



## On-line Public Relations and the Blogosphere New Rules for Growing your Book of Business

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Establishing yourself as a credible expert is critical in this increasingly competitive environment. Investors are selective about where they get financial information and advice, and an excellent way to differentiate and market yourself is with on-line Public Relations (PR).

Public relations is no longer just for professionals; using the power of blogs, forums and the social web, you can establish your expertise at both a local and national level with little outside help.

The silver lining of the economic downturn is that great businesses and entrepreneurs can increase market share, and financial advisors are no exception. Clients and prospects are scarce—and scared—as a result of the financial market decline. A carefully executed PR strategy can expose your firm to your market through highly credible channels, while providing a calming and much-needed perspective during a period of uncertainty.

### The new world of PR

In the new world of online PR, it's not about who you know, but what you know and what you are willing to contribute. Traditionally, public relations revolved around writers and editors, but today's PR is driven by bloggers and forum administrators. A growing number of individuals are participating on social networks like LinkedIn and investment forums on [Early-Retirement.com](http://Early-Retirement.com). The bottom line: a wealth of potential prospects are within your reach through online PR channels.

Success in online PR is all about content creation. Every day, millions of people share their thoughts and perspectives on the financial markets; the ones who succeed adhere to two best practices:

1. **Consistency:** The absolute key to success is consistency. While creating content that shares your perspective with the world can be interesting at first, it can quickly become time-consuming. Like anything else, your blog and your readership has a tipping point; if you consistently produce high quality content, you will eventually gain a following.



2. **Marketing tactics:** Unfortunately, “build it and they will come” mentalities don’t work on the Web. Certainly, marketing yourself and your perspectives online is much easier than with traditional PR, but it still requires a thorough game plan. A step-by-step plan for conceptualizing and executing on smart marketing tactics will get you in front of your target audience.

Blog marketing is a good place to start, and future articles will cover topics such as forum and social network marketing. Blogs are similar to newsletters and can be updated on a daily or weekly basis with high quality articles.

## **A step-by-step approach to online PR success**

### **Step 1: Do your research**

Before you start, develop a sense of the PR best practices of other financial advisors, on both a local and national level. Your research will enable you to understand the competitive environment and will provide a yardstick for your future PR efforts. Here are some smart ways to conduct your initial research:

1. **Find a featured financial advisor or analyst.** Go to your local newspaper and magazines and take down the names of the finance columnists. Search their names with “blog” (e.g. “Robert Keen Blog”) to see if they currently maintain any blogs. One of the best ways to devise a strategy is to follow and adapt the steps that a successful financial advisor took to become featured.
2. **Search for local financial and investment advice blogs.** Start with blog search engines like [Google Blogs](#). These search engines will index millions of blogs on a daily basis. Type in searches with your local city/region and finance/investment related keywords (e.g., “Wichita Finance” or “Wichita Investment”).
3. **Find lists of top financial blogs on the Web.** Lists like WiseBread’s [Top 100+ Personal Finance Blogs](#) provide a good roadmap of blogs on which you can model your own.

### **Step 2: Create your official blog**

If you are relatively new to blogging or if you do not have the resources, money or time to create a web presence that includes a website with a professional URL and a fully-integrated blog, you may simply set up a 'hosted' blog. These are available, free of charge, from popular sources like [Wordpress](#), [TypePad](#), and [Blogger.com](#). The great thing about these solutions is that they afford you an opportunity to build a web



presence without great expense, or a tremendous amount of technical knowledge. The URL would look like this: <http://www.typepad.com/bobfinancialplanning>.

### **Step 3: Create a content roadmap**

Creating high quality, differentiated content is a must in online PR. Once you've done your research and have a good sense of your likes and dislikes, you're ready to create your own content roadmap. This will enable you to create an inventory of article topics for the next few weeks or months.

Here are some ways to brainstorm ideas for engaging articles:

1. **Keep your audience in mind.** Your initial readers will most likely be current clients, friends, family and your extended circle of influence. So, you don't have to start by writing for a national audience or even your local community. Tailor each article as if you were speaking to people you know personally. This will enable you to narrow down your topics and will help you develop an approachable and friendly tone.
2. **Don't be intimidated.** When you start blogging, don't be overwhelmed by the amount of content that has already been created on the Web. There are no "silver bullet" financial perspectives and investment strategies. People care about gathering different points of view. If you have valuable and thoughtful posts about the areas they care about, you will attract readers, no matter how many other articles may cover the same topic.
3. **Content doesn't have to be original.** Take the best of what other advisors have created as a starting point—then offer a rebuttal or give more detail. Put all of the best blogs you found on an RSS Reader, a Web tool that aggregates all of the blog articles that you are following and put them in one place.

### **Step 4: Execute an online marketing and PR strategy**

Success or failure of your Personal PR program depends on how you market your blog. Here are some smart tactics that will guarantee a growing readership:

1. **Start marketing with a list you already own: your Rolodex.** One of the easiest ways to use your blog is as an online newsletter. Package your weekly articles and send them to clients, prospects and professionals you have met throughout your career. You will be surprised at how many clients will find your articles useful and will see your expertise in a new light. This technique is also helpful



when engaging new prospects; ask them to visit your blog to read more about your investment ideas and approaches.

2. **Contact the editors of your local newspapers and online magazines.** Using the editorial contact information section, create a detailed database of contacts. Choose your best blog article and write a tailored email to each editor, explaining your new blog and the articles you will be writing (be sure to highlight the featured article you've written). Find out if you might be able to write a "guest column." Every news source needs quality content, and if you can show a commitment to providing it, you will increase your chances for exposure.
3. **Read other industry/financial blogs.** Follow good blogs on a daily/weekly basis and look for opportunities to comment on their posts. By providing thoughtful comments on their blogs—and leaving your blog's URL—you will benefit from any exposure they receive.
4. **Optimize, optimize, optimize.** You will also want to make sure your blog is search-engine-optimized (optimized to your region) and indexed in search engines and local news vehicles. With Google [Webmaster](#) and [Analytics](#) accounts, you can monitor the types of visitors and which sites referred them to your blog. By keeping track of your visitors you will focus your efforts on the channels that produce more visitors, whether it's a friend who has referred fifty readers, or a blog that mentioned you. The person or company who developed your website can help identify which channels may be most productive for you.

## Step 5: The Do's and Don'ts of blog marketing

Proper online blogging etiquette is essential and can help you avoid problems and maximize your success. Consider the following best practices when you're promoting yourself online.

1. **Adding value vs. commercial promotion:** While it is completely acceptable (and a good marketing tactic) to leave comments on relevant industry or competitive blogs, there is a fine line between providing great content/feedback and promoting your services. If you focus too much on overtly promoting your firm without adding a new perspective, visitors will stop reading your comments and site owners may even ban you from submitting new comments. Wrap all of your "promotional" efforts with a thought-provoking response or comment that will get readers to come to your blog for more. Consult with your attorney or compliance officer to make sure that you are not overstepping any regulatory requirements during your outreach efforts.



2. **Be mindful of personal space:** The Web has made it much easier to find out the personal information of editors, writers and other influencers. You'll gain the respect and attention of these influencers if you're mindful of their time and personal space, and communicate with them on their preferred channel. This can mean finding their LinkedIn account and sending them a message, or following them on a public commenting/messaging service like Twitter.

The world of PR offers new and powerful tools. Your clients and prospects are online every day—and using a smart online PR strategy will enable you to become an important source of financial information.

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