

Bonus Materials for

Office DEPOT.

“What can Publicity do for you?”



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Media Madness - How to Capture the On-Going Interest of the Press

WHY ADVERTISING IS NOT ENOUGH...

Understanding the difference between advertising and publicity

- Both advertising and media publicity give you visibility, but only publicity gives you credibility
- Pursuing media exposure will cost you time, not cash
- Press attention feeds upon itself, leading to more coverage

Consider the differences between advertising and publicity:

ADVERTISING

Immediate results if consistently
Total control over content
You are the sole focus of the ad someone who
You can target your audience potential customers
Costly
Not inherently believable
Inadequate medium to explain or concepts Limited life-span

PUBLICITY

Immediate and long-term results placed
Little or no control over its content
May have to share the spotlight with a competitor or holds an opposing view
Broad audience, who may not necessarily be

Cost-effective
Gives you credibility
Allows you to convey complex ideas complex ideas
Leaves an enduring impression

Paid advertising is a time-honored way to let customers know what you have to offer, but positive press coverage does something no ad can: it gives people faith in you.

A print or broadcast story offers you much more exposure than an ad, and it will cost you a lot less. When pursuing publicity, your investment is time, not money. And press attention begets press attention. When you are quoted in a story, chances improve that you will be used as a source in other news stories.

An obvious disadvantage of publicity over advertising is that you have no control over what is written about you. However, the better you understand the press, the more you can shape the stories you or your business appear in. Here's how to learn the ropes, work within the system, and reap the returns!

WHAT IS NEWSWORTHY?

Identifying a news hook for your story

- Your story must interest the media outlet's audience - know who its readers or viewers are
- Look for the news value in your story
- Don't confuse a news story with an advertisement

There's not a whole lot that hasn't been brought to our attention in this media-saturated culture, but for the most part, Mr. Dana's observation still holds true. The trick is in the presentation. Spin your story in an original way, and it will feel fresh. And remember to form your story idea to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Ask yourself what news stories you enjoy. What is it about those stories that grab your attention?

Sometimes seeing the potential stories in your business is simply a matter of looking at what you do from different angles. If you have trouble stepping back to gain this perspective, ask friends or colleagues to help. A brainstorming session may yield a number of ideas.

A story with news value usually contains one or more of the following elements:

Trend

Does the story tap into a social, political or economic trend? The media probably won't care about your restaurant's new children's menu, but they will be interested to hear about your innovative new Monday night baby-sitting service for patrons. Note: it takes three or more to make a trend, so be prepared to supply the names of at least two other businesses that are doing something similar.

Anti-trend

On the flip-side, has your business bucked a trend? A thriving privately-owned pharmacy in a region dominated by chain drug stores is certainly newsworthy.

Human Interest

Do you, one of your employees, even a customer have an interesting story to tell? People make a story come alive. The best stories are injected with a human element.

Community Involvement

Do you use your position as a business owner to contribute to the community, preferably in a unique way? Gain a reputation for being a giver and have had several articles written about your business in the local media.

Offbeat

Is there an unusual angle to your business? "If a dog bites a man, it's not news. If a man bites a dog, it's news." Find the humor or irony in your product or service.

Significant

Are you doing something that affects people in a profound way? A research lab may employ only a dozen or more people, but if it discovers a cure for cancer, you can bet it will make headlines.

Timely

Can you peg your story to a current event? A small furniture manufacturer appeared in the local news during O.J. Simpson's trial because Judge Lance Ito special-ordered its ergonomically-correct chair. Had Judge Ito ordered the chair six months after the trial, the media probably wouldn't have cared.

Prominence/Celebrity Endorsements

Can you link your service or product to a well-known person? Having a celebrity for a customer gives the impression that you are in demand. You can encourage this perception by sending your product to local luminaries.

Superlative

Is your service or product the biggest? The smallest? The first? The last? Seems every summer there's a news story about drive-in movie theaters, simply because there are so few left.

Slice of Life

What may not have much inherent news value may find itself on the features pages as a slice-of-life story. These are the features that put the reader into someone else's skin. For instance, a reporter may spend a hot August day in an ice-cream truck, then write about the vendor's experience.

Local

Do you do something that matters to people in your area? A gift shop grand opening in struggling downtown Jonesville isn't going to make it into The New York Times. However, it may very well appear in the Jonesville Daily News, especially if the opening is tied into a broader story about downtown revitalization.

Steps to Coming Up With Story Ideas:

Look beyond the business section

Just because you have a business doesn't necessarily mean you have a business story. Your idea may be more suited to the lifestyles pages, the local news section, even the sports pages. In fact, it may be to your advantage to appear in other, more widely-read sections of the newspaper.

Think local

Don't underestimate the power of the local press. Media builds on itself. Once you get your story out there, it will take on a life of its own. A good article in your town's newspaper can mushroom into a series of national news stories.

Stay informed

Not only about your industry, but about the world in general. Think of ways to tie what you're doing to some larger issue. If you can wrap your idea around something much greater than yourself, you're more likely to have a winning story that includes mention of you.

Be unconventional/innovative

Your spouse may not be crazy about this aspect of your personality, but the press loves a risk-taker, especially an outspoken one. If your opinion goes against conventional wisdom, your innovation turned around people's thinking or your contrary point of view brought you success, it may bring you publicity, too.

Be ready to pounce

If you can link you or your business to breaking news, call the media - quick! If the Rolling Stones announce they're breaking up and a crowd of mourners dressed in black hold an impromptu vigil in the "R" section of your music store, pick up the phone! You can bet the next two people through your door will be a news photographer and a reporter.

Peg your story to holidays, anniversaries and other widely recognized events

These offer ready-made news hooks for your story idea. If your endeavor doesn't fit into a well-known holiday, leaf through Chase's Calendar of Events, which lists all sorts of little-known occasions you might link to your business. You can also invent your own holiday by submitting an application to Chase's.

Get published

You don't have to write a book, but if you come out with a position paper on a particular subject or even publish a newsletter, you will become regarded as an authority in your field. Send copies of your published material to the media. Editors and producers will often scan newsletters for story ideas.

WHO TO CONTACT

Making sure your idea gets to the right person

- Familiarize yourself with the publication or broadcast, and gear your pitch accordingly
- Send your materials to the appropriate person
- Maintain a media list of contacts, including their titles and areas of coverage

After you develop a story, it's time to figure out who to tell it to. Your story idea will have the highest chance of making it into print or on the air if you get it to the right person. The easiest way to do this is to call the assignment editor for the names of the reporters or editors who cover your topic.

Study the publication or broadcast to determine which reporters would be most receptive to your idea.

Another terrific opportunity to figure out reporters' likes and dislikes is to read their columns. Reporters and editors often reveal their personal sides as guest columnists for their own newspapers. One reporter told me that after she wrote a series of columns about her dog, she got several phone calls from readers who wanted to talk with her about animal issues.

Draft a media list of reporters, editors, columnists, and producers, including their specialties. It's important to keep the list updated because turnover and job changes tend to be high in newspapers and television.

Once you have identified a few likely prospects, send your materials only to them, and only when you have something new to report. Remember, you'll not only waste your time and resources if you blanket a newsroom or overwhelm a single person with your press releases, you may alienate the very people you are hoping to win over. If you get a reputation for sending out worthless material, eventually everything that comes with your return address will go directly into the wastebasket (or worse, in a box under the desk of a rabid columnist). On the other hand, if you become known for sending out solid information geared to the appropriate people, your information is more likely to get opened and moved to the top of the stack.

Before you drop your pitch in the mail, make a brief call to notify the recipient that it's on the way. Again, make the call as short as possible since its sole purpose is to help your story idea stand out among the others. In fact, if you can leave your message on voice mail, all the better.

A few days after your mailing was due to arrive, place another quick follow-up call. If your story idea is rejected, don't take it as a personal insult. Instead, ask for the names of others within the same news organization who may be interested.

Also, send a follow-up letter thanking the reporter or editor for considering your idea. The next time they need a source for a story in your area of expertise, they may very well remember your professionalism and call you for comment.

NOTE: I cannot overemphasize the importance of getting your story to the right person.

You may feel that one reporter is the same as another, or that as long as your idea makes it to a business producer, it will get on television. Not true.

The dual advantage to getting your pitch to the right person is that it increases your likelihood of success and it keeps you in the good graces of potential media contacts. If you take the time to come up with an interesting story, tell it to someone who cares.

THE APPROACH

Packaging your story idea for the media

- Treat the media with the same regard as you would a client or customer
- Remember, you are a source, not an advertiser
- The easier you make a reporter or editor's job, the more willing they will be to work with you

There's really no mystery to dealing with the media. Just think of them as prospective clients and your story idea as the item they've been waiting for. This means following the same basic rules with the press as you would with a business client or customer. Just as you have learned who your customers are and what they want, educate yourself about the media outlets you are targeting and frame your story idea to meet their needs.

Focus the materials you send TO HELP the editors or producers. This means anticipating and answering their questions, labeling photographs, and most importantly, explaining why your story is worthy of coverage. It doesn't hurt to get a little creative when you send your materials, either. I use a dark purple envelope for all of my correspondence to the press, prospects,

clients and vendors. Not only does this ensure my mail will stand out from the rest, but it makes it easier for the recipient to locate my materials from among the stacks of paper when I follow-up with a phone call. None of these methods guarantee a story will be picked up, but they do get the material read, which, after all, is your first priority.

Prepare yourself by:

Requesting a media kit from the advertising department of the newspapers, magazines, radio or television stations you will be contacting. Media kits give information on reader or viewer demographics and often include an editorial calendar of upcoming special sections or segments which let you tailor your pitch to a specific outlet.

DO:

- Act professionally in your dealings with the media.
- Be persistent, but not annoyingly so.
- Find out when their deadline is.
- Ask if you are calling at a good time. If not, ask when you can call back.
- Get straight to the point. Editors and reporters are usually busy and don't have a lot of time to spend on the telephone.
- Emphasize results of your product or service over its features (answer the question: "how can this help me?").

DON'T:

- Call a television news station right before air time.
- Call a newspaper on deadline.
- Talk fast if leaving a message on voice mail. State your name and company at the beginning of the message, repeat it at the end of the message and give your telephone number twice.

The pitch letter

You can call the media with your story idea, but you will have more luck if you put your pitch into writing.

When writing your pitch letter, keep the following in mind:

- This is your first chance to make a good impression. Keep the letter succinct and check your spelling, especially the name of the recipient.
- Make the first paragraph a real grabber. It should mimic the beginning of a news story. This is where the editor decides whether to read on.
- Summarize your story idea, answering "who," "what," "where," "why," "how," and "when."
- Be specific. Don't say, "business has improved greatly," without including figures to back the claim. Instead of asserting, "service is great," specify what makes it great. The difference between the pitch letter that becomes a story and one that becomes trash often lies in the details.

Can I Buy You Lunch?

With your pithy press releases, creative pitch letters and useful insider's knowledge, your friends at the newspaper and television station have come to regard you as an invaluable source. Congratulations! You have succeeded in your goal of developing a solid relationship with the press. Now your inclination is to show your appreciation. But before you offer a reporter your vacation villa in St. Thomas, remember that the press regards gifts differently than do your clients in the business world. A reporter must scrupulously avoid all appearances of a conflict of interest. One who accepts a pricey gift from a news source risks being regarded as unethical.

The question then, is how do you thank the media? The answer is to use your own best judgment. It would be inappropriate to send an expensive gift to a reporter immediately before or following an interview. You will make an impression, however, if you send a personal note after the story appears. It is also fine to send press contacts a book you know they would enjoy, or an inexpensive gift to mark a special occasion in his or her personal or professional life. And

it's perfectly acceptable to invite a reporter to lunch, and to pick up the tab. In fact, inviting a reporter to lunch accomplishes more than a show of gratitude. Breaking bread with someone allows you to connect on a more personal level. Through occasional lunches, you can keep your press contacts informed of what you are doing and learn more about their interests. Keep in mind that it may be difficult for a reporter to break away for lunch, especially those at larger publications or television stations. Generally those at smaller news outlets or trade journals are under less pressure to churn out stories every day and have the time to spend with their sources.

Publicity is a never-ending job. It's a way of life. Seize opportunities that pop up as you read the paper or watch television. Maintain a media file of special sections and segments where your ideas may fit in. But be sure to consider the media's needs when coming up with story ideas. Your objective obviously is to publicize your business, but the media cares only about giving its audience information that is enlightening, educational, balanced, and interesting. The better you know your media contacts, the better your chances of making news.



Nancy Michaels is America's most sought-after consultant to America's Fortune 500 Companies. As the liaison between big business and small business owners, her expert opinion is wildly sought after and has been profiled by Inc.com where she is the solo-preneur expert, Entrepreneur Magazine's Marketing Expert, Success Magazine, Fortune Small Business and The New York Post. In addition, her sales and marketing advice has been featured on CNNFn, The Weekend Today Show, and Fox News. She is the author of five books, including [Off the Wall Marketing Ideas](#) and [Perfecting Your Pitch](#). Nancy is most at home showcasing her message "virtually" through web casts and tele-classes as well as at special in-person events. She's a sought after host and speaker for Fortune 500 Companies targeting the small business marketplace including Office Depot, UPS, The Home Depot, Microsoft, Wal-Mart, Alcatel-Lucent, AT&T and many more.

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