

How Manufacturers Can Pump Up Sales, Profits,

By Petra Carlisle

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Hiring a professional Public Relations (PR) firm is not for every company, but can be the swiftest route to increased sales, profits, and market credibility in some circumstances. According to Len Saffir, a PR industry veteran and author of the best-selling book *Power Public Relations*, the basic progression is to do in-house PR “until a company becomes either big enough or smart enough to seek expert help.” In the following ten circumstances, a manufacturer would be wise to consider getting expert product publicity help:

1. When your product is largely unknown. Like launching a rocket into orbit, it takes a tremendous amount of energy to launch a company or product from obscurity into a state of recognition. Editors and potential early adopters will have a healthy level of skepticism that must be overcome by a sustained boost of energy and credibility. That means researching where your product or service is superior to the competition, credibly highlighting that, and following up with editors. By comparison, once your product is known (“in orbit”), it naturally benefits by word-of-mouth and takes considerably less effort to publicize.

2. When there is no acknowledged leader in your market category. A good PR firm with product publicity expertise can help establish a new market category in the mind of target readership. This isn't possible by placing an occasional article or two. It takes a sustained volume of credible articles, usually in a variety of story types including features and case studies, before an acceptable level of mindshare is captured and a new market category established.

One caveat: it's dangerous to create a new market category, without establishing clear leadership in the area. A “go slow” approach in fact may allow nimble competitors to take over market leadership in a category you established. That's why it's critical for a volume of credible stories to be systematically created and published to keep up momentum. This will simultaneously rev up sales and discourage competitors from taking over any new market category you may establish.

3. When you aren't getting enough qualified leads from traditional sources. In many cases traditional forms of promotion and advertising, including direct mail and telemarketing, may be adequate. But if this isn't working to your satisfaction, then successful PR focused on product publicity should be explored.

4. When your gross income is flat or down. To improve on a bad situation, more aggressive steps are necessary than what you've done in the past. A carefully crafted product publicity campaign will step up momentum and create new sales channels while enhancing those you've already established.

5. When sales reps spend more than ten percent of their time cold calling or trying to get past gatekeepers. For efficiency, the sales staff should spend the majority of their time on bids, quotes, and proposals - not making cold calls or circumventing gatekeepers. Proper product publicity will not only bring in a volume of leads, but also improve the quality of lead - so the sales staff spends more time with prospects inclined to buy your product or service.
6. When your product sells in a national market. Given a national market for your product, it makes sense to target the tremendous number of trade publications in both vertical and horizontal markets. Local angles can also be implemented for regional newspapers and TV, for example.
7. When your product is newsworthy. The strength of PR is that it is placed as content in publications, and inherently has more credibility than advertising. But newsworthiness must be highlighted and developed. If you're unsure if your product is newsworthy - even if you've been told it's not - it's a good idea to consult an expert in product publicity PR to see if an appropriate angle can be developed. For example, successful case studies can often be developed around custom products, since each application is unique.
8. When at least 25 trade publications serve your market. Some markets have a hundred or more publications that speak to the needs of potential prospects. A small number of publications, such as three to five, may be competently dealt with by in-house PR staff. But the logistics and follow-up of dealing with the editors and staff of 25 or more publications is often too complex or time-consuming for in-house staff. This is where the expertise, focus, and follow-up of a product publicity PR expert can help.
9. When you have excess production capacity. When staff or facilities sit idle, it's critical to the bottom line to get them working since any sales past the break-even point can substantially increase profits. A critical volume of product publicity stories crafted to entice specific markets can keep production and profits at all-time highs.
10. Where credibility is an issue. Because articles are vetted by editors and published as content, they're typically much more persuasive to readers than advertising. Ask yourself, would you be more likely to read and believe a published story or a paid-for ad, when searching for a solution to a problem? Publicity, of course, can also be powerful in healing any past issues of credibility.

For manufacturers considering hiring a PR firm specializing in product publicity, a few more pointers should be kept in mind to maximize the sales, promotional, and credibility benefits they'll receive. First, make sure the firm you pick has successfully dealt with a variety of different technologies, including yours whenever possible. They must first understand your product before they can promote it. Second, ensure the firm has, in fact, performed to high product publicity standards in the past. Before you part with any money, find out how many articles they've placed in publications similar to those of your target audience. They should be able to itemize not only the circulation of each publication, but also the cost of each lead. Having done your homework, you'll now be able to properly monitor and track their progress, while your sales, profits, and credibility head for the stars.

For more info, contact: John Elliott, Founder and CEO of Power PR, Inc. (a product publicity firm specializing in manufacturing clients). Elliott has 35 years of experience as a journalist, editor and public relations practitioner. Call (310) 787-1940; fax (310) 787-1940; or visit www.PowerPR.com .

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