VIC noticed. Look into opportunities to talk at local events, e.g. Council meetings, trade and tourist association meetings, school events etc.
- 8. Embrace social media:** this may well be the province of your marketing team, but make sure your VIC's messages are exploiting all available relevant social media channels (such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) to convey real time news to your audiences. You should consider adding a blog to your website as another way of getting your news out. Look up other local tourism blogs and see how you can contribute content.
- 9. Run a competition:** it takes a bit of organising, but a competition can get you lots of free media space. Your local trade is the best source of prizes and will normally offer these on a complimentary basis in return for the publicity. A weekend break with free festival tickets will grab a lot of attention!
- 10. ... and lastly, partner with other VICs.** The first tip highlighted the importance of partnership with local, regional and NITB tourism partners. This last one stresses the value of the network. There is only so much you can do on your own. With your fellow VICs, you have a natural community of interest and economy of scale. Some larger projects, like running press trips and publicising VIC "open days", may become more viable if you partner with neighbouring VICs or with the network as a whole.

PR planner:

Most PR plans tend to follow the same basic format. We've suggested a structure but it is up to you how much or how little detail you need. The important thing is to set yourself a budget before you start: not just money, but also how much of your time you can devote to it. That way your plan will be grounded in reality. Otherwise it risks becoming a "wish list" which sits on the shelf.

The template is designed to cover all aspects of a VIC's potential PR work. How much you do, and the priorities you assign to each initiative, will depend on local circumstances and resources. Work through the template with your team and ask yourselves the question, "What is the best and easiest way for us to do this?" Where appropriate, we have offered some ideas and examples, but it is for you to decide what is most relevant and practical. The planner is for your retention. If you have any queries, please contact Jayne O'Neile at j.oneile@nitb.com.

VIC CONTACT INFORMATION

VIC name and address		
Contact name and position		
Telephone number		Email address

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Summarise briefly what your plan is trying to achieve and the timeframe for delivering it.

2. CURRENT SITUATION:

Describe the context the plan is trying to address. What is the public opinion of the VIC? In their eyes, how does it compare with competitors/other providers of visitor information? (You may find the SWOT you did for your business plan will help you with this section).

3. GOAL:

What is the single aim that would address the problem or opportunity you have identified in 2 above?

4. OBJECTIVES:

List your key objectives which will help you achieve your goal. Try to make them as specific, measurable and attainable as you can, with clear deadlines for completion.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

5. TARGET AUDIENCES:

Who are the key stakeholder groups you want to reach? Visitors, trade, councillors etc. (Check these are consistent with the audiences you have prioritised in your stakeholder engagement plan, if you have one). Are they local or from further afield?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

