

Public Relations and Goodwill

One highly effective type of advertising costs virtually nothing: public relations. With public relations, the newsworthiness of some aspect of your business or business activities can earn you free publicity in newspapers or magazines, or even on radio or television. However, it must truly be newsworthy. You might publicize, for example, a lecture, a demonstration or a workshop being presented at your business site—an event that news outlets could list in their community calendars or possibly even send a reporter to cover. Find out who at a station or publication handles such local events and send that person a news release. Alternatively, prepare an article for a newspaper or trade magazine in which you offer information of value to its readers. The point of such articles is to establish you as an authority in your industry. It's for this reason that a stockbroker might write a biweekly column on personal finance or a nursery write a column giving gardening advice.

A further source of publicity is goodwill efforts. Team sponsorships, for example, keep your name in front of the public. Lectures given by you or your staff to civic groups or other businesses also enhance your company's visibility. Get a list of clubs and associations from your local Chamber of Commerce. Another course of action, one that must be heartfelt and genuine, is to spearhead a campaign to solve a community problem that is related to your business. A pharmacist, for example, might lead an effort to keep poison detection centers open.

Writing a News Release

If you keep in mind the person at the newspaper, magazine or station who'll receive your news release—a person buried under stacks of releases and eager to find some newsworthy information – you'll automatically write the best kind of release: short, crisp and simple.

In the first paragraph, tell who, what, why, where and when—starting with a description of the event itself. For example:

A free slide talk on family hikes in the Bay Area will be given by writer–photographer Jane Doe on Thursday, October 18, 7:30 P.M., at Jackson’s Shoes in Berkeley.

In the following one or more paragraphs, add information that rounds out the first paragraph or answers questions the first paragraph may evoke. For example:

Doe, author of *A Walk in the Park*, will recommend nature walks for families with children aged seven and older. Most walks are in regional parks, and Doe will not only show what various trails have to offer but also the trails for difficulty. Parents and their children are invited to attend. Jackson’s Shoes is located at 1234 First Street in Berkeley. For more information, call (510) 555-3271.

Finally, on either the top or bottom of the news release—which can be written on letterhead with the words NEWS RELEASE above the text—write the name and telephone number of your contact person. For example:

For more information, contact Jim Brewster at (510) 555-3271.

To give newspapers further encouragement to publicize your event, enclose a glossy black-and-white photo that illustrates the subject of your release. Type a caption and paste it on the back. For example, if you are using a nature photograph:

Family hikes in the Bay Area will be the subject of a free slide talk by author Jane Doe on Thursday, October 18, 7:30 P.M., at Jackson’s Shoes in Berkeley.

Overall, the virtue of a clear, well-organized news release and captioned photo is that they give newspapers—your most likely recipients—several ways to respond. They

can print your entire release and captioned picture, they can use only the captioned photograph, or they can insert just the first paragraph into a community calendar. As a result, your chances of getting something into print are greatly enhanced.

© 2009 Kurt Mortensen