

Seen and Heard

Learn to make the most of broadcast media. Follow these tips and you'll gain free exposure for your business on radio and TV.

BY TRACI BISSON

As a small-business owner, you have unique expertise. This expertise consists of your experiences, your background, your education and your industry knowledge. You may not realize it, but as an expert, you could be an important source of information to reporters, producers and hosts of radio and television talk shows.

Have you watched a local news program or listened to your favorite radio station and heard the host interviewing other business owners on a certain subject? These professionals became recognized as knowledgeable sources because they took steps to build the value of their opinion. Follow the five tips in this article and learn how to build and sell your expertise so the next expert opinion you hear is yours.

Position Yourself as an Expert

Positioning yourself as an expert in your field is one of the best ways to attract the media, says Nick Osborne, author of *Net Words: Creating High-Impact Online Copy*. Yes, you first have to be an expert, but you don't have to be the world's leading expert; you just need to know what you're talking about and be able to talk about it in depth.

Start by making a list of topics you would be comfortable discussing. Consider various angles of your business. If you run a traditional gift shop, you could discuss top gifts for weddings or other special occasions, or you could comment on gift-giving trends. If you operate a home

accents store, you could talk about adding style to small spaces. A florist could demonstrate simple floral-arranging techniques. As a business owner, you could also discuss tactics for running a small business or ways the economy affects companies.

Monitor local and national news for breaking stories on which you can comment and on which a reporter or producer would find your expertise valuable. Look for a connection between your expertise and the news.

Develop a Media Kit

Once you've identified topics on which you can provide an informed opinion, the next step is to develop a media kit. A media kit acts as a professional portfolio that highlights your expertise. Included in the media kit should be an informational sheet on your company and a biography of yourself; past news releases, articles or stories written about you and your company; brochures or product sheets that help portray your company; and a well-written cover letter.

The biography should include your picture and highlights of your experience and expertise. This piece sums up the contents of the media kit and gives reporters or producers a quick reference sheet. You can also include a list of topics you can discuss or interview questions you can answer. The easier you make it for the media to interview you, the better your

chances of being chosen over a competing store owner.

Past articles or stories will show that other media outlets found you valuable. You could also list the different publications or shows that interviewed you.

If you have brochures or product sheets, you can include them in the media kit as well. However, keep in mind that the media kit is an informational tool, not a sales tool. Its purpose is to position you as an expert, not to hard-sell your product. Sales are a byproduct of gaining expert interviews from the media.

Your cover letter should be personalized for each media source. Highlight in the letter your experience and your understanding of the market, and offer ideas and story possibilities for which an interview might be possible. Include all of these elements, along with your business card, in an attractive pocket folder, and you'll have a useful tool for demonstrating your expertise to the media. Now it's time to find the appropriate resources to which to send your media kit.

Build a Media List

Every business owner should have a targeted media list. This list ensures that you reach the reporters, producers and show hosts who would be most interested in your expertise. Start by reviewing radio and TV station Web sites. Look for the names of news reporters, news directors or assignment editors. Two other resources that will help you build your list are:

- Newslink—<http://newslink.org>—a Web site that provides media information



by state and by type. You can break down the media by city in each state. The site also provides a link to each news outlet's Web site.

- Media directories, which are available at most libraries. These directories break out radio and TV stations as well as other media by city and state. They also contain information on demographics, circulation and contacts.

Find out as much as you can about the radio or TV stations you are targeting. Watch or listen to local programs and understand the format they use and the types of guests they interview. If a show reaches your target market, write down the name of the show and the host's name. For TV, review the list of credits at the end of the broadcast for producers and hosts.

Once you have established your list, mail your media kit and pitch letter to a small sample of media outlets to start. When you follow up on the kits sent, you will gain a better understanding of how the media perceive your expertise and whether anyone is interested in interviewing you for an upcoming story. If you get a lukewarm reception, you'll need to tweak your media kit or improve your knowledge.

Start at the Bottom and Work Your Way Up

If this is your first time seeking radio and TV interviews, start at the bottom of the media ladder and work your way up.

According to Joan Stewart, publicity expert and owner of The Publicity Hound in Port Washington, Wisconsin, "The ladder is nothing more than groupings of various media at different levels or 'rungs' according to size and importance. The trick is to start somewhere on the ladder and once you have penetrated the media on that particular rung, use the publicity to attract the attention of the media on the next highest rung, and so on."

Here's what the media ladder looks like:

- Bottom rung: Print and online newsletters, public-access cable TV channels, community-access radio programs.
- Next-to-bottom rung: Trade publications, weekly newspapers, special-interest publications, alumni publications.
- Middle rung: Local daily newspapers, radio and TV stations; business journals; city and regional magazines.

- Next-to-top rung: National newspapers, national magazines.

- Top rung: National network news.

More than 1,000 public-access stations exist across the country. Find them by calling your cable operator or watching the preview channel. If your cable system lacks a public-access channel, look into other nearby cable systems.

Strike While the Iron is Hot

To gain the most radio or TV exposure, you need to keep your eye on the news and work your media contacts. Any time you see a breaking news story on which you can expertly comment, contact the media on your list immediately and stand by for their call, advises Annie Jennings of Annie Jennings PR in Belle Mead, New Jersey. Contact your media targets in advance to let them know you are available the next time they need an expert in your industry.

If you cannot locate any urgent news stories and you need to touch base with the contacts on your media list to maintain top-of-mind awareness, consider the following options:

- Consult *Chase's Calendar of Events* to find an event or special occasion to which you can tie your expertise. *Chase's* is the ultimate reference calendar documenting holidays, celebrations, historical anniversaries, etc. You can purchase the book online

at www.chases.com.

- Advertise in one of the many expert-interview publications produced for the media. These directories include *Radio and TV Interview Report*, *Directory of News Sources* and *Yearbook of Experts, Authorities & Spokespersons*, all of which can be found online.

Be the Object of News

Another option in addition to being interviewed as an expert is to be interviewed as the object of the news. Think of the events you organize or the products you sell and create something interesting based on them. If you're collecting canned foods for charity, consider building a canned-goods castle out of all the foods you collect. Build the castle in your display window. Passers-by will delight in seeing how the castle is growing. Then contact the media and invite them to see how tall the building has grown. Remember, when it comes to gaining publicity, the unusual beats out the basic. For TV, think visually. "Joan's Gift Store is collecting canned goods for charity" doesn't sound like an exciting TV piece; "Joan's Gift Store is building a canned-goods castle" holds more interest.

Traci Bisson is a freelance writer and the owner of Bisson Barcelona, a public relations firm in Barrington, New Hampshire.



Quick Tips to Put You on Radio and TV

It doesn't take big money or secret connections to get interviewed on radio or TV. Follow these five tips and you'll be the celebrity expert in your community.

1. Develop your expertise. Determine the topics on which you can provide valuable knowledge. Think in terms of what listeners or viewers would want to hear.
2. Create a media kit that showcases your knowledge. Include a bio, interview questions and previous articles published on your company.
3. Build a media list. Develop a targeted list of news reporters, editors, talk-show hosts and producers. Mail your media kit to the contacts, and keep the information current.
4. Start at the bottom and climb. Concentrate first on gaining exposure on public-access channels or community radio shows, and then use that publicity to hit larger stations and shows.
5. Create interesting news. Develop a twist on the unusual and think visually.

