

## Public Relations and the Media

This article will discuss:

- [how to obtain press coverage](#)
- [the importance of not wasting media's valuable time](#)
- [how to generate real news](#)
- [how to create more & better media coverage](#)
- [the importance of saying thank you](#)
- [developing a reciprocal relationship with the media](#)
- [how to get on television or radio, for free](#)
- [personalizing correspondence with the media](#)
- [to retain a professional publicist or public relations firm, or not](#)
- [being prepared for the response](#)
- [always making time for the press](#)
- [the importance of including your address and phone number](#)
- [responding to publicity-generating leads](#)
- [the importance of creativity](#)
- [press begets press](#)

### How to Obtain Press Coverage for Myself and My Business

Here's a great way to provide no-cost advertising for your business or yourself. I want you to read this several times, not only because it is enjoyable, but because of the powerful concepts outlined. As you read it, think about your own business, particularly the section about being prepared for the response.

It is fantastic to think about the rewards free press and publicity can bring. In fact, it's seductive, but you must also consider the cost of fulfilling the response.

Obtaining favorable publicity is a vital part of marketing. It can support and magnify other promotional activities (direct and indirect) and produce numerous advantages in its own right. What is presented here is not a list of tips on how to write and distribute press releases. There are many of those. Rather, it deals with the fundamental strategic and philosophical issues vital to obtaining high levels of positive publicity. Hopefully, it will help to sensitize you to concerns that are crucial to success in media relations. It is intended to detail approaches to the media that have worked best.

The recommendations made here have proven to be highly effective. They are based on both extensive research and my personal experience in serving hundreds of clients. In most cases, the publicity campaigns that I have undertaken for clients have been based on strategies first tested, refined, and proven effective in the promotion of my own proprietary endeavors.

### The Press Does Not Owe You a Living!

Many seeking publicity, including some professional publicists, communicate an attitude that the press owes them

coverage. Nothing could be further from the truth. And such an attitude will be extremely deleterious to your efforts to obtain press coverage.

Obvious? Of course! But, consider this. In the rush to get publicity in an environment where you see others with equally or less worthy "causes" receiving desirable coverage, there is a high probability that an attitude of "I deserve to be covered" will creep into your communications with the media. No matter how subtle, it will hurt you.

The business of the media is to provide news and information which is of value to its audience (readers, listeners, viewers). With so much to choose from, they have great latitude in determining who and what will be covered. Publicity for you is elective -- the attitude you communicate about the media and the individuals you are dealing with in your quest for publicity will have great impact on your success.

The media is not an extension of your marketing department. Its representatives owe you nothing. If you have information of value that attracts their attention, you may be fortunate enough to benefit from receiving publicity. Don't forget this!

### **Don't Waste the Valuable Time of the Media With Unimportant Trivia**

The vast majority of news releases never receive coverage by the media. There are many reasons why a release isn't provided coverage, of course, but none more persuasive than the fact that the release deals with unimportant information.

Take professional practitioners as an example. Most professionals send out three press releases during their entire career. The first announces the fact that they have started practice, the second communicates the fact that they have removed themselves to larger offices, the third broadcasts their retirement. Failing to see their name in print, they conclude that obtaining publicity is an unproductive effort.

They failed to receive coverage for a simple reason. Starting a practice, moving a practice and retirement are not news -- very few care. If they are located in a small town where the local newspaper feels an obligation to report on any and all local business happenings, they may get a line or two of ink. But in a major market there is far more important news worthy of the very limited space available. Of course, a highly specialized industry/profession newsletter may provide coverage, but even this isn't too likely.

If you want publicity, you must come up with information that is truly of interest. If you are unable or unwilling to do so, don't waste your time or that of the media.

### **How to Generate Real News**

Generating news and information of sufficient value that it will be worthy of serious consideration by the press is not difficult.

Start by doing something that a great many journalists do -- asking the question: "What information would be of value and interest for the audience I am attempting to communicate with?" Doing so gives you focus and direction. It's a proven principle of target marketing.

This same principle can be applied to publicity efforts as well. If you ask the question about what the audience would be interested in knowing, you can generate news that has a high probability of attracting the interest of the media.

One way to do this is by conducting research on a provocative question and reporting upon your findings.

For example, when I schedule a seminar in a city, it would be desirable to have press coverage of that fact. It could stimulate additional registrations. But my decision to conduct another seminar really isn't that newsworthy. However, a press release that communicates information about how consultant and professional fees or business prospects in the local area compare with national averages and trends might be. Including information that the researcher will be in town to conduct a seminar where these trends will be discussed in more detail has a higher probability of receiving coverage.

You may feel that collecting research data would be difficult, very time consuming or even costly. Certainly it can be. But it isn't always. A small survey of attitudes or opinions may not qualify for a doctoral dissertation, but it can provide interesting insight or information that will attract the attention of the media -- because it is of interest or value to the audience they are trying to inform.

### **Sameness May Be Efficient But Not Effective**

We have all been hooked by the notion that it is efficient to do something one time and magnify our efforts by reproducing it over and over again. While this is efficient, it may not be effective when it comes to getting publicity. Many seeking publicity, including a high percentage of professional publicists, create a general press release, make multiple copies and mail it to every potential press lead they can unearth.

You will be far more successful if you will avoid this practice and concentrate on tailoring your publicity to the unique interests and special circumstances of each potential media lead. It is almost always more effective to develop a unique and special publicity release that directly targets a given media professional. Perhaps even better -- don't send a release at all. Write a personal letter that communicates at a more specific and personal level and which will motivate the recipient to more carefully consider the value of providing publicity for you or your endeavor.

As with marketing, publicity efforts need to be targeted. While it is far more time-consuming to prepare a specific/targeted communication, I would rather concentrate on obtaining publicity from a smaller, select segment of the media than spend effort generating less pertinent quantity.

### **Seize Opportunity to Create More and Better Media Coverage**

Those who are good at getting publicity seem to have a sense for opportunity that we should all work on developing. A good question to ask regularly: "Is there a news or publicity angle to what I am doing?"

Opportunities present themselves almost daily that can be turned to publicity advantage if we stop and take the time to be creative.

For example, when you are reading specialty or trade publications or even the general media, you will see remarks made by colleagues or competitors (or others) with which you agree or disagree. It is often a good idea for you to draft a press release refuting or supporting such opinions. The media tends to like controversy -- so refutation is more powerful. And the more important the person you are refuting and the more controversial you appear to be, the more likely your efforts are to produce coverage.

It's okay to be somewhat controversial. Some fear that being so will hurt opportunities. But since it is unlikely that you will be able to do business with everyone, it may actually be beneficial for you to cause the market to have mixed emotions. If half of your market feels you are a raving maniac, but the other half feels you walk on water, it may be to your benefit.

### **Don't Forget to Say Thank You in a Meaningful Way**

The vast majority of those who are fortunate enough to receive the favorable publicity they have worked so hard to obtain never take the time to say "thank you." It is simple common courtesy to thank those who have done something which benefits you. Because so few say "thanks," the fact that you do will more likely be remembered, and could benefit your publicity efforts later. This does not mean sending a gift. Never do anything that would cause the individual, their publisher or others to think that the editorial integrity of the journalist has in any way been compromised.

### **Make Media Relations a Two-Way Street**

In addition to always taking the time and trouble to say "thank you" for the publicity received, it will be in your interest to expend effort on a regular and consistent basis to develop a reciprocal relationship with members of the media.

Most seeking publicity won't bother to do this. So, if you do, you're more likely to be noticed and remembered. Make it a policy to communicate two or three times each year (and more often, if possible) with your media contacts in a way that is other than self-serving. As you pick up information, hear things, run in to useful data, etc. ask yourself, "Which individuals on my media contact list would find having this information of value?"

Then communicate it to them. If you run into an interesting story idea that you feel would be of value, tell them.

Look at it this way. If I am a member of the press and every time I hear from you it is to make use of me to benefit you, I am less likely to be responsive than if I receive a mix of communications from you -- including some that benefit me rather than you.

### **You Can't Buy the Legitimate Press**

Even in this enlightened age, there are some who feel that they can buy good press coverage.

They believe that since they have spent or offered to spend "significant" sums on advertising, they are deserving of editorial coverage.

Sometimes they are right. There are some publications that quite regularly trade editorial coverage for advertising. But the legitimate, respected press does not. What makes publicity so effective for those who receive it, is the editorial integrity of the publication. Generally speaking, the more highly respected a publication, the greater its editorial integrity. Knowing this, the legitimate press takes great pains to ensure that its integrity is never compromised.

When available, you may find it advantageous to benefit from publicity made available in exchange for advertising or other commercial benefit. But, take care that you never approach the legitimate press with an exchange attitude. Doing so will be very damaging to your prospects for obtaining publicity, and to your general image with the media.

### **How to get on television and radio for free.**

One of three ways:

1) Go with a per-inquiry or per-order advertising deal. It's ideally suited for smaller businesses. If you're in business for yourself, it's a way to bring in new sales at a guaranteed profit. This is where you make a deal with a publication, radio or TV station, or catalog to advertise your product without charging you an up-front fee for the ad space or air-time. Instead, you pay them only for each inquiry -- or each order -- that's generated as a result. So your advertising costs come right from the profits, not from your pocket.

I should warn you, though, that the medium will do this only if they think they'll make more money on this basis than they would if they sold the time or space to you outright -- or if they are having difficulty selling the time or space, and will grab any money they can get. In fact, be on the lookout for media trying to get rid of any unused time or space at the last minute, and negotiate with them. You can get some very good deals this way.

You need to understand that media have unsold time and space. If it's not used, it cannot be "saved." If a radio station has, in any hour, 12 minutes of ad space and they only have sold five, they can't save that time. It's gone forever. The right proposition from you at the right time can make a big difference. And the right proposition is, for a percentage of sales. Or you can get creative: If they want a minimum amount of commercials or ads every week or month, you'll give them a certain percentage of the gross sales.

2) Approach them with a barter deal. You can do a direct trade of your product for their ad space, which can be very profitable for you. (See Section Four for a more in-depth explanation of bartering).

3) Do a triangulation deal: If you can't convince the media to take you up on your bartering deal, triangulation becomes the device to save the deal.

Triangulation is the use of three separate transactions (or more) to achieve, in this case, free radio or television advertising. Section Four of this report gives a detailed in-depth example of how to construct a triangulation deal.

### **Are You Important Enough to Be Called By Name?**

When the daily mail arrives, you likely pay far more attention to letters which are addressed to you by name, are properly spelled, specifying the correct position, title, address, etc. So do members of the media. While it is easier to fire off press releases to "Business Editor, Chicago Tribune," it may only gain attention equal to the attention you devote to "President" or "Occupant" mail that you receive.

Just as your communications with the media will do better if they are specific and targeted to the special interests and concerns of the recipient, it is important that you invest time and effort on the details. Write to people by name. Be sure the spelling is correct. Do the research necessary to ensure that you are reaching the one person at the publication or broadcast station who has the greatest interest in your cause. Check titles, professional or academic designations, addresses, etc., with great care.

Any major library has a variety of media directories that will help you with checking the facts. But, directories get out of date quickly. Confirm information by telephone and update your records regularly.

We all get busy and look for shortcuts. But ask yourself this question -- if I fail to get publicity because I have created a poor image by misspelling the name of a journalist, did I make a wise decision about my priorities?

### **Should You Retain the Services of a Professional Publicist or Public Relations Firm?**

Using experienced, creative professionals may be very much in your best interest. The more difficult your publicity objective is to achieve, the more useful professionals can be. If your cause or project is different and highly newsworthy and you desire to make an impact with a narrow band of specialized trade publications or even the general media in second- and third-tier markets, you may be able to get quite good results on your own.

However, if you are trying to impact major-market mass media or obtain publicity in crowded, competitive niche markets, you may be frustrated by your lack of success -- suspecting that a professional could generate significantly greater impact.

There are many advantages in using skilled professionals. One is contacts. A good professional has done, or knows how to do, the necessary research (fairly quickly) to identify the best media contacts. Another is influence. Most members of the press come to rely on professionals to bring them information and news. If a member of the press knows that 70% of the time a particular publicist can be depended upon to bring them a good story lead, they are much more likely to respond to that individual's communications than to the stack of unsolicited press releases on their desk.

A third is creativity. Professional publicists and public relations firms are often imaginative and creative. They frequently know how to package an idea or an image to make it appeal to the media.

You can do it yourself. Even the most difficult publicity objectives can be accomplished without external professional assistance. Doing so, however, often requires that you master the tools used by the professionals and learn the tricks of the trade that allow them to collect fees for the services they provide. You need to ask yourself -- "Do I have the time to become proficient in generating desirable coverage?"

As with most things, when buying professional services you get what you pay for. Most publicity professionals charge either on a project basis or on a monthly retainer. The fees are not inexpensive. And, you are responsible for their direct expenses. These can be considerable. In seeking their services you are likely to be quoted a wide variety of fees. Evaluate their approach, their ideas, their style and make your decision accordingly.

If you do elect to use professionals, it will be in your interest to manage them tightly. In my experience, the squeaky clean wheel gets the grease in this business. I have always found it advantageous to ride them hard. Think about calling every day and saying "I read *The Journal* this morning and I did not see my name on the front page. What are you people doing?" They will be quick to remind you about your last coverage or to tell you what they did for you yesterday. Thank them, but remind them that such is history. Then, inquire about what they are doing for you today.

### **Are You Prepared for the Response?**

Don't commence efforts to generate publicity until you have carefully considered how you will handle the response if your efforts are successful.

Do you have time to be responsive? What if 30 writers want to interview you? Suppose 16 local a.m. television talk shows want you to guest? How would you handle 7,321 requests for information?

The time to think about how you will handle the results of your efforts to generate publicity is before you start, and not after you achieve the desired result. The publicity you generate (or the opportunities for publicity secured) will be wasted unless you are able to respond quickly and appropriately.

Before you pitch the bookers, producers or hosts of all of the local television talk shows to have you as a guest you had better ask yourself whether you would be willing to travel all over the country, at your own expense, to do five minute segments at the drop of a hat.

Do you have adequate staff support to quickly process hundreds or thousands of requests for information? Plan ahead. Think the response through carefully. If not, publicity can become a burden rather than a benefit.

### **Always, Always Make Time for the Press!**

The response to your efforts to generate publicity seem to arrive at times which are most inconvenient for you. Writers call a few minutes or a few hours before deadline. Planned guests on talk and interview shows cancel out at the last minute, creating an opening that the producer hopes you can fill.

If you wish to maximize the results of your publicity-seeking efforts, you must always make time for the press, be immediately responsive, follow up quickly, and work at their convenience -- not your own.

When called for a quote, interview, comment or information, stop whatever you are doing and respond at the time. If you absolutely can't respond at the moment, inquire about deadline and schedule and respond as quickly as necessary. When

a good live appearance opportunity comes about, change your plans and schedule to be there.

Just like you, members of the press wait for the last minute and are motivated by deadlines. Be responsive to their schedule! Follow up immediately. When they need information, be prepared to fax it instantly or send it overnight express, if necessary.

Make sure that you are viewed by your media contacts as being instantly available, immediately responsive and sensitive to their needs.

### **Try and Get that Address and Phone Number Included**

Publicity is wonderful. Publicity that includes your address and phone number is productive. When dealing with the media, be creative in coming up with angles that will result in your address and phone number being included in the press you receive.

Remember, people are a little lazy. If it's convenient to get in touch with you, they will. If it's not, most won't bother.

Agreeing to provide free or low-cost information is often an excellent device for getting your address and phone number published. My experience, in this regard, may be instructive. I am frequently interviewed by newspaper and magazine writers who ask questions related to my annual, national study on the fees, incomes and operating ratios of consulting and professional practices.

At some point during the interview, I will say something like, "By the way, if any of your readers would like a complete summary of the data, I would be happy to provide it to them without charge. All they need to do is write or phone and request it." If you are doing a broadcast interview, you can make a similar statement. The interviewer has little choice but to then ask you to give your phone number and/or address to permit the audience to take advantage of your gracious generosity. Developing the ability to get the media to include information on how to contact you has great value.

### **Respond to Publicity-Generated Leads Immediately!**

If you are going to the effort and expense to obtain publicity, be sure to respond to the leads promptly. We live in a society of instant gratification. If you need a carton of milk at 1:00 a.m. you can go to the local convenience store. If you want a photocopy at 3:00 a.m. you can go to the local all-night copy center. We don't like to wait for anything and we don't have to. If you are unwilling or unable to respond immediately, your competition can.

Respond to leads received the very day, or at worse, the next day. Get to them while they are hot. Interest wanes fast. And usually when someone is requesting information they are requesting it from several sources. The first to respond has the greatest chance of getting the business.

Living by such a policy has resulted in much business and goodwill in my shop. I have had people call at 5:15 p.m. and request information. A personal letter and sales literature is mailed that evening. In the local area it is likely to be delivered by noon the next day. They frequently call to do business and almost always comment on the speed of response/quality of service.

### **Not All Leads are Business Opportunities**

Just getting leads may not be productive. What you really want are qualified leads, of course. Your publicity efforts should be directed towards ensuring that you acquire leads with the right potential.

Many years ago, in-flight magazine publishers discovered the bingo card. Since, at least in those days, you could not telephone from an airplane, to order or request information and probably were not inclined to write a letter aloft, the reader response card was a great device. People could take a pencil and circle numbers, mail the card after disembarking and receive information. The concept has become popular for magazines.

Some advertisers realized that when the air is thin, the liquor flowing, and people have little to occupy their minds, some of these travelers become mesmerized by the bingo cards and circle those little numbers to death. As a result they received mountains of information. But few bought. Indeed, some advertisers began to request that they be left off the response card. Responding to the leads was too costly for the business obtained.

In seeking publicity, if you are not too discriminating, you can get lots of leads. But are they the right leads? Screen publicity opportunities to help ensure that you get only qualified leads. When making information offers, consider charging a dollar or two in order to separate the interested from those who just like to receive mail.

## **They've Not Seen it All! Creativity Counts**

Direct marketers expend great effort trying to figure out how to get your attention. With the mountains of promotional solicitations received these days and the busy schedules we all keep, they know that they have to be creative if they are to have their promotional message noticed.

Since you are but one of hundreds or thousands contacting the media to gain publicity, it will be in your interest to think like the most creative direct marketers. No, the press has not seen everything. Creativity pays off. Anything that you can do, in good taste, to encourage your pitch for publicity to be noticed and responded to as you desire will be beneficial.

Some writers on the subject of publicity and public relations advise that all interactions with the media be in ways only proven by tradition. Often this is a good practice, but be careful that you don't follow tradition so closely that your communications to the media don't get noticed. Members of the press are impacted by many of the changes that you and I are. This sometimes permits you to depart from the way things have always been done. I would rather receive coverage than strictly adhere to tradition.

### **Press Begets Press**

The more coverage you receive from the press, the more you will receive. If you, your product, your project or your cause is to become a "household" word, you want as much favorable press as possible. And getting press is one of the best ways to get more press. You may have noticed that certain sources seem to be quoted repeatedly. They are not only frequently mentioned in a given publication, but in the media in general. Here's why...

Most journalists keep a file or notebook of sources by subject matter. When working on a story, they turn to the appropriate file. If you are there you will likely get a call and be asked for your opinion or information. If there is no one under the category or an insufficient number of sources, the reporter is likely to take a look at other articles on the subject. If you were mentioned or quoted there you are likely to get a call. The more files and notebooks you can find your way into, the more media coverage you can anticipate.

Simply put -- press begets press!