

Win Publicity:

Sell Your Story Right and Get Media Exposure like Big Businesses

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Most small businesses need positive publicity. It's usually the only possible way to leap from obscurity to national prominence. Big businesses, that once were small, seem to get named in the press a lot more often than yours does.

It didn't happen through luck or flashes of genius. It takes a consistent commitment to a media relations program over the long term. It's about building relationships with the right journalists and earning publicity one piece at a time. You first have to identify what kind of person is your single most valuable prospect decision-maker.

If you see everyone as a prospect, you should *begin* with selecting the one group that's *most* likely to become a customer and then tailor your entire campaign for them. Reporters make news judgments every day about what matters to their audience. Readers only want information that's useful to them. It's important to know who needs to read your story so that you can focus on and select the most valuable media outlets. If warranted, you can pursue additional groups later.

Here are six keys to conceiving and executing a successful PR campaign.

1. **Make a media contact list.** Decide which newspapers, magazines or broadcast stations will reach your target prospect. If you don't know, consider specialized magazines, such as *Facilities Manager* or *Retail Pharmacist*. These niche publications reach decision-makers who buy specific products and services. Look in free online media directories like *Bacon's MediaSource* or *Gebbie Press*; starting with a search of logical keywords. You also need to match media outlets with the type of story you're selling. If your company has just affiliated with a local charity, for instance, the business section of your local newspapers might be a fit.

2. **Get to the point!** Editors and producers are interested only in stories that will attract readers or boost ratings. If you can hit the right highlights *within 15 – 20 seconds*, and your story is compelling to their readers, editors will be glad you called. If you don't have a story that fits the immediate needs of a particular media outlet, don't waste their time or yours. Your angle should be tailored to a specific media outlet or program and, if your angle doesn't hit the mark with that individual, he or she will say so. At some future date, maybe it will. Say thank you and you on to the next target. Also, be sure to be prepared with a brief, clear pitch for voice mail. If you don't give a compelling reason to call you back, they won't.

3. **Build relationships with a few journalists.** Instead of "blasting" to everyone, you should get to know a select few writers and learn what they are usually looking for. When you have something that really fits the bill, consider offering an "exclusive" story that you don't send out to anyone else, and follow up with comprehensive background information, such as names, dates and statistics. Most reporters are much more interested in announcing something special than simply dishing out the same stories that everyone else has. This is particularly true of weekly newspapers and magazines. For example, you could use your Web site to poll visitors on the most challenging problem they have solved by your product or service. You could use the results as the basis for a story that tells something interesting about people or places and then pitch it to a key magazine editor.

4. **Provide quality and value.** Media relations is a lot like sales. Find out what the journalist needs and then meet those needs with a story idea and supporting information that is clear, professional and easy to use by someone in a hurry. Reporters and editors are inundated with dull, uninteresting information that is poorly written, confusing and does not contain any real news. If you think through the process and make sure your ideas and your stories are focused on that particular media outlet, and are complete and ready to drop into that day's news, most reporters will want to use it. If it's truly complete, it will stand out. Complete might mean providing quality product photographs for magazines, or emailing links to online high-tech product demos, or providing a page of tips and brief explanations that give a writer the background that he or she needs. They might even use your extra material as a springboard to interview you by phone.

5. **Always follow up.** Entrepreneurs are busy and sometimes overlook the need to spend time building media relations "relationships," just as the best sales professionals do. Send first-rate materials and then follow-up by phone or email.

Busy newsrooms get an enormous amount of unsolicited material every day, and often rely on interns or junior staff to screen incoming mail. Don't be surprised if a reporter asks you to resend your materials. Be patient, responsive and respectful of the journalist's time. If they turn down today's story, find out what they want so that you can better tailor your next pitch.

6. **Be ready with more.** If a reporter wants something different from you, or if he or she wants to know more about your company, congratulate yourself. Be prepared to send a full media kit or any supporting materials the news outlet needs. After doing this for a short time, you'll gain an understanding of what information should be in your media kit. Be careful not to overdo it. Reporters aren't impressed by embossed pocket folders and expensive glossy printing. Pare it down to information that serves a purpose.

As you'll find out first-hand, media relations is a lot like sales, which is hard work. So long as you provide clear information and good news ideas, reporters will take your call. Even better, they might someday call and ask to quote you in other stories they develop in the future. If you stay on top of it, you could become the best-known person in your specialty... and save a bundle on advertising.

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