

The 'Sunny' Sides of Press Releases

Written by Ambika Indira

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In today's world of cutthroat competition nothing is as important as sales. As a small business owner, if you are to survive in the industry, you need to come up with an effective business strategy that boosts your sales. For startup companies with small budgets generating business through advertising is both a challenging and risky venture. Once the initial budget is gone, there are seldom second chances. For such startup companies the best way to generate sales is to create buzz through Public Relation.

Until recently most public relations activity involved person-to-person contact between PR professionals and members of the media. However, several trends such as blogs, discussion forums, RSS Feeds, Podcasting, Search Engine Optimization, etc., are developing in the field of Public Relation.

In this article I am focusing on the traditional mode of Public Relation-Press Release. Compared to advertising, the value of successful press release adds credibility to your story. Being a small business owner who is apparently new to the market, you have a special advantage. For the public loves stories about new initiatives, their brilliant ideas and how they shaped something from nothing.

Readers/viewers view media as independent sources that are unbiased in their coverage, which means that the decision to include the name of a company and the views expressed about the company is not based on advertisement gimmick or payment but on the media's judgment of what is important. A positive story about a new product in the business section of a local newspaper may have greater impact on readers than a full-page advertisement for the product since readers perceive the news as an impartial perspective of the product/service.

Before approaching the media with your press release it's good to have an overview of your

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market. Identifying which community should use your product will help you recognise the media you need to work with. Once you have an idea of your target audience, find out the benefits of your products and services that are relevant to the market. It is also important to prove your product is x-times faster and more cost effective than your competitor's products. Such specific and proven advantages will provide the media concrete evidence to feature your product over anyone else's. To be on the news you can also donate your products/services to a charity or organise some arts and sports events.

Once you have a clear picture of your market and the unique selling aspect of your product/ services, start your release with a great headline. Your first paragraph should both explain the headline and summaries the story. After preparing the release, make a phone call to the local reporter or to the local office of the publication to let them know that you have a story that may interest their readers. Give them the headline and the first paragraph. They'll make a decision then and there whether they like it or not. Follow up by asking if you can call back the next day or at some other specific time, depending on publication dates. Don't be pushy. If the story is of value, it will sell itself. All you should do is provide your contact with the convenience of more information. This is also a good way to make sure your press release gets a second look. Use a photograph if necessary since one image can literally sell a thousand words.

If you don't have any important announcements to make, don't try to create and distribute a generic press release. It should be reserved for true announcements of value and major milestones. While preparing your release also keep in mind that not every media won't be interested in publishing your stories. A business publication is more likely to be interested in entrepreneurial story and recent retail success than a newspaper.

If you want to get more space for your press releases its important that you establish a lasting relationship with editors, reporters and producers. The more relationships you have with your targeted publications, the increased likelihood you have of getting publicity. So when you do have that blockbuster story, you'll know who to contact directly and quickly for the biggest PR impact. Use PR effectively to accelerate your sales. A good press release is indeed a cost-effective Public Relation strategy that helps you to reach your target audience through one the most credible and convincing news media.