

STOP Sending Press Releases!

By Susan Carter

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Whether you are in business or in the PR profession, you have been taught that the way to disseminate publishable information is by using the press (or news) release. Companies with good intentions do it, and public relations firms do it. The practice of sending press releases has been pounded into our brains and rarely questioned. But, for 99% of my clients, that's the harder - not smarter - way for small business owners to attract publicity.

Why?

By its very nature, a press release is designed for distribution to a wide range of media. It is not targeted to any particular format, media or editorial focus. Because it has to be written in very general terms, news releases do not usually fit a particular audience of reader. When reviewing a news release, an editor must search for a story angle in the text of the release that would interest readers. Most editors do not have the time or the desire to have to do this. There are plenty of other proposals in the month's "IN" basket prepared by writers who have already done this for them.

Does this mean that a news release will never generate a story? Of course not. Editors use anything and everything that fit the needs of the publication. Press releases can spark some well-deserved company feature stories. Yet, savvy business owners (like you and me!) are interested in minimizing the effort while maximizing results. A press release is low on that list. So what should you do instead?

If you want the job done right, go directly to the source—the writers!

BUT, not just any writer. I'm talking about the writers who are already being published in the magazines you want your company to appear in.

Here's why.

Editors of publications develop strong relationships with their recurring writers. Confidence in the writer's ability to deliver what the publication wants is established. The editor trusts the writer to pitch a good, usable story. With each published story from a specific writer, the editor relies more and more on the writer to continue to feed the publication good stuff. The writer becomes an important extension of the publication's staff.

When a writer and editor have a well-developed relationship, two things happen:

1 - The editor is more likely to take notice of anything the writer sends because that editor knows the writer is very aware of the types of articles the publication uses.

2 - When an editor is 'stuck' to find additional last-minute filler information for a specific topic, the writer becomes a reliable last-minute resource.

So what are the advantages to YOU for writing to the writers instead of the publications?

1. Writers who write for specific publications are paid by the publications that print their articles! Since writers are paid by the publication, it is FREE to you.

2. Writers who have already been published in specific magazines have an established relationship with its editors—editors are more receptive to people they already know, have used before, and trust. Writers who know what specific magazine editors are looking for keep an eye out for stories that can be turned into cash for them. With this kind of motivation for the writer, your less-than-perfect introductory letter won't be dismissed as quickly as it would by an editor.

3. It's obvious, but needs to be said: writers are writers. It's their business to take the information you give them and turn it into a story proposal that an editor will want to use. You don't have to worry about writing the perfect headline. That's the writer's job. It is worth money to the writer to find and enhance the aspects of your business that will be interesting to the readers of any specific magazine.

4. Published writers know exactly what the publications they write for want from a story. This often shortens the submission and acceptance cycle so that your story gets printed sooner.

Types of Stories You Can Participate In

* Professional profile. Exceptional leadership qualities, or a business owner who uses a very unique management style, are of interest to many business publications. While you may prefer to seek publicity for your company, a professional profile puts a favorable spotlight on your company, too.

* Company profile. An aspect of the company's operation is of interest to a specific type of publication. For instance, Human Resource magazine might be interested in you if you have a unique employee benefits or incentive plan.

* Multiple source feature story. Feature stories often use interviews from several companies regarding one topic. For instance, Human Resource magazine may prefer to present several incentive plans used by different companies. You become one of those companies as a small part of a larger article.

* Expert resource. A magazine may cite you as an expert in a certain industry to lend credibility to its article's main point. For instance, if you are a financial analyst, a magazine covering a story about investing may want to back a statement made about how the roller-coaster stock market will affect today's Baby Boomers' financial portfolios. You would have the industry knowledge and access to research to offer an educated (and credible) opinion.

Any of the above ideas (and countless others) can result in valuable publicity - and useable marketing materials - for you. All without extensive research or learning how to craft a perfect headline.

How much easier (or cheaper!) can the quest-for-publicity get?

Susan Carter is a small business operations and marketing consultant, and author of How To Make Your Business Run Without You. For step-by-step, show-and-tell details (including sample letters) on how to find and approach writers who are eager to tell YOUR story, download Carter's popular ebook today and be sending out your publicity-generating letters tomorrow! Visit: <http://www.successideas.com/Flashbooks.htm> for details.

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