

Cultivating Positive Media Relationships

By Ramona Creel

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Some people think that publicity is all about paparazzi snapping photos of celebs and intruding into their private lives -- or as Woodward and Bernstein blowing the lid off of a government scandal. But, as a small business owner, publicity is actually one of your greatest allies! People who read about you in the newspaper or hear an interview with you on the radio will sit up and take notice -- much more notice than if they simply see a flier of yours posted at the Laundromat. But you have to be in charge of your relationship with the media, and make sure that it is a good one!

FINDING YOUR LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

The first step to securing some good free publicity is hooking up with the right people. Sending information to a generic address at every major media outlet in your area is almost always a waste of time. You need to find someone who is ready, willing, and able to get your story covered. You should be able to purchase a "MEDIA GUIDE" from local PR firm -- choose a large one with a good reputation. This will provide you with the names and addresses of editors, staff writers, producers, and other key contacts for print, radio, and TV.

WHO SHOULD GET YOUR PRESS RELEASE?

Make sure you send your press release to the APPROPRIATE DEPARTMENT at whichever media outlets you select. So if you are writing an article about organizing a business, send it to the business editor -- for cleaning out a closet, direct your release to a staff writer in the home and garden department. But don't limit yourself to publications that specialize in your field of expertise -- you never who will see your story as something unique and worth covering.

AVOIDING THE TRASH BIN

Editors and publishers are bombarded by tons of publicity requests each day -- and unfortunately, many press releases get tossed before they are ever read. But you can improve your odds by PERSONALIZING your package. It's usually best, at small offices, to send your piece to the editor or producer. However, at larger newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, you may have better luck getting a staff writer or columnist to review your proposal. Always VERIFY your contact's name (check the spelling!) and department. If you send a press release addressed simply to "editor" or "producer," your package will probably go straight into the trash! No matter how much time or energy it takes, it's always better to target a specific individual.

MAKING YOUR COMPANY ATTRACTIVE

It's not going to do you any good to send out a press release if no one looks at it! Your job is to make your company as attractive to your media contacts as possible. A great way to stand out from the crowd is to include SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS to entice your readers. Include tips related to your area of expertise, quote relevant statistics, share hero stories about clients you have helped, and throw in a few fliers about your business. Slip in a few photos of your products or your work -- or better yet, a demo tape. You might propose a SPECIAL OFFER ("call in and mention this article to receive \$25 off!) to be run in conjunction with the story.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Reporters are most easily impressed with PREPARATION. Call first to let your contact know that you are sending a press release -- this alerts them to your presence even before they get your submission. Always double check your facts and figures before submitting your press release. Be sure to call all for the organization's submission procedures -- don't expect to send in a press release about spring cleaning in April if your target magazine has a deadline three months before publication! And practice your INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES before hand -- you have to learn to think on your feet and articulate your thoughts clearly and concisely. Think in terms of sound bites and easily-quoted phrases.

IT'S ALL ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Working with media contacts is like working with clients -- it's never a one-shot deal. You have to STAY IN TOUCH with your media contacts and build lasting relationships before they will feel comfortable handling your story. Rather than simply mailing your press release, take the reporter to lunch to discuss how you can help them find a good story. Send your media contacts tidbits about possible stories that you think might interest them. Offer to make introductions. And always follow up with a PERSONAL NOTE. You are no longer a "grabber" -- you are now part of a symbiotic and mutually beneficial professional relationship.

PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF

You aren't going to get bowled over with publicity right away. Accept that fact from the beginning, and you won't get disappointed. Publicity is a "NUMBERS GAME" -- the more people you contact, the more press releases you send out, and the more often you send them, the better your chances of getting some good press. So let people know of every interesting move you make with your business -- they will become familiar with your company and eventually find a way to include your story.

You must include the following resource box when publishing this article:

Ramona Creel is a Professional Organizer and the founder of OnlineOrganizing.com -- a web-based one-stop shop offering everything that you need to get organized at home or at work. At OnlineOrganizing.com, you may get a referral to an organizer near you, shop for the latest organizing products, get tons of free tips, and even learn how to become a professional organizer or build your existing organizing business. And if you would like to read more articles about organizing your life or building your business, get a free subscription to the "Get Organized" and "Organized For A Living" newsletters. Please visit <http://www.onlineorganizing.com> or contact Ramona directly at <mailto:ramona@onlineorganizing.com> for more information.

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