

# How to Get Free Publicity

Follow these seven marketing secrets and you'll be well on your way to a successful publicity campaign.

BY TRACI BISSON

**A**re you tired of picking up your newspaper and seeing a picture of your competitors' smiling faces with a shot of their new products? Ever wonder how they snagged an interview on your favorite radio station's morning show?

Well, it's time to put on your PR hat and get a piece of the free-publicity pie that every small-business owner deserves.

Following are seven secrets every small-business owner should know about getting free publicity.

## Secret #1: Know Your Target Market

Your target market is the group of people that is most likely to buy your product. Make a list of print and broadcast media that reach your target market. Visit your library and ask to see its media directories. These books are divided into regions and list contact information for the media in that region. You also will find data on the media outlets' target markets, their circulation or ratings, whether they accept press releases and other valuable information.

If your library does not carry media directories, call the advertising department of every newspaper and magazine in which you hope to get publicity and ask for a copy of the publication's editorial calendar. An editorial calendar lists all the special topics and sections that the publication will cover that year. It will help you decide which issues would be most appropriate for your press release.

## Secret #2: The Hook

According to AllBusiness.com, an online resource for small businesses, "A hook is the characteristic that makes your business unique and of publicity value."

The site offers the following examples:

- A restaurant in which the waiters are



intentionally rude to patrons (it also happens to serve excellent Italian food).

- A gas station that gives newspapers to its customers with every fill-up.
- An antiques shop with goats in its lobby for visitors to feed.

When creating a hook or a unique story angle, consider ideas that motivate, inspire, educate or create controversy.

## Secret #3: Build Relationships with the Media

Building a relationship with the media will net you top-of-mind awareness. This ensures that editors and program directors will remember you when they need an expert for an article.

To start building these relationships, call the media outlets and introduce yourself. Offer to provide any information they need on your area of expertise. Additionally, you can call the publications or stations to notify them of any newsworthy event, such as a business's grand opening, an anniversary, an upcoming event, a new product or service, or the receipt of an award. You may not always get coverage of your newsworthy idea, but you have nothing to lose by cultivating media relationships.

According to Steve Bolerjack, a business writer and public-relations consultant in Palm Springs, California, small-business owners shouldn't be intimidated by reporters. "The media are always on the lookout for a new story, a different angle and a fresh approach," he says. "Therefore, they are potentially interested in you and what your business is all about."

## Secret #4: The Press Release

Press releases (or news releases) are used to announce your company's news to journalists in the hope that they will publicize your story. When writing a press release, remember these important details:

1. Always include your full contact information so an editor can contact you easily with questions.

2. When space is limited, editors cut stories from the bottom. Therefore, it is important to construct your press release using the inverted-pyramid model (more important information at the beginning; less important information at the end).

3. Begin your release with a catchy introduction or a straightforward synopsis of Who, What, Where, When and Why.

4. Follow this information with important details, including any quotes from company officials.

5. Conclude the release with other information, including contact name, phone number, address, Web site, etc.

6. Be aware of reader, viewer or listener interests. Craft your press release with these in mind.

7. When submitting your press release to the media outlet, send it to the appropriate person. Call ahead of time for details.

## Secret #5: Create an Identity Kit

An identity kit or media kit is a professional portfolio of information on your company

that can be sent to the media. The kit does not have to be fancy, but it should contain a professional profile of the owner, a company brochure, a business card, photos, past press releases, copies of print articles and suggested interview questions or ways the business can help the media.

The items can be enclosed in a simple pocket folder. Add a sales cover letter, and you have a useful tool for gaining and maintaining top-of-mind awareness with the media. Keep the folder updated with

additional articles and published press releases about your company.

### **Secret #6: Other Promotional Ideas**

There are many other options for building awareness of your company. Public speaking is a great way to educate your target market about your products and services. Chambers of commerce, Rotary groups, women's organizations, etc., often need speakers at their meetings.

Alfred Lautenslager, an award-winning marketing and public-relations consultant and the principal of Marketing Now in Wheaton, Illinois, says that speaking in front of an audience can make you an expert. "People like to buy from experts. If they're in your audience, then they'll remember your expertise and come to you when they need your product or service," he says.

Joan Stewart of The Publicity Hound in Port Washington, Wisconsin ([www.publicityhound.com](http://www.publicityhound.com)) suggests other ways retailers can gain exposure:

- Start a television show on your local community-access cable TV channel. A floral shop can do a program on how to create flower arrangements; a gift store can do a show on gorgeous gift-wrapping.
- Contact your trade association and ask the directors to refer reporters to you. Many reporters who don't know where to find sources on a particular topic start by calling trade associations.
- Write how-to articles for newsletters published by groups in your community or for newsletters read by audiences who buy your products or services. Be sure the last paragraph includes information on how to contact you.
- Get on your local TV news. Tie your product, service, cause or issue to a breaking news event; pitch yourself as the local angle to a national story; or suggest a feature story with great visuals.
- Pitch story ideas about your business to the reporter who covers the retail beat for your local business journal.
- Invite a reporter from your newspaper for coffee or lunch. Instead of asking, "Will you write about me?" ask, "How can I help you?" Offer yourself as a resource in your area of expertise. Talk about trends you see in your industry.

### **Secret #7: Consistency**

Once you've started a publicity campaign, be consistent. Keep the media informed of newsworthy events on a regular basis. If you lose touch for too long, your contacts may think you have gone out of business. As was true with the tortoise and the hare, slow and steady wins the race. ■

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