

Industry Pro Interview: Insider Secrets To Building Your PR

Campaign

By Karon Thackston

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Todd Brabender of Spread The News Public Relations was kind enough to answer some burning questions most small business owners have about public relations, press releases and gaining media attention.

As a nationally recognized TV producer/reporter, Todd knows first hand what it takes to get the media's attention. He also knows what will turn them off faster than you can blink your eye. Since turning from television to public relations, Todd has successfully built Spread The New Public Relations (<http://www.spreadthenewspr.com>). He's taken a few minutes out of his busy schedule to help us out by answering some questions.

KARON: There seems to be a misconception about press releases these days. Most business owners have been led to believe that they can write a press release about anything and have the media running to their doorstep. You and I know that's simply not true. Can you give us an outline of what the media might find "newsworthy".

TODD: A media release does not a PR/publicity campaign make. A media release is indeed an integral part of a campaign, but without a number of other elements it isn't worth much more than the paper it is printed upon. The biggest mistake most entrepreneurs make is using a media release aimed toward the end user/consumer, not to the media. Keep in mind the media is the target of a release. If a release doesn't sway the media into thinking that their readers or viewers would be interested in the topic of the release then they won't use it and the end user/consumer won't even hear about it.

KARON: So how do we change our focus from consumer to editor?

TODD: The media needs a "newspeg" to be interested in your release. Overcommercialized, advertising copy calling your product/business the "best" is fruitless -- because the editor likely just got off the phone with a person who claimed HIS product was the best too! Knowing what the media is interested in covering is the key to generating good exposure from your release. The media likes releases that provide unique information for their readers/viewers -- information that isn't just a

re-hash of a tired old story. If your message details something that is unique, unprecedented or solves a consumer's problem you then have a better chance of creating media interest.

KARON: Good points! Let's talk about format for a minute. I have seen a LOT of information lately about the formatting of press releases. Some say stick with the tried and true format. Others say - in the age of the Internet when reporters receive tons of email per day - we have to make them extremely short (about 3 paragraphs) and include the facts only. What have you found to be most effective?

TODD: When it comes to releases my favorite adjective is "concise". That doesn't mean short or small, it means that the information provided in the release is pertinent, factual and direct. I have been handed draft media releases written by clients that were over 1000 words that could have been completed in 300 words. There is no magic number of words to use but a good rule of thumb is to write an amount that can be seen on one screen of an email program -- about 300 words. Keep quotes from company executives to a minimum, don't include testimonials and state "facts not fireworks".

KARON: Thanks, Todd. Now, I know that I've gotten several questions pertaining to why press releases don't work. I'm sure you have, too. There's a misunderstanding that just sending a media release is enough. Can you give us a brief description of what it takes to develop a full PR strategy.

TODD: Sure, be glad to. A solid Public Relations/Publicity campaign should consist of the following elements.

1. Articulate media release/feature pitch composition that gets the attention of editors, reporters and producers nationwide. If you can't get their attention, you've lost the battle before you've even started.

2. Meticulous media market research capabilities to find those media outlets and contacts applicable to your campaign. Just sending your release to anyone and everyone makes no sense. Some press release distribution services charge hundreds of dollars to send out your release. But WHO is it going to? It does little good to send a release about new business finance developments to the editor of Southern Living. Their audience isn't looking for that information.

Be sure you take great care to find media outlets and individual contacts that are interested in what you have to say.

3. Extensive, ongoing campaign management including: media follow-ups; media relations contacts, media request fulfillment and more. Why? Because without follow-ups, you have to start all over again then next time you send a release. And without media relations, you decrease your chance of getting seen by a horrifying percentage.

4. Media tracking capabilities to get you copies of the articles and features in which your product or business is mentioned. This information is vital for critiquing existing campaigns and launching future ones. By determining who ran what stories, and which types of media picked up on your release, you can strategically alter the direction of your publicity efforts for a greater response.

KARON: Now, you mentioned distribution services a minute ago. What I hear most from small business owners is that they "need" a press release distribution service. I have found, however, that it is often more effective to develop your own, targeted list of outlets to send releases to. What do you find works most often?

TODD: When it comes to press release distribution -- beware. Many distribution services are what I call "pitch and ditch" services in that they pitch your release to supposedly thousands of media

outlets, but provide no additional media relations, follow-ups, media request fulfillment or tracking. Many services indiscriminately spew your release to hundreds of untargeted media outlets with little or no results. I'm not saying release distribution services aren't legitimate -- I just question their effectiveness for companies that aren't publicly traded. A smaller company needs to provide consistent and effective follow-ups before a campaign begins to bear fruit. And be sure to research to find out the preferred method of receipt of your media targets - don't just assume an email will suffice. Whether it's by snail mail, email, fax or phone calls, the media can't run your story if they don't hear about it.

KARON: Thanks so much, Todd. You've provided a lot of direction here that I know Business Essentials' readers will take advantage of.

Todd Brabender of Spread The News Public Relations can be found online at <http://www.spreadthenewspr.com> .

Most buying decisions are emotional. Your ad copy should be, too! Karon is Owner and President of KT & Associates who offers targeted copywriting, copy editing & ezine article services. Subscribe to KT & Associates' Ezine "Business Essentials" at BusinessEssentials-subscribe@topica.com or visit her site at <http://www.ktamarketing.com>

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