

Parlay Planning into Effective Public Relations

Public relations – stories, articles and features - enhance visibility and help establish credentials. Many small business owners overlook the potential to generate positive public perception with press releases or stories about their business that create public interest. With just a little planning, you can be one of the select few that maximize the power of public relations.

Think PR and look for ways to enhance buzz, which is about hearing your name often, clearly and memorably. You don't have to pay a high dollar for buzz; instead, you must invest time and energy into your message and use exposure to tell your story. Traditional PR includes newspapers, magazines, radio, and television.

In some cases, a business owner might write a monthly column in his/her area of expertise. A financial services company might write about the pitfalls of retirement planning, for example. This type of public relations can create additional awareness and even credibility. An employment agency might host a weekly talk show on hiring trends in the marketplace.

Sometimes an alliance can be formed to generate more publicity. All of the businesses in one neighborhood, for example, concentrate their efforts to get recognition. They create ongoing team exposure with signage and banners that include all logos. Press releases discuss the venture and detail its progress. The story is the cooperation; or, the story could be a specific event.

Getting consistent publicity involves networking your contacts to penetrate the media. Business is not about being coy or recalcitrant. If you are helping the community, do not be embarrassed to have it noted. The story may inspire philanthropy in others and improve your locality. Further, "helping" not only makes you feel good, it makes the people who patronize your firm feel good about their choice. These are also great stories that will often get on the news ahead of "revenue boasts."

Other great story and PR ideas might look like this: a local veterinarian posts a review of the latest pet foods on his web site as well as behavioral training tips for cats and dogs; a financial planner writes a monthly column on retirement for a magazine; a painting firm donates excess paint to a charity who then reports that information and it's aired on the local TV news; a restaurant receives a community award for employing the handicap and the local newspaper covers the story in its business section. Get the idea?

Still stumped about what you could do to generate publicity? Have coffee with a local reporter and ask for their input. Talk with other business owners who have been profiled and find out about their experience. Read blogs, listen to podcasts and review online media. Situations like these force you to be a bit vulnerable. Certainly, rejection will occur. However, be persistent and thoughtful creation of a good story will overcome this hurdle.

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