

Publicity 102

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Last time we talked about publicity, the best bargain in the business when it comes to promotion. We reviewed how you can go about understanding what's worthwhile for you to tell about your business and who you might want to tell it to. If you've made your story of great enough interest to the media you send it to, the media will turn around and tell your story to hundreds, thousands, maybe millions more people. Now that's what I call publicity!

In order to determine who you need to promote your business too we created a list of the places that our potential customers get their information. Our list included magazines, newspapers, television programs, trade shows, the internet and so on. Once we have developed that list, we need to do some additional research. We need to know who the key players are for each media or information source? Who is it that will decide if your story gets told? Those are the people that you'll want to target with your communication.

When you communicate to potential publicity sources via email, telephone or mail, remember that you should follow up on this communication through another means as well. In other words, if you email a contact information, follow up with a phone call. If you send a hard copy of information, follow up with an email, and so on. So now that we have an understanding of how, and to whom we will focus our attention, let's get on to understand what we want to be telling them and how.

A short, personal note is one way to introduce yourself and your business to someone new, as is a phone call, but unsolicited phone calls, emails and letters can be quickly reviewed and discarded. A press release can work to get and keep someone's attention and get them to more quickly understand the story you're trying to tell about yourself.

Press releases aren't exclusive to large businesses, with multiple locations and many staff. They can be developed by smaller businesses as a means to introduce their products and services to their audience as well. They also help to ensure that you are speaking in the same voice, with a consistent message, each time you communicate your story. By writing a press release, it not only helps you explain to others what is special about your business, but it helps you and your team understand it too.

Let's talk about the specifics of writing a press release. There are a few things you should think about before getting writing. Is the information in your release newsworthy? Would anyone want to tell their audience about the information you are sharing with them? Is it important to anyone outside of your immediate staff and clients? If your news is not interesting or relevant to anyone but you and the people around you, you wouldn't want to bother writing a press release. For example, there are not many people outside of your business who would care about a price increase in your services menu, however if you were to open a second business, the first of its kind, in another town, that might be the start of a story to tell. Once you've determined that you have something of interest to tell people, line up the who, what, where, when and why of the story. This should include information about your business as well as the news item that is the reason for the release.

Your headline and first paragraph should clearly state in a clear voice the reason for the release. The rest of the press release will fill in the details of the rest of the story. This is your one and only chance to capture the attention of the reader, be sure you start strong. Remember that the media is your audience for this piece, write it for them. Keep in mind, some media outlets might choose to use your release verbatim, so tell the story the way you would want them to tell it to others.

When writing your release, stick to the facts and don't add too much unrelated information or filler, this weakens the release as it appears that there is not enough to say about the topic of the

release to let it stand on its own. Along these lines is to be honest and not embellish. The media sees through fluff very easily.

Be sure to use real life examples of how your business fulfills needs or satisfies desires and try to tie your news to current events, time of year or social situations. For example, if you are introducing a new airbrush tanning system into your business as we head into the long, grey winter, talk about the benefits of sunless tanning being better for the skin, quote a medical professional about the problems with UV Rays, and talk about the great timing of the new service offering during Winter, so your clients can look like they just got back from holiday during the holidays.

Be sure to use minimal industry language or jargon in your release, not only might it not be understood by the media you send it to, but to their readers. The exception to this rule is when you are promoting to industry or trade media, where you are free to talk the talk of industry folks.

A few other important points: Avoid ALL CAPITALS. Don't overuse punctuation, quotation marks or exclamation points!!!! Be sure that before you mention a brand of equipment or product you are introducing into your business, you get permission from that company to do so. Proofread your information. Spelling or grammatical errors will effect your level of credibility and the perception people have of your professionalism. Be sure to include a short paragraph describing your business at the end of the release, followed by all of your contact information. Be sure to include all ways of contacting you, phone, fax, email and website if applicable, and of course a contact name.

Finally, keep in mind that the development of a press release is a more useful exercise than simply one to provide information to the media. It gives you and your team the opportunity to develop a language to discuss with partners and clients all the new things happening in your business. So whenever you have something exciting to share, sort through it, find the key points that will entice outsiders into give you a try. Then take that opportunity to start to develop that next important client relationship in the long and flourishing life of your business.