



A Guide to Public Relations

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Introduction

Small Business Times appreciates how valuable public relations and press coverage can be for your growing business. We also value the pivotal role you play as a potential source for the exclusive news, industry insight, and operational strategy that allow SBT to be a resource to our executive readers in SE Wisconsin. We appreciate and encourage your story ideas.

The only investment required to generate effective PR is preparation and effort. We hope you find the information on the following pages helpful in creating a strategy to promote your organization regardless of the media outlet.

Planning and Timing

Building an effective promotional campaign begins with a careful examination of your firm's objectives. Obviously, you would like to develop new customers and reinforce your relationship with existing clients. Therefore, it is important that you don't place too much emphasis on small items like staff promotions or common awards. Submit the information but save your big effort for the really important issues or ideas. A good editor will follow up on your lead if they see a story in it. Other announcements will be listed in each publication's appropriate section.

Before you release information, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1.) What are my objectives for this release? Define the public relations objective: i.e., awareness of new product, additional uses of an established product, a tradeshow appearance.
- 2.) Is the time right? Is the product or service proven and reliable, or is it still being tested? Will the message make more of an impact in a few weeks or months? (Consider if a news story is appropriate for special sections that magazines are planning, and also think about the time of year the product will be used.)

Get the editorial schedule for each publication that covers a market you are interested in. They are usually included in the media information kit that each publication will be pleased to send you if you call their sales department and request one.

In releasing information to magazines, take a look at how important the information is to you. Don't spend a lot of effort on news releases that don't warrant it.

Determine the kind of information that appeals most to the readers of the magazine you are sending the release to. Some releases can be sent to all your media contacts; others cannot.

PR is not a science. It cannot be guaranteed that a precise message will appear in a specified publication. Your success comes from supplying reporters with information they can use. If you make their job easier, they'll start to rely on your company for more and more information.

Establishing Contacts

Good media relations begin with a working media list that has been compiled through careful research. Your media list should include this basic information: Title, address, telephone and fax numbers, editorial mission and audience. This information can be obtained from the publication's media kit or through a Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS) catalog available at most libraries or online at www.srds.com.

Writing a News Release

Your press release should start with a lead paragraph that summarizes the relevant information. More in-depth explanation can follow in later paragraphs, but keep your release limited to two pages and don't be concerned if your release seems short. Releases get attention from the information supplied and not their length. Instead, concentrate on assessments like "named the best in customer service by the association for..." or "the first supplier in the Midwest for..." Remember to focus on the facts and the features. Avoid boastful statements like, "head and shoulders above the rest" etc.

Follow these hints when writing a release:

- Just the facts.
Stay honest. Avoid puffery and exaggeration. Press releases are intended to be factual tools to help the writer convey your information to the public. If you don't appear credible, your releases could be ignored.
- Use headlines.
A good release will have a clear, concise title and often a factual, to-the-point subhead to provide more information on what the release is about. This helps the editor determine if the release is appropriate for his or her magazine. Remember, yours is not the only release an editor will see in one day. Editors of even the smallest magazines receive dozens and dozens of releases daily.
- Give 'em what they want.
A good release tells the facts in the first paragraph (who, what, where, when, why and how). Answer these questions briefly up front. You can provide in-depth information on each point later in the release. A great way to get started writing a release is to explain what you're trying to communicate by talking into a tape recorder. Play it back and check for your essentials. In most cases, you'll find that you have your press release ready to be typed up.
- Short and concise.
A press release isn't graded by length. If your announcement is short and sweet, keep it that way. It's not more important because it's longer. Product news releases are most effective when arranged in bullet-point format describing a product's most important features.
- Include a contact.
Always have a contact name, title, phone number and address for follow up. Make sure that the contact is someone who is easy to reach and can provide additional information on the subject covered in the release.

- Identify.
If you mention a person include their title or responsibility in your company. Your release should also include brief explanations about associations named in your release. Never use just the acronym.
- Pictures tell a great story.
Include pictures whenever you can. Color artwork works best. If you're using electronic files, send them in a format that is usable for reproduction. A company like Cygnus Business Media requires high-resolution scans of at least 300dpi with a 3-in. minimum width to be usable. (Don't work too hard to keep the equipment clean. Users prefer to see equipment on the job not all polished and pretty on the showroom floor.)

Assembling a Company Information Kit

An essential tool for your publicity effort is a media information kit of your own. This allows you to consolidate background information like news releases, company and product fact sheets, executive biographies and photos and illustrations.

This Kit should be used sparingly and sent only to publications in your primary markets or to reporters who have requested background information.

(This kit should be in a three-ring binder with each section separated by an index divider. Photos or slides should be in a protective plastic sleeve. All sales sheets and/or catalogs should also be included.)

When to Issue a Release

- Introducing a new product
- A special editorial feature is planned on the type of products you sell
- Announcement of a major contract or a project that is known nationally
- Expansion or acquisition of another company
- New staff or promotion, significant anniversary or annual event
- A unique approach or application for using your product
- A national award or citation

Follow-Up Calls

It is important to follow a major news release with a telephone call, but remember that it might take a few days for your release to be received and routed to the right editor.

When you call, don't start your conversation with "Did you get my press release?" Most publications receive hundreds of news releases a week. Instead, say "I'm (your name) from (your company) and a few days ago I sent you information on _____. I would like to provide some additional information on this subject as well as give you the names of some people who are using the product in the field. Do you have a minute?" Or, "I saw an article like this written by you last year. Have you considered this angle?"

Understand that, unlike advertising, once a story angle is accepted, you no longer “own” the message. A good pitch should point them in the right direction, but the best reporters and editors will be fair and objective in pursuing all sides of a story. Be available to respond to deeper questions about your product and its applications. And be prepared to see your competition mentioned in the same article.

Even if a story idea gets shot down, offer to send the reporter additional information, materials or names of users. Knowing that you want to cooperate helps to build stronger relationships.

30 Day Publicity Planner

- 1.) Are there any upcoming editorial features that we can contribute to?
 - Review primary market editorial calendars for issues published three months from today's date.
- 2.) Have there been any features on the products that we can contribute information on?
 - Review magazines you received in the past month.
- 3.) Are any magazines having an annual buyers' guide or product catalog in the next three months?
 - Review primary market editorial calendars for issues published three months from today's date.
- 4.) Will we be attending a tradeshow?
 - Review tradeshow plans, list all tradeshows that you will be attending and magazines that cover those markets
- 5.) Promotions
 - List all managers, reps or officers that have been added or promoted.
- 6.) Awards?
 - List all awards.
- 7.) Product Development:
 - Have you changed or significantly modified a product in the past 30 days?
 - Will you be introducing a new product within the next 90 days?
 - Have you heard of a new application for your product(s) from your customers or distributors?