

"Soft" News Programs Offer Hot Opportunity For Free Publicity

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george@get-free-publicity.com

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My grandmother used to say, "You can ask for anything if you're not afraid to take no for an answer."

Grandmother wasn't talking about asking the media for free publicity, but she could have been.

Shrinking ad revenues, and the ever-growing number of cable stations have caused massive cuts in news operations everywhere. And with fewer people doing more work, you can score some big publicity coups simply by making yourself available.

This is especially true with "soft news" or "lifestyle" programs in small-to-medium size TV markets.

These are shows that generally appear in the mid-morning, and focus on relationships, medical, travel, consumer, legal and financial topics rather than murder, mayhem, and traffic accidents (which tend to show up on evening or "hard news" programs).

I recently picked a Tuesday morning and watched "San Antonio Living," a one hour program airing each weekday at 10:00 AM on my local NBC affiliate.

They did a little hard news and some weather, of course. But the rest of the show seemed like non-stop unpaid commercials for a number of businesses.

Here's the lineup:

10:06 Guest appearance by designer Carolina Herrera, including models wearing some of her fashions. A full screen graphic with Herrera's name and phone number closed the segment. 13 minutes

10:21 Live remote with a reporter at a new store called "TreefrogEd," which sells educational materials for kids. Full screen graphic with name and phone number included. 8 minutes.

10:30 An appearance by a food specialist from a local supermarket. Live interview on the set. 7 minutes. Once again, a full screen graphic was included at the end of the segment.

10:40 Interview with Dr. Nancy Appleton, author of "Lick The Sugar Habit." Dr. Appleton not only got seven minutes of airtime, but the station promoted the book throughout the show during teases. Dr. Appleton (wisely) managed to mention her web site and the fact that she would be giving away several free copies of the book at a seminar that night.

10:51 A segment about a charity drive kickoff scheduled for the next day at a local homebuilder's showroom. The builder, KB Home, had a spokesperson and a banner on the set.

10:57 A quick return to the reporter at TreefrogEd, including another short interview with the store owner and more shots of products sold at the store.

Again, this was a typical Tuesday morning picked at random. People who appeared did not have to buy advertising as part of the deal. The exposure was totally free.

You can do it too. All it takes is a decent press release sent to the producer of the show. Stress the benefit their audience will get by watching (avoid mentioning specific products at this stage).

Will you get the air time you're looking for? Maybe. Maybe not.

But as my grandmother would tell you, you'll never know unless you ask.

George McKenzie offers free tips, techniques and tactics for using the media to attract new customers and drive up sales without spending cash on advertising. Visit <http://www.get-free-publicity.com/1.html>

George has more than 30 years experience as an award-winning radio and TV journalist. His work has been featured on ABC, NBC, CBS, ESPN and CNN.

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