



Golden rules for getting work experience in a PR agency

Entering the job market with some valuable experience under your belt is more important now than ever. With hundreds of applicants applying for entry level roles, work experience is a must for those aspiring to break into the PR sector, but getting your foot over that all important threshold is the first hurdle to overcome.

Steve McComish, Managing Director of London PR, receives around 30 emails every day asking for work experience yet can only offers placements to a handful of candidates. Here he reveals the secret to getting your request noticed and making the best first impression.

Say it in an email

Emails are a great way of contacting agencies quickly, but ensure that your request is clear and succinct. When emailing a PR agency to ask for work experience your email is your covering letter. You should attach only your CV. Although previous work may be important, avoid attaching large files such as scans of published work. These will clog up your recipient's in box and won't be popular.



Do your research

Don't just blind copy hundreds of agencies. Research half a dozen or so you'd really like to work with and target them. If they all come back with a no then find another half dozen. Yes, pasting hundreds into the BCC is easier – but a lot less impressive. Your email should be to one named recipient.

Address the email to a real person

Be sure to address a real person. You should read the PR agency's website and find out who the directors are. Send your email to the main man or woman and address it to them personally. And for God's sake spell their name right.

Tell them why you want to work in PR

Many applicants don't actually know what PR is. Tell them in your application what has attracted you to a job in PR, why their agency has attracted you, and what you can offer. It seems obvious but many forget to address these basic points. Give real reasons and avoid wishy-washy comments like, "I have always wanted to work in the world of PR."

List all relevant experience

The more the better. This is evidence that your interest in PR is genuine and not a flash in the pan. Give details of results and what you've concretely achieved. Even if you don't have any professional experience yet, tell them what experience you do have. Experience in student media, or clubs are good examples of important skills used in PR – even designing a flyer for your school's chess club tells us what you can do.

Don't be a sycophant

So many applicants fall into the trap of thinking they have to crawl to get noticed. That's why many of the approaches we receive say things like, "I am aware of your undisputed reputation as one of the world's leading agencies..." Remember the person reading your email is highly media savvy. They'll know if you're being sycophantic. If you want to praise, show them you've done some good research and comment on some real work the agency's done. But avoid unreferenced praise for praise's sake. As my old Gran used to say, "You can't kid a kidder!"

Use the spell check

And make sure it's in British English. That means try to avoid American spellings like 'realize'. While such slips aren't likely to kill your chances, any real spelling mistake will. That includes saying "your" when you mean "you're". It might seem petty but remember, you are applying for a writing job here. Your application is the first chance you will get to show off your communication skills and will be promptly deleted if any careless mistakes are made.

Avoid coming across as arrogant

You wouldn't believe how many people write in with the attitude that they are doing the agency a favour. Example: "My highly developed communication and language skills will clearly enhance your agency." Will they really? A little humility is always a winner. But be confident. The key is to balance humility with confidence. Don't just claim to have skills the agency needs. Say something which supports your claim and offer that to the agency. If it is something the agency needs, they'll let you know. For example, instead of writing "My highly developed communication and language skills will clearly enhance your agency," try, "I am fluent in English and Italian and have experience of translating documents."



Don't be afraid to pick up the phone

It's amazing how few applicants bother to telephone these days. Remember this is the communication business, and oral communication skills are imperative to success. So if you're not afraid to pick up the phone, following your email with a phone call will make you stand out from the crowd and you're much more likely to succeed.

Paper can still be a winner

In these digital times it's easy to forget to even consider sending in an old fashioned paper letter and CV. But because so few do, it might just be what you need to get noticed (in the past year we have received only two paper CVs compared to 20-30 PER DAY by email). Also a hard copy CV is likely to stay on the desk of the recipient for much longer and is harder to ignore or delete than an email. But just remember to do your research and address it to a named person. Of course, all of the above still applies.

Work experience will give you a real insight into the workings of a PR agency. It may have the reputation as a glamorous industry, filled with lunches with clients and rendezvous with journalists, but the reality is often very different.

PR is made up of long hours and hard graft, yet efforts are very often rewarded with great results. Of course, there are exciting networking opportunities and every day is different, and work experience will give you the chance to experience this in this dynamic and fast-paced industry first hand.