



“Helen Dewdney writes with fearless clarity and she’s done it again...”

Rob Rinder

How to Get
Free

PRR

For Your Business & Be **PAID** For It

Helen Dewdney
The Complaining Cow

280

ways to gain
media coverage
& raise your
profile



How to Get
Free
PR

For Your Business & Be **PAID** For It

Helen Dewdney

The Complaining Cow

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Dedicated to my teenage son Oliver
who would never do any of this
in a month of Sundays!

Contents

Foreword—Jeremy Vine	vii
Introduction	1
CHAPTER 1 Starting to get publicity in mainstream media	3
CHAPTER 2 Prepare for your coverage	51
CHAPTER 3 At the event	59
CHAPTER 4 Getting paid	71
CHAPTER 5 After your appearances	77
CHAPTER 6 Building your media contact list	91
CHAPTER 7 Sending out press releases	95
CHAPTER 8 Boost your profile outside of traditional media	111
CHAPTER 9 Write yourself and get your name out there	131
CHAPTER 10 Performing at your best so you are asked back!	135
CHAPTER 11 Be true to yourself	143
Glossary	147
References	153
Acknowledgements	175

Foreword

Jeremy Vine



It was the buggy. My wife had been to collect it from—let’s say, in classic BBC style—the largest outlet of a well-known high street purveyor of prams. The trip was thirty miles, to Staines (the home of Ali G). She then returned to Hammersmith (home of the Vine family).

When she got back to our place, she found they had sold us the wrong buggy; it was not a model that would fit in our car. I was at work. Rachel had parked carefully, got out of the car, extracted the box from the boot, heaved it indoors despite being eight months pregnant and sliced the cardboard lid apart with a Stanley knife. She immediately saw the firm’s error.

I got home from work and was cross. She calmed me down. It was all fine. She had called the store about the error and been assured the correct buggy was in stock. She asked them to deliver but they said, “It would be better if you collected it.” To me that seemed unfair—another thirty-mile round trip, more petrol and more precious time—but my wife is a patient soul.

The following night I arrived home to discover her in tears. She had repacked the first buggy, reloaded the car and re-driven to Staines. A distracted worker with no knowledge of the case had eventually found her the buggy replacement while chewing gum. Rachel loaded the box in the boot and drove it home, cut it open with the very same Stanley knife—and discovered it was broken. A piece of hard plastic in the mount had sheared off and a wheel was loose.

I came home and asked her what the tears were for and she said those four words: “It was the buggy.” She had contemplated ringing the store and complaining, but what if they just said, “Come a third time and we’ll sort it out?” It was clear that the company did not really care. The thought of driving all that

way to collect another buggy would send her over the edge.

At this point, trying desperately to make myself useful, I remembered a guest who had appeared on my Radio 2 show the previous Monday. It was hard to forget her—Helen Dewdney had insisted we style her “The Complaining Cow” on air; you wouldn’t disobey someone with that kind of rider. She had taken listener calls on various letdowns by big companies. She was, of course, full of great advice. Big companies are hard to penetrate. “Be prepared to go public,” she said. “Never be rude.” But the thing I remembered most clearly was this:

You need to attract the attention of the person at the top. One way is a poem.

So I sat down that night and typed what I considered to be the most polite-angry poem in the history of English literature.

*All we wanted was a decent pram
To wheel around our lovely baby when she appears;
First you sent us the wrong one,
Then a broken one,
And made my wife burst into tears.*

*Your delivery people told us
They could not collect the wrong pram;
I guess they were in bed.
So you asked my eight months pregnant wife
To do the driving instead.*

*Rachel drove forty miles for you,
Because you are a lazy and selfish firm.
You swapped the wrong pram
For a broken one;
She only discovered when she got home.*

*The pram will now be dropped with us
On the day the baby is due—
That’s what you told my wife.
It’s lucky you’re not delivering our child,
Because it would never arrive.*

I found out the name of the chief executive and posted the poem. We waited for a response.

Before I tell you what happened next, I should say that I reckon you'll have wondered why I'm writing the foreword to this book. I'm a reporter and reporters hate PR, right? Sure, I've interviewed Helen scores of times over the years and we've always got on well. I like her style and I like her life tips. But *Public Relations*? Is that what this is about? What would I know about PR? I mean, somebody once said: "Journalism is all the news they don't want you to hear. The rest is advertising."

You'd expect me to be wary of endorsing a book about *How To Get Yourself On A Radio Show*. Every day we have at least a dozen emails from people who are lobbying for a person or a product or a book; often, lobbying very badly. They say "Our client would love to be on *Radio Three*," or "has always wanted to meet Jeremy Vince." The stories are regularly pap—the lonely quantum physics professor who has finally got in the *Daily Mail* with a story about his "formula for a perfect burger" now thinks he can get on the radio with a "formula for the perfect beach"—*sorry mate, the burger story was rubbish and this one is too and you know it*. We once got done by a brilliant PR firm who got a number of mums to set up a "Campaign for Happy Endings," apparently because they were upset by the unfortunate outcome of the new Lemony Snicket book. Only a week after the item aired did the penny drop. The mums were *promoting* Lemony, not criticising him. Yeah, yeah, I thought, well done. You cheated your way on air. I still get cross when I'm in a bookshop and see a Snicket. I'd call that a backfire.

But that's not what Helen is writing about or suggesting here. She's not doing the devious PR stuff, but rather making wholly honest and interesting suggestions about how you reach out—I can hardly object to her suggestion that it might be a good idea to work out who you're speaking to before you ring them; what the story is; what your expertise is. All good! There are no dark arts in here because dark arts don't work.

Two days after I sent the poem, there was a knock at our front door. Rachel opened it to see a middle-aged man in a suit. A regional manager for the baby gear firm arrived with a stuffed teddy, the correct buggy, chocolates and flowers. He could not have been nicer. He even handed over a card signed by all the staff at the branch where the trouble had started. I got home and thought: "Next time Helen asks me for something, I'm going to say yes."

So here I am.

Introduction

As always, thanks first and foremost to my long-suffering friend, mentor and editor Marcus Williamson for the suggestions, the editing of what seemed like hundreds of versions and proof reading. Back in 2012 I started *The Complaining Cow* blog, sharing stories of tackling companies with poor customer service. It resulted in the publishing of two best-selling consumer advice books and lots of media coverage. Having gained recognition for my expertise and knowledge of consumer matters and complaint handling, I can often be seen and heard in the media, with my no-nonsense direct style. As a credible and authentic expert, I have regularly appeared on around 200 media outlets, including *BBC One Show*, *ITV Tonight*, *BBC Breakfast*, *BBC Morning Live*, documentaries, *Jeremy Vine* on 5 and various programmes on *BBC Radios 2, 4, 5, Scotland* and *Wales*.

Within months of starting the blog I obtained local media coverage and after a year I was paid to be an 'expert' on *BBC Radio 5*. From there, I started to get regular local, regional and national coverage on radio, newspapers, magazines and TV. Within a few years I was getting paid for it. I've now even pulled away from most unpaid media work. Work in the media is now one of my income streams and gives me PR! So, it has double benefits.

It is possible for anyone to get Public Relations (PR) coverage, often with a little bit of luck. However, for most of us it's a matter of either paying someone to get the coverage or work at it oneself. I haven't ever paid for PR but I have worked hard for it. I have undertaken nearly all of the suggestions in this book. It takes time and effort to build up your contacts, discover and take advantage of the opportunities out there and get known as the expert and the 'go to' person for the media to get that PR. This in turn can lead to paid work, giving you income as well as free PR.

I have always had a passion for fighting injustice. I started complaining to companies that didn't keep to agreements or broke consumer law, from the age of 11!

Now an established consumer champion, I also support small businesses to develop their terms and conditions and challenge and support companies to transform and improve their complaint handling through customer insights and perspectives. My unique approach sees customer service through a new lens.

My strong mainstream and social media presence mean that I regularly have the ear of consumers. I know what they want in complaint handling and customer service. I support businesses in focusing on continual improvement with ongoing challenge and support through consultancy, workshops and more and my PR has played a significant part in that success.

Although the title of this book is *How to Get Free PR for Your Business—and Be Paid for It*, it's not truly free, in that it will cost you time and energy. I do also refer to one paid way of getting PR that complements the other ideas but I think it's essential.

Paying someone to do your PR is certainly easier and quicker! However, there are a number of ways you can build up your coverage which a PR person would not do. But only a few are quick wins! You will need to undertake both proactive and reactive activities to get the results you desire. You will need to work out if paying someone to do your PR (and thoroughly check the contract!) is a better option than using your time. There are also a number of tips which help both your PR and other areas of your business too.

There will be wobbles on your PR journey as you build your confidence and experience, but this book will help you with that!

CHAPTER 1

Starting to get publicity in mainstream media

What is PR?

PR is Public Relations, a process of managing communication from you or your company to the public, to influence their perception of you.

When you appear in the media, whether local, regional, national, international, radio, online or TV, that raises your profile. The classic line “No such thing as bad publicity” may or may not be true but it does get your name out there. If you are a business it helps people to get to know you and what you do. People buy from people.

It can be as simple as keeping your audiences up to date with what key figures in your industry or you are doing. When you get noticed for speaking up, you’ll be noticed and viewed as a knowledgeable resource.

You can pay for advertorials, which read like articles but are actually an advertisement and have to be labelled as such to abide by the Advertising Standards Authority rules. You can pay for adverts on radio, TV and online. Even paying for Google Adwords is a form of PR. But arguably the best PR is where you are telling a story or sharing your expertise with the public. This can be in the first person or you can be interviewed or provide comment for features.

In the digital era, social media plays a big part in PR too. Influencer marketing, blogs, websites and social media should also form part of your business strategy. You need a holistic approach.

PR is important for any business. It should be part and parcel of any marketing strategy. But it doesn’t have to be expensive or in fact cost anything, except

time. But be in no doubt, a lot of time. It aids credibility as well as increasing the visibility of your business.

It shows thought leadership and gets you talked about and when others talk about you it's more powerful than you talking about yourself. It's great for brand awareness and trust in it which will increase your overall customer loyalty and therefore sales.

Cheaper than placing adverts which have a clear aim to sell, positive PR is the equivalent of a trustworthy word-of-mouth way of getting your message out there. Ultimately, the media has a bigger reach than you!

A PR person is an individual or an agency who works on your behalf to get the PR for you. Their work involves contacting media outlets and arranging interviews. They have the contacts and know where to look for opportunities that fit, taking away the hard work, time and effort that you would have to spend on getting your own PR! This is sometimes referred to as "Earned PR" because it's all about building trust, credibility and getting people talking about you. It includes mentions in magazines, papers, industry outlets, radio, social media and high website rankings.

The thought of trying to obtain publicity may be daunting. You may feel like you'll never get it. But it is possible! Start small. Get the experience and grow from there. I started with the smallest audience possible in the local free paper for Waltham Forest back in November 2013. It's a long game too and you have to keep at it to retain momentum.

I Decide why you want PR

Plan your objectives. Decide why you want PR. Is it for brand awareness? To launch a new product or service? To gain new customers? To enter a new market? Is it a mix of these for different reasons? Be as specific as you like. Working out and writing these down will help you determine which of these tips to try first, whom to target, how and when.

Obviously, you can change and adapt as you see what works, what doesn't and how to fit in with other priorities.

Jill Foster, a journalist, says "When people apply to be in a story, I always advise that they go into it with open eyes. Your quote and your picture may

be seen across the world so you need to be aware of that. If you want to raise awareness of a cause or charity, then great. But if it's a more personal story, you need to be 100 percent certain that you're comfortable with hundreds of thousands—even millions—of people reading it.”

2 Get your mindset in a good place

This may seem strange but it's important to recognise that PR is part of your work. Don't be shy about it. In fact, talk about it as part of your business to people you know and online. For example, Tigz Rice—a photographer—always makes a point of vocalising her goals to as many people as she possibly can! She strongly believes in those six degrees of separation working wonders!

In order to publicise her photography business, she tweeted that she wanted to be on more podcasts. Someone recommended her to the BBC's *The Naked Podcast*, which resulted in her being interviewed naked in a Kings Cross hotel room in January 2020!

Remember, too, that it's not all about you. The messaging you are providing will also be helping people.

The six degrees of separation theory was an experiment undertaken by American psychologist Stanley Milgram. It demonstrated that on average any two individuals anywhere in the world are separated by just five connections. So this means that you can connect with someone by communicating with one person and from them to another and so on, until the sixth connection.

3 The 7 touch points of marketing

Dr Jeffrey Lant suggested that people need to be “touched” by you seven times before they will buy from you. However, this was before the numerous digital channels that we now have and the analysis tools available. Given the increased number of ways there are for absorbing content, and the amount of content there is, this figure is likely to be much higher. However, you can apply the

concept rather than a rule.

A touch point could be hearing you on the radio, reading about you in a newspaper, seeing you on TV, an advert, an email newsletter, a phone call, your logo on a leaflet, etc.

It is the combination of all these things that help raise your profile. So you want to ensure that you work on a variety of outlets!

See also **160** Monitor the effects of coverage.

4 Read the book and make a plan!

There are a lot of tips in this book! Many of them are actions but you cannot do them all at once. PR is a long game and a combination of steps that you can take to increase your visibility, credibility and ultimately your sales. You won't suddenly be frequently featured on a wide variety of platforms, showing off your expertise.

Read at least this chapter, then **CHAPTER 5 After your appearances**, **CHAPTER 6 Building your media contact list**, **CHAPTER 7 Sending out press releases** and **CHAPTER 8 Boost your profile outside of traditional media** and make notes on which tips you fancy doing the most and write a plan of action.

Start with your objectives and what you want to achieve. Decide on how long you want to spend on PR each day/week, where and what

Ensure your objectives are **SMART**—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic/Relevant and Timebound (e.g. to respond to 5 press call outs a month, to pitch a story to journalists once a week).

SPECIFIC
Clearly defined

MEASURABLE
Can count your responses

ACHIEVABLE
If you follow the advice in this book you will be able to reach these targets

REALISTIC/RELEVANT
Allow a set time each week to undertake this work ensuring relevant to your business

TIMEBOUND
Dates in place

you are going to work on when. Organise your tasks and time and how you will measure success. Set actions, targets and goals for coverage. Could it be reaching certain outlets, for example, or the number of times you want to be quoted as an expert or a case study?

Be clear on the messages you want to provide and the image you want to portray.

Whilst many of the methods may be part of your marketing strategy, the overall strategy should be different. Marketing is about driving sales, whilst PR is about raising profile which may ultimately lead to sales.

This should all form part of your business strategy.

5 Local press

Start with looking at your local newspaper, if you have one, whether it's a free or paid edition. This was the first piece of printed media I did, an opinion piece in *Waltham Forest News*, back in November 2013, on the importance of complaining effectively about consumer issues. Before I did it, I asked a few people in a Facebook group if a similar activity had been useful for them. Many people said that they had received large numbers of social media 'follows' after they did a piece. I didn't get lots of follows but I did get a few and at this point I didn't have anything to sell, either!

6 Local online press

Don't forget online local press too. Janine McDonald, founder of *Clear the Clutter Now*, and author of *Clear the Clutter Now: Streamline Your Life by doing Just 3 Things* set up her business just before the Coronavirus lockdown. She contacted a reporter from an online local newspaper asking if he would be interested in covering the story. He was and it then got picked up by three different newspapers.

7 Contact your local radio station

Rhiannon Abbott is the owner of The Epsom Bakehouse. She teaches people to bake bread at home via online classes and a membership club. When she heard that her local BBC Radio station was going to discuss *The Great British Bake Off* show, she phoned them and offered to go on and join the discussion. She then took part in several other shows for the series. As they had her details, she was invited back in subsequent years for follow-ups.

8 Invite the press to events

If you are running an event, contact your local press who are often looking for stories and good pictures.

Diane Ivory, a former Scotland Yard fingerprint expert and Crime Scene Examiner, now runs workshops and events through her company Forensic Minds. She spent a week delivering workshops at a college and invited a local journalist and a photographer to run a piece on her.

See **87** ➤ Hold an event.

9 Local free advertising

Sometimes a local paper will offer a free to advertise slot to promote local businesses. Do this where you can, as you may gain more than just new customers.

Linda Gransby owns Memories and Photos. She runs residential craft weekends, a monthly Scrap Box Club and online shop. Her local paper has a free to advertise “What’s On” guide where she lists all her photo album and scrapbooking workshops and events.

A BBC researcher saw her ads and asked her to talk about photo and memory preservation and organisation for a slot on local radio. This included being able to give out her contact information, website and social media details.

To read the whole book
you can **buy a copy here.**

How to Get Free PR For Your Business & Be PAID For It

This is a guide packed full of ideas about how to raise your profile. It will help you to grow your own media contact list, approach television, radio and newspaper outlets and leverage your coverage.

Armed with this knowledge you can become the 'go-to' media expert in your chosen subject area, with regular paid-for appearances. The book provides many examples from Helen, and others, who have used these ideas to boost their PR coverage.

“ Helen Dewdney writes with fearless clarity and she's done it again... She's one of my few and regular go-tos, especially for how to approach consumer issues or in the event of an urgent sense check. This book is packed full of great and creative ideas for building up excellent PR, establishing yourself as the expert and keeping the momentum going. She is—hands down—a mega star in the world of consumer affairs and in this latest book, on PR, she shares how you can do it for yourself. ”

Rob Rinder

Barrister, Presenter and Columnist

“ Exceptional, truly exceptional. I've been in business now for 20 years, and PR has been a massive vehicle for me.

Helen Dewdney's PR book is the PR Bible, I promise you. There's no filler; it's all thriller.

No fluff, just straight talk. Succinct and comprehensive, it's an enjoyable, scannable read that gives so much value.

I've seen PR books that are 'hoity-toity', almost costume-playing what it is to be a PR. They are not Absolutely Fabulous. This is—Helen cuts through all that, delivering pure, good stuff, zero wastage. None.

It is as lean as you're going to get. This is the book PR professionals and 'agencies' really do not want you to read. PR just isn't the dark art it's been made out to be, and this book shines a light on everything you'll need to know to go it alone, and get your PR working fast. Before you hire an agency for thousands of pounds, read this for just over a tenner.

Exceptional. A true 10 out of 10 book. Absolute belter. Absolutely fabulous! ”

Brad Burton

4Networking Founder and Motivational Leader

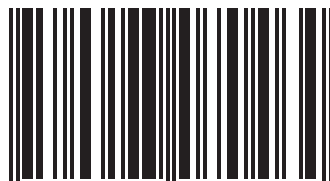
“ Helen's book is full of helpful advice for businesses, big and small, looking to get some publicity.

Helen is a very experienced consumer champion, adept at dealing with journalists from all walks of life. Her advice is easy to follow, practical and will get results. She knows the value of good press and her book is a great starting point for anyone wanting to promote their work and grow their business. ”

Lydney Hope

Freelance Journalist and Editor

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