



Episode 38

Why PR is So Expensive?



**Maria: [00:00]**

Hi. Welcome to Designer Discussions with Maria, Jason and Mirjam. And today we are going to learn why is PR so expensive?

Intro: [00:05]

Welcome to the Designer Discussions podcast. Tune in each week where we discuss marketing, branding, PR and business advice for design professionals.

Mirjam: (00:27)

Yes, that's an excellent question. Maria and I have quite an extended answer to that, actually, because if you think about it, it's not that dissimilar from interior design because they're both service based. They're services. Right. So in reality, you get paid for the time that you invest on your client. And in interior design, okay. Sometimes you make some money on the products that you specify. And in PR, we don't have that right. So really, all we are selling is our expertise, our experience and our time. And of course, we like to get paid for that just like everybody else in the business. Because if you hire a PR person, professional, a good PR professional, it's a person with a lot of skills. It's a person with a lot of hopefully experience in the niche that you're looking for. You pay for the relationships, the connections. It's the whole package that you pay for. It's not just the time. And all of that comes with a price. And so if you think about hiring somebody to help you get published, help you with your PR, whatever your needs are, there's a number of different providers out there that can help you.



Mirjam: (02:07)

There's really large PR agencies. There are boutique agencies that typically focus on a niche area. There's solo consultants like myself. And you really want to think about who you align yourself with when you get that help. And I would say what typically is a good match is if you're a really small business, you're not going to go hire one of the really large PR firms because they're out of your price range, most likely anyway, because they will not work with smaller accounts. And if they do work with you, you're likely not going to get the attention you deserve. That's another issue. We could have a whole other episode about that. But you want to find somebody who specializes in your industry. And I think this is especially true for the design industry. So don't go out hiring a boutique agency that helps tech startups do PR, because they're not going to have the expertise about the industry. They're not going to have the media connection. They're just not going to understand your business well enough to really help you. And sadly, because it is a business like any other business, most PR agencies, they will tell you they can do anything you want them to do. And it's probably true to an extent, because PR is like a foundational skill that you can apply to all different kinds of industries. But there is a learning curve. So if you get a client in the interior design industry and you have never worked in that industry, it's going to take you a lot of time to build up your level of expertise, your understanding of how the business works, finding the right connections with the media, that's all going to take a lot of time. And your agency is going to want to get paid on the time that they spend. So you're likely going to spend more upfront than when you find somebody who already has all of that in place. So that would be my best advice for you. I have actually a good example of aligning the agency you find with your needs. So in my old life, when I worked at Kohler, I had a team internally that I led on the PR side, but we were so busy that we often brought in help from outside agencies. And I've worked with everybody from the large agencies to the smaller agencies to the freelancers.



Mirjam: (04:07)

And at the time I had an agency I really liked, which was very boutique, and they did a great job. I loved them. However, what happened is that the executive management decided that they wanted to streamline all the agency relationships. So they made us fire our agency, which we loved, and they made us work with. It's one of the very biggest PR agencies out there, and they do a great job, but they're a very large agency and they had zero experience in our industry. They didn't have any of the media connections, so we ended up working with them, paid them an insane amount of money. It's insane what they get paid. And I would get complaints from Editors because one of their super junior members would do the pitching and they had no idea what they were talking about. And they're like, why is this person calling me? If I know Miriam at Kohler, it's like, why is she? And it's insulting for the media? So you really have to be careful with who you align yourself with, because the positioning of the person that you work with, it reflects back upon you in a reality. You get what you pay for, like so often in life, right. It is also a fact that the larger the agency is, typically, the more paperwork there is. It's just that they often work with very large companies and there's a lot of need for strategic planning and reporting, and that can take up a lot of time that you always pay for. But if you're an interior designer, regardless if you're a solopreneur or you have a larger studio, you don't need that level of service. So I would caution you to go that route. But there's certainly a lot of great boutique agencies out there. There's a lot of great consultants and publicists out there that do specialize in this area. But just be aware of those differences as you go in, because there's also a cost implication. Since we're talking about how expensive it is, let's take a look at that. So regardless of who you partner with. There's different ways PR people and agencies work with clients. The most common way is a monthly retainer. So you go into the relationship and you say, okay, I'm going to pay you this amount of money per month and you're going to do these things for me.



Mirjam: (07:07)

Right. And the thing about PR is it's a long term endeavor. I always say you can't say, oh, I'm going to do PR now for three months, and then you're going to stop. That's going to be a complete waste of your money and time because PR is a long term strategic discipline that you need to weave into the marketing of your business on a consistent basis if you want to be successful with it. Right. So typically it's a monthly retainer. And when you first enter the contract, it may be six months just so you can make sure it's a good fit and everybody is happy. And the partnership, because it really, truly should be a partnership. The PR agency or the PR consultant you work with, it should feel like that person is part of your team and you're going to have to take some time and work with them so they can get the best results for you. Typically, after six months, if everything goes well, the retainer is just going to keep running. I have clients that I've worked with for years, and when I was in the corporate side, I had agency partners that worked with me for many years. And that's the best way to do it, because then you really get to know each other and the PR expert really gets to know your business and it's going to be so helpful and they're going to get much better results for you. There is also a project options, typically. So if let's say maybe you designed a product with somebody and you just want to get that product launched. So that would be an example of when a project contract would make sense, right? Because you really want to get the product out there. You probably not going to want to do that for two years. This might be a six month or a twelve month thing. So that happens. Also, it's definitely more rare. Oftentimes product launches happen within the framework of a retainer, which makes even more sense because then you can build it into everything else that you do. You can probably find people out there who work hourly. But I will say that it is rather rare because of the fact that it is a long term thing. Right. So working hourly, it doesn't make as much sense. And the benefit of a retainer is too, that I will honestly say probably most PR people work more hours than they get paid for within the retainer because you want to do a good job and you want to get your client what they need.



Mirjam: (10:07)

So then the time that you spend can fluctuate some. It is of course still based on the hourly rate that they would charge. So if you go considerably over in that time that they have allotted for you, they probably say, hey, you know, we got to renegotiate this agreement because we're spending too much. We're spending more time than we had planned for. And usually that's a conversation. And then you can either say, okay, then I don't want all this extra stuff that I'm asking you to do, or you're going to have to up what you pay. Honestly, most of it is very much common sense. I think there are also some people out there who basically say, you pay me when you get results on the PR site. It's like you only pay me when you get published. Anytime you see something like that. That makes all my red flags go up like crazy. Because in reality, in PR, you cannot guarantee things because as the PR person who pitches to the media, you are at the mercy of the editor. Whether or not your story, your feature, your project is getting published or not, it's not my decision. So as a professional, ethically, I cannot promise you that it's going to happen. All I can say is that if I do the very best that I can, I present the content in the best way. I find the best, the most suitable media. You know, like I find the best story angle. Those are things I can guarantee, but I cannot guarantee you that the story is actually going to get published. I cannot guarantee you that. I'm going to get you on the Today show in the next six months. Nobody can do that. So when people say that, just be very careful. There are, of course, more and more paid opportunities out there. So sometimes the fishy PR people, they'll say, oh, I can get you in here, but really they're paying for the placement. So that's not true. Pr. There's a place for everything. I do paid PR opportunities for some of my clients when it makes sense. But I'm transparent about the fact that it is a paid opportunity. So I think there's those differences. So just be a little bit careful. And I will tell you that no honorable, professional PR person will do pay for play.

**Mirjam: (12:07)**

It's like we need to get paid for the time we invest, not for the results that we get, because there are so many variables that go into it, and that's how the business works. And anybody who doesn't approach it that way, I would not recommend you work with and in the end, you're going to get a better deal.

Maria: (13:41)

I think one of the things that's hard to visualize when you're paying for a service is how many touch points are involved. And I think that's the same with interior design. I think a lot of people just focus on what the end result is, and they don't understand the frequency of the touch points and the frequency of the relationship building and getting the acknowledgement of your brand and what your business does by the Editors of the magazine so that they even understand who you are. And then also just in general, if a designer is not prepared, if her assets or his assets are not set up and they are not media friendly, you also really need your PR professional to help you to make sure you're set up properly. So I can see how that would also tie into a long term relationship.

Mirjam: (14:35)

Absolutely. Yes. And it's very true. And part of the onboarding process itself can be pretty involved, depending on what the status of the business is and how much marketing a business has done. If everything is organized, if they have an idea of priorities, you're going to want to make sure you line it all up and you agree on the goals that you have. So you have something measurable things at the end of the day, because as PR professionals, we're here to support your bottom line. That's our job, right? No, but that's an excellent point. Now that we've been talking very vaguely about how expensive this is, I'm going to give you just some ballpark numbers of what we mean when we say it's expensive and there's always numbers flying around. It's like people who say, oh, it's like, oh, you have to pay at least \$5,000 a month to get PR help. And that's not completely off. Actually, I would say that typical retainers within the industry. So we're talking monthly range between 3000 \$5,000 and you can have a \$10,000 retainer and you're just going to get more services for it, you're going to get more time, so you're going to get more results.



Mirjam: (16:07)

If you think about that, I would say that the hourly rates that are charged in PR are probably somewhere between 100 and \$350 an hour. If you work with a large agency, even the peon on the team is going to be charged at \$150 an hour. Okay. So if you have a meeting with three people from your agency team that meetings going to cost you \$1,000 plus. So just keep that in mind if you go with a smaller agency and of course they have overhead, right. It's an entirely different business model. So if you can find a boutique agency or a freelance consultant to help you, your cost will definitely be maximized. So that being said, PR is not cheap and it shouldn't be. It shouldn't be because it's an important service. And frankly, in interior design, if you are not a published interior designer, it's really not optional. If you want to be taken seriously, if you want to be recognized in the industry, especially in the luxury industry, it's required that you have that going for you. So I would look at it as an investment. It's a business investment, and there's different ways you can go about it, certainly. But so is that about the numbers you guys were expecting, or Maria nodding. Yeah, awesome.

Maria: (17:01)

I would say since I've been trained by the expert here on our panel on how to do some of my own PR, I didn't realize how much time and attention it does take. But it is doable to be able to be done yourself in office and kind of at least have that presence and to understand how PR works and be able to apply it so that you can get the placements and the SEO and all of the things that we really do need as designers. And more importantly, we also really need that professional out there that can look at our assets and say, fix your website. You do need to pair yourself up with this brand, and your social media does need to be brought up. There's so much that even a small design firm really can benefit from having access to some form of PR education. So, Mirjam, can you talk to us a little bit about that?



Mirjam: (18:07)

Yeah, absolutely. Today, there's so much free education out there for anybody. Of course, you know me, I'm a big believer that especially in the interior design industry, it's ideal to do your own PR because you are your own best publicist and you don't have to do all the fancy stuff that I call fluff. That's not really going to benefit your business if you just focus on the basics. It's exactly what you just talked about. You want to get those placements. So all you're basically doing is media relations. You start out with that and then you add on as you get more proficient, and it's an investment in your business and your long term going to be so much better off building that muscle, building those relationships yourself, then continuously paying somebody else to do it. And there's a lot of free information from many different people out there. I mean, go on YouTube, Google it. There's a ton out there. And for my Getting DIY program is set up. It's sort of a hybrid. So I help people get better at doing their own PR. So I'm the coach who gently sort of pushes them along and provides input and feedback and a little other extra help along the way just to make it easier and more manageable.

Maria: (21:01)

I personally participate in Miriam's Get Inc. Diy program, and I've learned so much about how to get local placements and to also get national publications. It's just dedicating a little bit of time each week towards PR and just learning directly from Marion. It's been a game changer for me for a business as an interior designer.

**Jason: (22:01)**

Mirjam, this has been a great talk, and we've learned a lot about PR that I didn't know and about the pricing and all that is great information. So if anybody wants to learn more about your program, how do they do so?

Mirjam: (22:22)

The easiest way is you can go to my website it's getinkdiy.com or you can find me pretty much anywhere on Instagram on LinkedIn on Facebook. Not so much on Twitter or you can email me at Mirjam@getink.com too.

Jason: (21:48)

Great. We hope to see you all here next week on Designer Discussions.

Outro: (21:53)

We hope you enjoyed this episode of designer discussions. What was your takeaway care to share your thoughts and tag Jason, Maria and Mirjam on social media. You can find them on allplatforms@designerdiscussions.com.com. Don't forget to like subscribe and leave a review or comment for this episode from wherever you are listening.



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