



Episode 94

Top 10 PR Questions



**Jason: (00:00)**

Hello and welcome to designer discussions with Jason, Mirjam and Maria. Today we're talking with Mirjam about the top 10 PR questions.

Intro: [00:10]

Welcome to the designer discussions podcast with Jason, Maria, and Mirjam. Tune in each week where we talk about marketing, PR, and business advice for design professionals. Are you wondering where to start marketing your interior design business? We are opening the Designer Discussions Marketing Studio, a monthly series of indepth actionable content to guide your marketing, PR and business development. We want to help you transform your business and elevate it to work with your dream clients. You are going to want to hear this episode. Jason is going to tell you how to get your new website paid for and include all the bells and whistles that you're going to need for 2023. Let's get out there and let's update that interior design website.

Jason: (0:45)

Number one, do I need an agency or a publicist?

Mirjam: (01:07)

I think we've talked about this probably in other episodes, too, but it's definitely probably the number one question that always comes up. The reason being that a lot of designers are so intimidated by the whole concept of PR, and they don't think they can actually do it themselves. And that while I'm not going to say it's easy, I would say that unless... There's really two scenarios where I would say you should hire somebody to help you with your PR. If it's an established business, know that brings in good revenue and you have budget to pay somebody to help you because you're going to have to budget between at least three to five, six plus thousand dollars a month to have somebody help you with your PR. And that just is not feasible for a lot of newer businesses. But on the other side, if you are a newer business and you really focused on marketing, then you also want to integrate PR right away. And it might be a time question. Maybe you have the capabilities to do it, but you can't do everything when you're starting a business. So then you might also want to think about hiring somebody.

**Mirjam: (02:07)**

But otherwise, I'm a big proponent of the business taking on the PR itself, either the principal or somebody on staff, because it is an investment in your future because PR is something that you're going to be doing for the entirety of the lifetime of your business. So in the end, it saves you a lot of money and brings you a lot of perks if you can figure out a way to do it yourself. And that's why also I am here to help you do that if that's what you decide to do.

Jason: (03:01)

Number two, what types of media placements should I focus on to maximize the impact of my brand's visibility?

Mirjam: (03:11)

This is a little bit of a trick question because a lot of designers, when they think of publicity, they think of being in AD or House Beautiful or El Decor, one of the big titles. But that is very difficult to do. It's like you have to have a lot of the relationships and the portfolio and the track record for those people to get on their radar. So for an average design or remodeling business, what I recommend is that you position yourself as an expert. So you get some of those expert mentions, which are usually online and are fairly easy to get with services like Harrow and the media opportunities memberships that we offer in our marketing studio. That's the number one. That's the easiest. And it's very impactful because you still get to brag about all the placements that you have gotten, even if you just got a one sentence quote. The second way I always say to promote yourself is build relationships with your regional media, especially if your business is focused on regional customers. It's super impactful for you to be featured in a regional magazine. So when you think about project placements, don't necessarily think about the national options, but go regional because that's going to actually be more impactful for your business and it's much easier to get because they're also looking for regional projects to feature. Those are my two top ways for you to get visibility in the media.

Jason: (05:09)

Number three, what are some practical ways to build relationships with media contacts and journalists without paying for PR services?

**Mirjam: (05:07)**

It really comes down to being proactive and reaching out to the media. And you can do this in various different ways. Harrow, the help or report or out request are a super easy way to get connected with the right journalists because... So this is where they put the queries, the request out and you respond. If you don't know what I'm talking about, we'll put a link in the show notes so you can get more information about it. But that's by far the easiest way to get connected with the journalists that write about interior design. The second way is to do a little bit of research and find out who the journalists in your area are that cover interior design. It can sound intimidating, but we have some trainings and we're working on more to teach you exactly how to do this. Those are the two best ways. You can also, if there are local events where there's media present, it's always a good idea to go say hello. If you see a journalist, don't be intimidated. They're just people like you and me. There's, of course, social media and you can definitely follow and interact with media on social media, but you just have to be careful that it doesn't come across as inauthentic, I would say. So if you want to be supportive, you want to like their stuff, that's great. You make some insightful comments, but just don't necessarily use it as pitching yourself to them. But it's a good way to connect. But not every journalist likes to be contacted directly on social media, so just be a little bit careful with that.

Jason: (05:09)

Number four, what are the essential elements of a compelling pitch that can capture the interests of editors and journalists?

Mirjam: (07:29)

So the first point I'm going to make, it might be a little counterintuitive, but it needs to be short. It needs to be short and concise. It's like, you want to reach out to them? I always recommend via email, and you have to get straight to the point. So the email needs to contain a few basic things. It's like, who are you? Why are you reaching out to them? What is it that you're pitching them? And why is it important for them and their leadership? So it's got to be super short. And typically when we're talking interior design, it is often a project. So if you pitch a project, include the necessary information about the project and include images. Definitely include images. Don't hold back with images. They're not going to steal your images. These are all professionals. You don't have to watermark them or do crazy things. They're only going to publish it if you come to an agreement. But so information, images, include facts. Don't be salesy. Don't tell them, You want what you want. Tell them why, what you have is interesting for them. So put yourself in their shoes and say, Hey, I can help you. I have this awesome stuff for you. Those are a few of the things I would say, but keep it short. Not more than three paragraphs ever. They're not going to read it. And don't include attachments, please.

**Jason: (09:09)**

Number five, how do I get brand partnerships?

Mirjam: (09:19)

This is an easy one. You just talk to brands to get brand partnerships. It's a little bit the same idea as with the media. You can sit there and be awesome. The chances of brands proactively reaching out to you are not super great because there's a lot of people out there and they do get approached by other designers. So if brand partnerships are something you want, then just make a short list of your favorite brands that you truly like. And I am talking mutually beneficial long term brand partnerships. It's almost like you're a brand loyalist, you're an ambassador. And that doesn't necessarily mean that you get paid a lot of money for it. I'm talking about building a long term relationship with a brand that you really, really like. So you have to find the people who are in charge of their brand partnerships. And it's usually somebody in marketing, if they have a communications department, it's them, the PR people that do it. Sometimes it's the agency. But just go reach out to somebody and ideally show them why you love their brand. Show them that you love their product, that you want to work with them in whatever capacity. Show them a picture of where you've used their product. They're going to love you forever. But don't just do it on social media and tag them, but make a specific effort to approach them personally. And then I would say take it from there. You don't have to go in with a full blown proposal because they may have processes in place already in how they work with brand partnerships through designers. So just go in and ask and have a conversation with people and then see where it goes. Maybe it works for you, maybe it doesn't. And if it's not that brand, it might be another brand. But it's not complicated. It's about building relationships with the right people within the brands that you want brand partnerships with.

Jason: (11:37)

Also, listen to Episode 42 and 85, where we talk about PR and brand partnerships.

Mirjam: (11:46)

Yes, lots of good info in those episodes. Definitely listen to those.

Maria: (11:51)

All right, Mirjam, so I have some questions for you, too. How does an interior designer stay up to date with the current trends and topics that the media is interested in?

**Mirjam: (11:59)**

This is super easy actually. I would say that in the design industry, most topics are reoccurring. It's very much a seasonal... The content is always seasonal because there's spring makeovers and then there's summer parties and travel and then there's fall and the holidays. The content calendar is pretty much set. But the best way to know how the nuances of that shift and whatever new trend might be the rage right now, you don't even have to go ask Google, honestly. You just have to plug into help a reporter out requests, which is the media opportunities membership that we offer in the marketing studio, or you can sign up for the emails yourself. Listen to the trainings we have on this. It's all in there. But that's where you find the latest and greatest of what the journalists are writing about. It's released. And I know, Maria, you've done this, too. I like to look through the queries just to see what's bubbling up and what people are talking about. So that's by far the easiest way to do that.

Maria: (13:21)

How do I get print placement in national magazines?

Mirjam: (13:25)

And I talked a little bit about this when I said what types of visibility are important in media. I'm like, this is advanced PR, I would call it. So when you work with national magazines, it's always very competitive because everybody wants to get into them. And when you're talking about print, the number one thing you have to be aware of is that these placements are negotiated sometimes years in advance. I remember when I reached out to AD a while ago and the editor told me that they're completely booked for a year and a half out. Even if you had a chance to get in, they have already booked out. The content is already set. When you start an amazing new project and you think it has the potential for national coverage, you want to reach out to whichever your target publication is super early on. And you have to be aware it's always 100 % exclusive. So you're only going to be talking to one. If you talk to AD, you're not going to talk to at the same time. No, they're never going to talk to you again if you do that, actually. But so just plan ahead and make sure you don't don't publish any type of content.

**Mirjam: (15:09)**

Let's say, maybe for some, you already have pictures or don't talk about it on social media. Don't show a bunch of pictures because if you have an exclusive deal with a national magazine and they all only do exclusive, that's all for them. So whatever you do, whatever you share, I would always clear it with the person that you have the agreement with. And it's a long game. It can take a year and a half, maybe even longer, before that project gets published. So this is not what I would call a quick win, but if you can get it, it's going to have legs for years and years and years to come. So it is worth it. But when you look at the magazines, and I hear this from designers a lot, they say, Oh, it's always the same people. It's like because they have the best agency or they have the best connections. And part of that is true. As a newcomer, your chances of getting a placement in a national magazine's in print are slim. So I probably wouldn't focus my efforts and energy in that area. I would start with smaller placements like we've talked about before and build up to it. And eventually, if you're consistent, it can definitely happen for you.

Maria: (16:21)

How can I ensure that my design projects are worked through accurately and in a positive manner in media coverage?

Mirjam: (16:25)

Actually, you can't because usually you can have a level of control over it. Maria just pouted at me. But that's why PR is called earned coverage, because you're not buying an advertisement and you don't control the content. So you want to put your best foot forward. You want to put a lot of thought into the type of information you share with the media, how you message your key points, what types of images you share. And then you hand over all the information to the editor and they will build the story. And oftentimes you don't get to read it. Sometimes they let you read it, but they don't have to. It's the freedom of the press. They have the editorial to pretty much say whatever they want. Granted, we're in a space that I would consider very friendly. They're not out to get you. They want to write the best story possible, but it can happen that the focus of the story that they pick, the angle may not be what you would have wanted. And then you don't have grounds to go back to them and say, Hey, but that's not what I wanted you to write, because they are writing the story and you provide the content.

**Mirjam: (18:09)**

I don't think that it happens very often in our industry that something goes completely wrong. But I've had it happen that the story of the title of a project that we placed, it was focused on the people who lived in the house, who had a celebrity connection, and the owners of the home were not happy with that. So I had to go back and negotiate with the editor to have that tweaked, but they didn't tell us they didn't want it mentioned. Sometimes things can go a little bit wrong and you can negotiate or sometimes ask for changes if it's online. But if it's printed, that's it. It's out there. There's nothing you can do. So you just have to be aware that you are not in control of the content. You are only in control of the content that you provide, and then they will shape it into the story that they think best suits their audience.

Maria: (19:21)

That's awesome advice. I didn't know you could negotiate and come back about things like that.

Mirjam: (19:25)

A little bit. But don't do it too often because then they're not going to like you anymore.

Maria: (19:21)

Interesting. Okay, so how am I supposed to be measuring the success of my PR efforts in terms of the media coverage and what that impact looks like on my business?

Mirjam: (19:34)

Measurement is a tricky thing for public relations because it's not like when you do SEO or pay per click advertising, lead generation, it's very difficult to measure. The biggest part of the value of PR is in what we call the third party credibility. It's the credibility that you gain from being featured in a reputable media outlet. I'm very much against attaching value to that. It used to be that when it was more print heavy, that we would take the size of the PR placement and figure out how much it will cost as an ad, and then people would add random multipliers. Sometimes agents would say, Well, this is worth six times as much as an ad, or This is worth 10 times as much as an ad. I don't think it really matters. What matters is not impressions or ad equivalency is what we use to call it. What matters is that you get featured in the right publications. If you can get a project featured in your regional magazine and all your potential customers read it, that's infinitely more valuable for your business than getting a placement in USA Today and get millions of impressions.

**Maria: (22:09)**

Mirjam, I have an interesting story in this. I remember talking to someone and them saying, Oh, I hired this great interior designer. She's promoted by HGTV. And all I could think was, Oh, that's those things where you sign up and then you have to send it out to everyone you know. And they have to continue to share about the website so that the company is getting all this great SEO and all of this high ranking website placements because your job is to get enough people to say that they love you and that they were willing to click on all the links and sign up on the email list. And once they do that, then they're willing to take the top 10 people and feature them on the website. And it's very interesting for me because from the person's perspective that's hiring the interior designer, they feel like that placement was a level of credibility, and they don't understand how the person got that mention. And so I do think a lot of the time just having even the small placements, getting to have those labels and brands that show up on your website. People don't even want to know how you got there and how much work it took and how you went about getting those types of placements. So I do think that with a lot of this, you do want get those big magazine placements every once in a while. You just need a couple of them to just show you have that level of credibility. But a continual placement of small things, it builds your brand.

Mirjam: (23:25)

Yes, 100 %.

Maria: (23:41)

That's the brand building part of your business because it doesn't matter if HGTV reached out to you and asked you to do a TV episode. There's no difference in the credibility there. And then one of these invite everybody to help someone else's SEO out, and then they get give you a little label for your website. So it's very interesting. Everything has a different weight and a different value. So let's go into my final question I have for you, Maryam. How can I best support my own PR efforts and increase the likelihood of getting featured in those media outlets?



Mirjam: (24:25)

This is a little complex, the answer to this, but we did a whole episode on it where it's called how to get found by the media, and it's Episode 69. So we'll link to that in the show notes as well. But basically it just comes down to you putting your best foot forward in how you present yourself in your business and in your marketing. I always say it's unlikely that the media is going to find you. Okay, let's say that. But if you want to increase the likelihood of that happening, it definitely helps to have a solid social media presence and to be active on social media because it's one of the places where design editors usually go look for content. So be sure you post your projects, you post about your got yourself, you have current information about you. I'd say definitely Instagram is the number one place where editors go look for new content. Make sure your website is up to date and in case they go there, make sure it's representative of what your style is, of who you are. Just make sure all those things are in place. Those are the two most important areas that I think you just have to make sure that you show up as you want to be seen. And the more you show up, the more likely somebody is going to come across you. You don't have to have a gazillion followers, but maybe if you had a white kitchen project and you put it on Instagram and you hashtag it white kitchen, and there's an editor who's looking for images for a white kitchen story, maybe I'll find you that way. He or she. I would never recommend that this is all you do if you want to get PR, but those are the basics. Have your branding and your marketing in place. And that'll really help once you get to the point where PR might happen to you as a strike of luck, or you decide you actually want to take it into your own hands and start doing it yourself so you can have another component of your marketing in place. That's it.

Maria: (26:41)

Honestly, this is a lot of questions, a lot of information, but I think it's going to help pull back that veil between PR and in the interior design industry, especially when you don't have the big bucks to pay for someone who understands everything that you do and how you can take that information and apply it to a small business. I think this is very valuable to a lot of interior designers.

**Jason: (27:15)**

Mirijam, we thank you for answering these questions. This was a great episode. Be sure to listen to all the past episodes that we referenced, Episode 42, Episode 69, and Episode 85, and also visit us on the Marketing studio for more information there as well. So we hope to hear you all here in two weeks on Design & Discussions.

Outro: (27:41)

So we are super excited to announce that the marketing studio is open. We are providing simple and easy to use resources to help keep your marketing, PR, and client communication the best that it can be. Go to designerdiscussions.com marketing studio to get started. We hope you've enjoyed this episode of designer discussions and all of the helpful information. Subscribe to our podcast, leave us a review, and share it with your friends. We look forward to having you back next week. For more information on the podcast and the marketing studio, visit designerdiscussions.com and follow us on social media.





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