

Top Ten “Must Do's” for a Successful Luxury Hotel Opening and Product Launch in the Digital Age

By Karen Weiner Escalera
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Who said that a celebrity studded gala, a million dollar event, or other big price tags are the only ways to get a new luxury hotel, resort, or other product noticed? Effective public relations launches don't have to “break the bank.”

Whether it's launching or repositioning a brand, a technology, a destination or a hotel, certain principles are fundamental to each new challenge: know the competitive environment, plan early and remember the adage, “first impressions are lasting ones.” Successful PR programs for upscale products just need to have the finest basic ingredients and a healthy dose of creativity.

Here are the top ten “must do's” for a successful launch:

1. **Start early, a minimum of nine months (think of giving birth!).** Consumer and trade magazines work as much as a year in advance so to meet deadlines, the earlier the better. Plus, you have to allow time to research the information (always more difficult in a pre-opening situation) and for development of the press materials. The pre-opening period is critical to getting the “buzz” going. This also holds true for social media, to get maximum impact from that medium. For instance, Fairmont Hotels used Twitter to mark construction milestones.
2. **Hire a pro with a track record in upscale travel products who knows the upscale niche players.** You're known by the company you keep, and products benefit from an association with other luxury products on an agency's client list.
3. **Get your positioning right.** Ask the question: What sets your product apart from others not just in your destination, but worldwide? What are the points of difference? Why should your target audiences care? Go through the exercise, which we call the [KWEstPROcess](#), to help define the Unique Selling Points and be sure to communicate these to the website copywriters before they begin (if different from your in-house PR or agency).
4. **Gimmicky mailings? Yes and no.** Traditional offline media (*Conde Nast Traveler*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, CBS, etc.) are not allowed to accept gifts of value, and even if they could, they would have no place to put them. On the other hand, new media, especially bloggers, love them and can even write about the gift itself.
5. **Make sure you have at least one great “WOW” image for media and sales campaigns.** Set up a mock spa shot, get an impressive rendering enhanced by Photoshop, or an image of some unusual service or facility. This image can sell the story, especially in this age of copy-light and image-heavy media, social media, blogs, etc. A good example is an image we used for the tub, a signature feature of Cheeca Lodge and Spa's new Premiere Suites.
6. **Incorporate video into your promotional strategy** to take advantage of today's video consumption boom. It attracts attention, entertains, informs, increases visitor engagement and motivates consumers to sample or buy your product. Moreover, YouTube comes up first in Google's search results and is the top video site on the Internet. Start with compelling content but don't be tempted to overproduce. It's there to make a connection, so it should be short, simple, unpolished and natural.
7. **Make sure the writing, especially the first announcement release, is top notch so check samples from who will be doing the writing.** Your first communications are the most important impression;

second chances are never the same.

8. **Booking travel has become a social, interactive experience** and we live in a short attention span world, therefore, a viral marketing campaign is a must. Invest time in engaging in social media communities such as Twitter and Facebook that have a “bubbling up” effect. Twitter is very viral and buy Facebook ads for precision targeting. Engage in social communities, shape conversation and its OK to over-communicate. The goals are to build awareness, build a buzz prior to rebranding or launch, and generate inbound links to your new/existing domain.
9. **Do a month by month timetable** for at least three months beyond the opening to include activities to sustain the momentum beyond the initial announcement: promotions, events, news releases, cause related marketing, strategic alliances and more.
10. **Stage a professional public relations shoot right after opening** to get a few sensational images, and don't use the photographs you're using for marketing collateral or necessarily those for the website. PR and advertising image needs are totally different: PR requires images that tell a story, advertising images are all about setting a mood.

Success comes from a strong foundation, and implementing these ten tips lays the groundwork for a solid public relations program. "Program" because to really reap the benefits, there must be a sustainable effort and that effort will see results increase exponentially in year two and beyond. So give yourself the luxury of time, allow for creativity, and invest in the basic needs of good writing and visuals and you have the ingredients for PR success.

About the Author:



For nearly 30 years, first in New York City and now in Miami, Karen Weiner Escalera and her firm's [KWE group](#) have been among the nation's leading strategic marketing and public relations experts in luxury travel, hospitality and real estate. Creator of the [KWEst PROcess](#) for strategic market positioning and product development, Karen has worked for brand leaders in all segments of the industry. Named one of the "Top 25 Most Extraordinary Minds" in hotel sales and marketing for 2008 by the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI), Karen is a sought-after speaker and author of the internationally syndicated *Luxury Travel & Lifestyle Trends* newsletter and blog.

Karen Weiner Escalera
+1 305 476 5424
Escalera@kwegroup.com