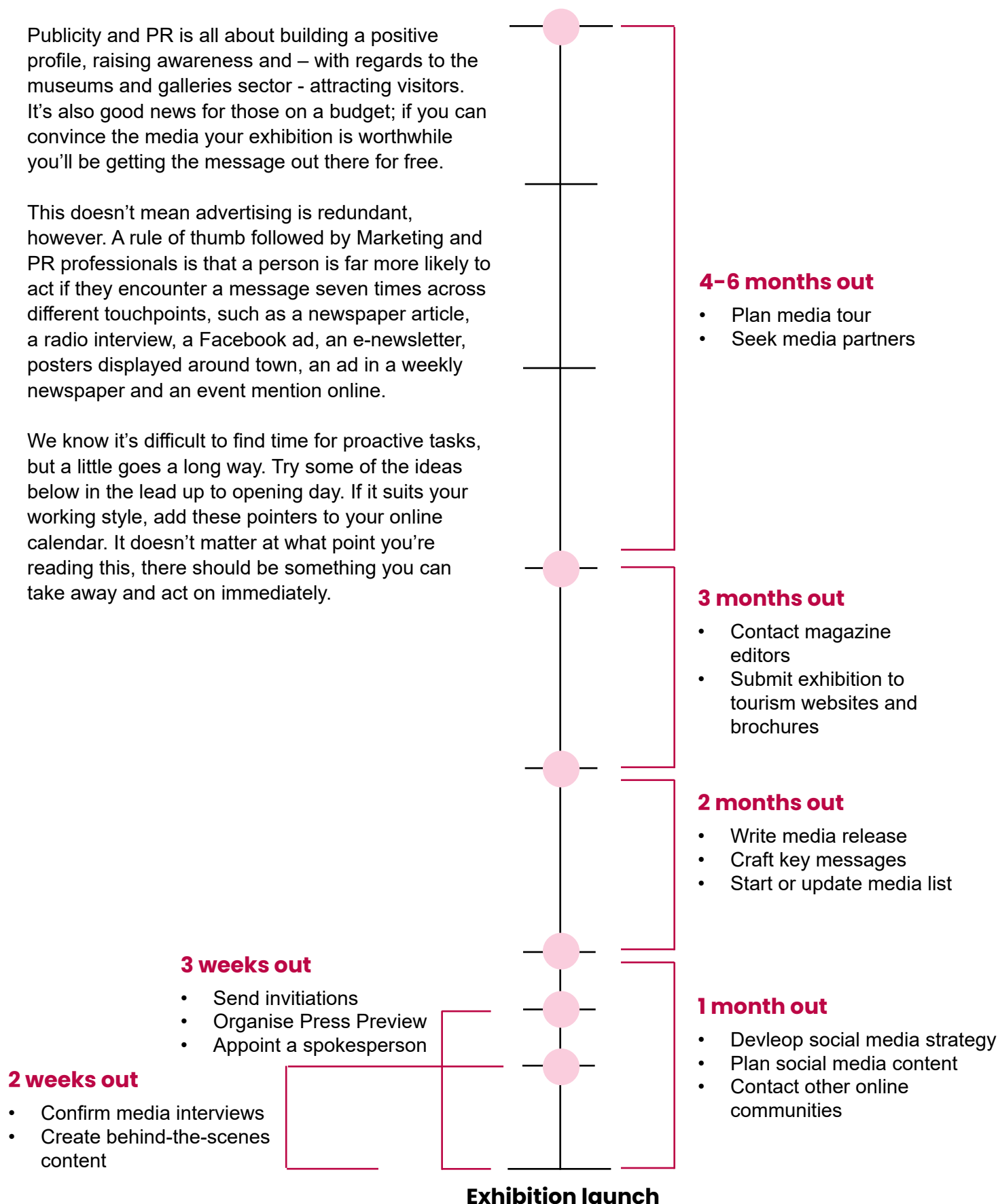


How to promote an upcoming exhibition

Publicity and PR is all about building a positive profile, raising awareness and – with regards to the museums and galleries sector - attracting visitors. It's also good news for those on a budget; if you can convince the media your exhibition is worthwhile you'll be getting the message out there for free.

This doesn't mean advertising is redundant, however. A rule of thumb followed by Marketing and PR professionals is that a person is far more likely to act if they encounter a message seven times across different touchpoints, such as a newspaper article, a radio interview, a Facebook ad, an e-newsletter, posters displayed around town, an ad in a weekly newspaper and an event mention online.

We know it's difficult to find time for proactive tasks, but a little goes a long way. Try some of the ideas below in the lead up to opening day. If it suits your working style, add these pointers to your online calendar. It doesn't matter at what point you're reading this, there should be something you can take away and act on immediately.



4–6 months out

- If the exhibition is the most important one in your annual calendar, think about holding a media familiarisation tour (also known as a ‘famil’) with select journalists, critics and influencers from the closest metropolitan city and nearby regional centres. Tempt them with a weekend away offering accommodation, a nice lunch and a private tour of the exhibition. If this sounds too expensive, search for sponsors like tourism bodies and local businesses who would also benefit from media visiting the area.
- Seek out a media partner who speaks to the audience you’re hoping to attract. Typically a media partner will guarantee coverage of the exhibition for something in return - perhaps the use of the museum/gallery space for a private event?

3 months out

- Magazines, whether national or regional, work on a three-month lead-time, which means if your exhibition opens in September, contact the editorial departments in June. Many magazines have event calendars they need to fill every month and a friendly ‘FYI’ email could suffice (if you search for each magazine online you’ll generally find an editorial email address or number under ‘Contact’).
- If your museum or gallery is in a tourist-heavy area, the exhibition and public programs should be submitted to all relevant websites and included in brochures produced by local government.

2 months out

- Write your media release and start crafting the key messages. These ‘key messages’ really just means the reasons why the exhibition is worth visiting. But remember, one message doesn’t fit all. For example, your local paper will want to know about the exhibition’s connections to the area, whereas an art critic or editor of a national magazine won’t be interested in local angles. They will want to know about the exhibition’s outstanding qualities and the merit of the public programs.
- If you don’t have a media list already, start one now – it’s easy! Save any email addresses and phone numbers in an Excel spread sheet and then you won’t have to start from scratch again when the next exhibition comes around.

1 month out

- Time to decide on your social media strategy, which includes copy and intention (ask yourself questions like, are we trying to boost attendance to a specific public program or simply raise awareness?). If you have the budget to advertise on social media, make sure you select which audience your posts are shown to in terms of location, age, gender and interests.
- Plan social media content for the first few weeks of the exhibition, such as an Instagram ‘takeover’ by the exhibiting artist, a curator or local celebrity and take your followers ‘behind the scenes’.
- Don’t rely on your own social media channels; reach out to other online communities, such as the owner of a popular Instagram account or Facebook page with local ties. The owner of the online community will be more likely to spread the word if they can offer a prize or incentive in their post – what about tickets to the opening night party or exclusive access to the exhibition for a small group?

3 weeks out

- If there's an opening night party, invitations should be sent out now.
- Although it's courtesy to invite local media to the opening night party, it's much better to have a 'press preview' the day or afternoon before the party. Start the preview even earlier for photographers and camera crews who need the exhibition space empty.
- Decide on who will act as your 'spokesperson' or 'talking head' for any interviews/photo opportunities and make sure you mention this person in all correspondence with the media. The spokesperson must be comfortable with public speaking, familiar with the key messages, able to talk about the exhibition in detail and available for the entire press preview.

2 weeks out

- If a press preview didn't happen, start confirming interviews for your spokesperson within the local and greater regional area. Things that should be mentioned in your correspondence with editors and radio producers include the opening date of the exhibition (it appeals to the media's sense of urgency!), the public programs and information about your spokesperson.
- When you're installing the exhibition, organise a 'behind the scenes' shot such as the installation of a large artwork or artefact. Engage local media to capture the moment and if they don't seize the opportunity, photograph it for your own digital channels.

You might also like:

How to do influencer marketing for the arts

AMACulturehive

<http://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/how-to-do-influencer-marketing-for-the-arts/>

Using social media to engage audiences

Museums & Galleries of NSW

<https://mgnswn.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/digital/using-social-media-engage-audiences/>

An example of a press preview announcement

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian

<http://npg.si.edu/about-us/press-release/media-advisory-press-preview-new-exhibition-%E2%80%9Cface-battle-americans-war-911>

4 Tips For Effective Facebook Advertising For Museums

Museum Hack

<https://museumhack.com/effective-facebook-advertising/>

This resource was written by publicity consultant **Patrizia Di Biase-Dyson** as part of Museums & Galleries of NSW's *Engaging Art* initiative.

To find out more about *Engaging Art* visit: <https://mgnswn.org.au/sector/programs/cultural-mediation/engaging-art-initiative/>

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