

You run your business and let your PR person run your PR

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Bill Gates once said quote: "If I was down to my last dollar, I'd spend it on public relations." So it was surprising to see a quote from another billionaire Mark Cuban's book, *How to Win at the Sport of Business*: "Startups should never hire a PR firm." Cuban is succesful, a regular on TV's *Shark Tank*, listed No. 459 on *Forbes'* 2011 list of "World's Richest People." He owns the Dallas Mavericks, Landmark Theatres, Magnolia Pictures, and is chairman of the HDTV cable network AXS TV.

It was good to read that Cuban thinks "a smart PR person can add value to a startup," but disappointing that he adds, "It's not enough value." He's right that if it actually comes down to a choice of keeping the doors open or hiring a PR person, the owner must opt to keep the company alive. But once you're open for business, you need to constantly promote your product or service, especially a startup. Maybe you can't afford to add a full-timer to your staff, but there are alternatives, like a part-timer or a consultant who's retained for a day per week or 20 hours a month, etc. That can be effective and cost-efficient.

Cuban's second concern is time. He suggests the business owner's time would be better spent taking their story directly to the media than trying to explain their message to the PR person who then pitches story ideas to the media. He's right that business and trade publications are always looking for good content. A savvy PR pro will quickly understand the company's products, culture and message. In fact, an experienced PR person can be more objective than the business owner, and may see story angles that the owner didn't see because s/he's too close to the business. Once the right pitch is made and catches the attention of an editor or reporter, they'll follow up with a request for an interview.

Trade and business publications and websites are always looking for timely, unique news. Cuban advises business owners to take their stories directly to the target media, noting "The key to getting a response is being short, sweet, hyperbole free and to the point. You have to sell your differentiation in a paragraph."

Yes, many business people are capable of contacting the media and establishing relationship. But the business owner's time is better spent focusing on running and building the business. The owner wouldn't set aside business decisions to paint the office or lay carpets - even if s/he knew how to do it.

The cost of PR and marketing, done correctly, can result in enough added business and branding to pay for itself many times over. It's surprising for anyone - especially a billionaire - to suggest an idea that's penny-wise and pound foolish.

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