

Good PR firms can make valuable business advisers

BY KEITH REGAN
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When **Boston Residential Group LLC** President and CEO **Curtis Kemeny** set out to find a public relations firm to get the word out about his development projects, including an upcoming project that involved the **Massachusetts Turnpike Authority**, he was looking for more than an expert who could get his stories in the press.

"We were working on some high-profile deals and I was looking for a trusted adviser on the PR side," said Kemeny, whose firm has developed several major residential projects in and around the city, such as 360 Newbury, Battle Green Apartments in Lexington and Linden Square Townhomes in Wellesley.

A recommendation from his attorney sent Kemeny to **Bishoff Communications LLC**. Five years later, the Boston firm and its principal, **Janey Bishoff**, are a key part of the developer's team.

"We work together well and are constantly in touch in those times between big projects, so when the next one comes around, we're ready to go," Kemeny added.

Bishoff advises against a beauty-pageant approach that favors a firm's portfolio over relationship consider-

ations.

"Both parts of the equation — what a firm has done in the past and how well you can work with them — need to be considered," she says.

A recommendation is a solid starting point for finding a PR firm that matches a business's needs, with many businesses using a formal review process of interviews with a field of candidates.

When the right fit is found, a PR firm can become a valuable adviser, as important as an attorney or accountant to a business's success, she said.

Industry experience may be part of that fit. Bishoff represents clients across a range of industries, including professional services and retail, but other firms favor an even sharper focus.

Marcia Brier, founder and principal of Needham-based **MCB Communications**, is especially well known for her work with some of the city's top law firms, for instance.

She and her two colleagues work hard to be valuable resources to reporters by building relationships over time.

"The real key to public relations is contacts and connections, being able to have phone calls returned," Brier

FAST FACTS

Recommendations are a good starting point for finding a good PR firm.

The real keys to public relations success is the firm's contacts and connections.

Some PR firms specialize more than others. Be sure the firm you choose is a good fit for your industry.



Brier: Be a valuable resource

some work with an association representing scrap metal dealers who suddenly found themselves in the midst of controversy as soaring prices prompted the theft and resale of copper and other metals. Suddenly, dealers faced stricter regulation and needed

a strategy to get the word out to the public and regulators about their role in such transactions.

"Businesses in that situation need a company that understands the industry they're in, understands local politics as well as the local media," O'Neill said.

Bishoff agrees that a good firm should be able to offer or at least help envision and coordinate a comprehensive communications program. "Media relations is our bread and butter, but any business that's undertaking any type of marketing program should talk to a public relations professional," she says.

"If it's done right, public relations should pave the way for any branding effort and support those other marketing avenues. If it all fits together, the message becomes more powerful."

said.

Boston's **O'Neill and Associates LLC** has its roots in government relations thanks to the background of CEO **Thomas P. O'Neill III**, a former lieutenant governor, state legislator and son of former U.S. Speaker of the House Thomas "Tip" O'Neill.

He says in today's marketplace it is very rare for a business not to need some regulatory or government relations as part of a larger communications strategy.

Whether it's a life sciences startup or medical device firm or a manufacturing company with overseas suppliers, most businesses deal with government on some level.

Even business people who think they might never find themselves in the spotlight may need advice.

For instance, O'Neill recently did