



## LIVE CHAT WITH ANNE HODES | 02 May 2012

- Gillb: Hello and welcome to today's live chat about the PR and events industry with Annie Hodes, owner of Angelfish PR & Events. Right, let's begin!
- Anniehodes: Hello everyone – welcome.
- Jade: I just started an events company. What do you wish someone had told you before you started your business?
- Anniehodes: I started my own business in 2006 and I was lucky, as I secured a retainer with Mugg & Bean Head Office. I knew already that it would be a lot of hard work and planning, but I wish someone had told me about how disciplined you need to be working as your own boss.
- Hanna: How do you handle it when an event doesn't go according to plan? How important is it to have a plan B in place?
- Beenzu: Hello, I am joining this chat as someone without any clue. Let me start by asking what is a PR agency and what does it do?
- Gwendolen: Hello Annie. I run a company called Xtraordinary Women and we host events that inspire women to dream big and to live their lives with purpose. We try to keep these events cost-effective so that women can afford to attend them. My biggest challenge with that is that in order to keep it cost-effective, I need to start relying on sponsors. Any suggestions on how to go about approaching people for sponsorship?
- Anniehodes: It is very important to always think on your feet. I don't always have a plan B as such, but I'm able to troubleshoot well and usually this is sufficient should challenges arise. A plan B could be eg a rain plan for a function which is based outside and for something like this there would always be an alternative venue booked just in case.
- Gillb: Welcome everyone! Annie will answer your questions in the order they appear.

- Anniehodes: A PR agency such as mine focusses on getting as much publicity for my clients as possible. We strategise, identify all available opportunities and angles, write press releases about these angles and create and manage events around these.
- Beenzu: Thank you Anne. How did you market your PR agency when you just started, especially that you had no direct referrals at the time?
- Anniehodes: Hi gwendolen. Firstly, your product needs to be clearly defined and understand how you would like to position your product. Secondly, put a great PR plan together explaining how your product will benefit the sponsor. Always identify benefits and values. To keep costs down, a good idea is to get a media partner on board and perhaps this partner can guarantee editorial in exchange for a venue or perhaps food and beverage.
- Gwendolen: Thank you so much, Annie, for the valuable advice. How would your company be able to assist us with growing awareness of our brand and our events?
- Lindimakhaza: Hi Annie. How do you get companies to see your service as more than an events company and position you at strategic level in line with their marketing strategy?
- Anniehodes: I was fortunate that I had established myself in the PR industry before going on my own, having worked for a big hotel chain for many years, which helped tremendously. One of my strengths is my networking ability – I ensure I get “out there” as much as possible. Word of mouth has been my main source of referrals. Use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn as much as possible. Perseverance is key. Try to specialise in a specific industry so you get to be known within the media. One of my clients always teases me that I always have such a good media turnout at all my events because I nag them so much – they are too scared to not attend :)
- Neotumi: Hi Annie, please advice on how to start an events company. What do you really need to get into this industry?
- Anniehodes: Hi again gwendolen. We would need to get a good understanding of your business, meet up with you and establish what you are looking for.
- Anniehodes: Hi lindimakhaza. Everything is about strategy, the events are only a small part of the big picture. We also put a PR proposal together, which would include the strategic objectives and we would align whatever we propose around the marketing strategy.

- Beenzu: Anne, coming to events management, would you say there is a difference in the way one would manage say a wedding and a corporate function? What common ground would such different functions have, if any?
- Lindimakhaza: We understand that. But I find that most clients don't.
- Anniehodes: Hi neotumi. Experience is key – if someone doesn't have any experience at all, the best is to try to get as much as possible, even if it means just helping out and shadowing at as many events as possible. Once you get started you would need to get your name out there as much as possible. Develop a good relationship with venues, suppliers, etc. I hope that helps.
- Anniehodes: Hi beenzu. I think the fundamentals are all the same in terms of the actual organisation of the event. With a corporate client, however, you are bringing different stakeholders to the event, eg high-profile business people, media and celebrities and you need to be very on the ball. The same would apply with a wedding, although you are dealing with the emotions of the bride, groom and family, which adds a whole new dimension – they need the extra fuzzy warm care.
- Gwendolen: Could you perhaps give us an idea of what products/services a PR company can provide their clients?
- Beenzu: I know every start-up is encouraged to check with the competition when it comes to pricing, among other things. My opinion is that it is not always effective to base your pricing going by market conditions. How did you work your way around this? This is always a challenge to a start-up, as compared to an established business.
- Anniehodes: Hi lindimakhaza. I agree that it is very difficult – a lot of people don't even know what PR actually is and they often think that PR and marketing are one and the same, when there is such a big difference between them. I always use the analogy “marketing you pay for – PR you pray for!” If you can prove monetary value in terms of publicity received, this helps. I assume you use a clipping agency, as this is a great way to ensure you get the value of all PR received and don't miss any articles or online and broadcast mentions. I also worked in PR in the corporate world and often directors just don't get how important PR is, which is very frustrating when you are trying to get budget allocated. The proof is usually in the pudding, though and with great results usually comes more understanding of the crucial role a PR agency or department would play.

Anniehodes: Hi gwendolen. This could be broken up into internal and external communication. An internal comms strategy could be used eg for general communication within a large organisation or it could be used if eg a company is going through change management. An agency could also assist with the CSI (corporate social investment) strategy and look at what would best be aligned with the brand. External services could include anything from crises communication to launches of products and writing of press releases, securing editorial (at the publication's own discretion) or placing of advertorials (paid for), proof-reading and ensuring all communication has the correct look and feel.

Gwendolen: Thank you Annie! You have been most helpful!

Lindimakhaza: Thanks Annie. After 12 years doing PR work in my previous business, I am in the process of starting my own agency. Being new in Johannesburg means I have to start over. As mentioned, networking is life blood of PR, but it can be challenging when you are new in the city.

Anniehodes: Hi beenzu. You are absolutely right, it is a challenge. However, you have to believe in yourself and believe what your worth is. Sometimes when people undercharge then clients perceive the service as being too cheap. Definitely get an idea of what your competitors are charging and especially if you are starting out, don't go in too expensive, but at the same time, don't sell yourself short. You have to believe your company is worth something.

Anniehodes: Hi lindimakhaza. Absolutely, it is a challenge, but you'll get there. Get in touch with anyone and everyone you know linked to this industry – tweet relevant comments and post information on Facebook. I'm sure your 12 years of experience will stand you in good stead. Start adding as many contacts as possible on LinkedIn – this alone will open many doors for you. Good luck!

Beenzu: Thank you so much Annie, you have been a great help. Are you at liberty to provide your email or any other contact info, just in case?

Busisiwesithole: Hi Annie. I just got my certificate in events management obtained through UCT. I am working full time and looking into changing careers, but am not yet ready to quit my current job. How can I go about getting working experience on a part-time voluntary basis? Are there companies that allow for this?

Anniehodes: Yes, absolutely: [annie@angelfishpr.co.za](mailto:annie@angelfishpr.co.za) or 083 325 4445. It's a pleasure. All the best.

Anniehodes: There are always companies who will take you on – you just need to be persistent and sell yourself. Get onto the net and contact as many PR and event companies as possible. Even if they don't have anything for you right now, make sure they know you are available and guaranteed the time will come when they need someone to pitch and that'll be your chance.

Emma: Hi Annie. When it comes to PR, what people skills are most important?

Anniehodes: busisiwesithole, are you based in CT? If you send me your details, I can send them on to a company I work with in CT, in case they ever need an extra pair of hands.

Lindimakhaza: Thank you for your suggestions and guidance.

LadyBailey: Hi Annie. Big props to for embarking on one of the most liberating and risk-infused adventures of starting on your own. Women like you are a great inspiration to me. Please advise your web address as I would like to pass on your details. Just one question, though: what is the best possible PR strategy/basics for an emerging business?

Beenzu: Thank you for the contact information, I will certainly get in touch. I am just curious, though – how do you manage a PR and an events company? My guess would be that there is no connection, no?

Busisiwesithole: No, I'm based in Johannesburg.

Anniehodes: Hi Emma. Definitely tenacity, perseverance, excellent communication skills and an eye for detail to ensure nothing is missed. It helps to be a bit of an extrovert as well as friendly and outgoing with your clients, guests, media, etc. That way you develop relationships which always stand you in good stead.

Gillb: 5 more minutes everyone – last few questions please!

Anniehodes: Hi LadyBailey, thanks so much. The best is to email me. The product/s need to be clearly defined and positioned. Understand the target audience. Once you have established this, you can look at which media to align the product to and cost-effective events and launches to gain as much exposure as possible.

Gwendolen: Your website address please.

Anniehodes: Hi beenzu. Eventing is one of the aspects of PR, depending on the clients you have. As we focus on the hospitality industry,

part of promoting hotels and restaurants would be to get media personalities to experience what's on offer and as such I do a lot of events. However, there could be other industries which need more of a focus on CSI or just communicating news on a product. It depends completely on what you are publicizing, eg a clothing line would entail getting fashion briefs and arranging shoots. Hope this helps.

Beenzu: Thank you for sharing and for your time.

Gillb: Unfortunately that's all the time we have for today. Thanks to everyone for participating and especially to Annie for sharing her expertise! Have a great day.

Anniehodes: Such a pleasure. My website is under construction at present, so please contact me on [annie@angelfishpr.co.za](mailto:annie@angelfishpr.co.za) or 083 325 4445.

Gillb: Bye everyone!

Anniehodes: You too. Thanks everyone