

Marketing Focus

THE SECRETS OF GETTING FREE PUBLICITY FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Product publicity is the secret pathway to business success everyone wants. In simple terms, product publicity is a kind of advertising that costs you nothing, yet brings in the orders for you.

Regardless of what kind of business you are operating, you should want, and strive for, as much publicity for your business and your products or services, as possible. After all, its free advertising that is essential to the growth of your business. However, your publicity efforts should be well thought out, and pre-planned for maximum results.

The first, and basic form of obtaining publicity is through what is known as the press or news release. This is generally a one page story about your business, your product/service or an event/happening related to your business that is about to, or has recently occurred. These publicity stories are generally shot-gunned to all the various media: local newspapers, radio and TV, and trade publications.

Problem number one is getting the people to whom you've sent these publicity stories, to use them - publish or broadcast them. And this leads us back to the right way of writing them and sending them in.

In every case, send a short cover letter addressed to the person you want your material to be considered by ... this means that you send your story to the city editor of the newspapers; the news directors of the radio and TV stations; and the managing editors of the various trade publications. It will do you no good whatsoever, to send your managerial to the advertising, circulation, or business managers - describing how you're a long term advertising, subscriber or listener. The most important thing is that you will make contact with the person who has the final say as to what is to be published or broadcast, and at the bottom line - this persons use of your material will somehow make him a hero to his or her readers, viewers or listeners.

The cover letter should be a short note. Go to a paper supplier - tell them you want a hundred or so sheets of good bond paper - A4 size, preferably in a pastel colour such as blue or ivory - and that you want this paper cut into quarters, giving you a grand total of 400 sheets of notepaper.

On this note sheet, begin with the date across the top - skip a couple of spaces and then quickly tell the recipient of the note, the attached material is new, and should be of real interest to his readers. If you were promoting business opportunities, yours would read something like this:

Here's something that's new, and for a change, truly helpful, to people trying to cope with inflation - the soaring costs of living - and those engaged in building extra income businesses of their own. Should be of real value - interest - to your readers. Please take a look - any questions, or if you need more info, call me on 12345. Then of course you skip about four spaces, type your name, your business name, and your address - sign your name above where you've typed it, and staple this note in the upper right hand corner of your news release. This note should be typed and double spaced.

So now, you've got a cover letter, and you know where to send it to. We type up one such note, and take it to a nearby quick print shop. They copy the note 4 times, paste these 4 copies onto one sheet of paper, print 50 to 100 copies, and cut the paper into individual notes.

Now you need the actual written publicity release, which also must be properly written if you expect it to be used by the media. Above all else, there's a proper form or style to use, plus the fact that it must be typed double-spaced, and short - about half a page in total length.

About an inch from the top of the paper, with an inch and a half margin on each side of the paper, from the left hand margin, type in all capital letters PRESS RELEASE: Then, underline these words. Immediately following the colon, but not in all capital letters, put in the date. Always set the date forward by at least one day after the day you intend to mail the release.

On the same line, but on the right hand side of the page, and in all capital letters, write the words, FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Underline this, and immediately below, but not in all capital letters, type your name - your phone number - and your address.

Skip a couple of spaces, then in all capital letters - centred between the margins - type a story headline, and underline it. Skip a couple of spaces, and from the left hand margin, all in capital letters, type the words, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: from there on, its the news or publicity story itself.

You can write the headline before the story, and then a story to fit the headline - or the story before the headline, and then a headline to fit the story - either way, its basically the same as writing a space ad or a sales letter ... You attract attention and interest with the headline, and fill in the details with your story.

Here's an example of the headlines we use on publicity blurbs for one of our products:

HELP IN MAKING ENDS MEET

NEW PUBLICATION FOR EXTRA INCOME SEEKERS

Notice how we continue to sell or involve the editor - his readers are always looking for better ways to make ends meet, and he's specifically interested as to what our promise involves. He wants his readers to think well of him for enlightening them with this source of help, so he reads into the story to find out who, what and how.

Suffice to say that your headline, and the story you present to the editor, must sell him on the benefits of your product or service to his readers. Unless it specifically does this, hell not use it. You must sell the first person receiving your materials. Keep this fact uppermost in your mind as you write it. The person you send your press or publicity release to, must quickly see and understand how your product or service will benefit his readers - thereby making him a hero to them - and he must be assured it will do what you promise in your headline.

Come right to the point and say your product is lower in price, more convenient to use or in what way your product or service is useful to the people in general. Its also a good idea to include a complimentary sample of your product or an opportunity for him to sample your services.

Remember, the editors receiving your information are fully aware of your purposes - Free Advertising! They are not in the least interested in you or your credentials - if you've sold them on the benefits of your business to their readers, and they want background details, they'll call you. That's why you list your telephone number and address.

These people are busy people. They have not got the time nor the interest in reading about your trials and tribulations or plans for the future. They want only a flag that alerts them to something new, and of probable real interest to their readers.

Sell the editor first. Convince him that you've found the better mousetrap. Show him that your product or service - that your business - fills a need and/or will interest a large segment of his readers, his viewers or listeners.

When an editor uses your publicity release, always follow up with a short thank you note. Never, but never send a publicity release to an editor and then call or write demanding to know why he didn't use it, use it as you wrote it, or only gave it a quick mention. Do this once, and that particular media will round file any further material received from you, unopened! If your first effort is not used, then you should review the story itself: perhaps write it from a different angle; make sure you're sending it to the proper person - and try again!

As stated earlier, these people are busy, with hundreds of publicity releases passing across their desks every day - they only have so much space or time - therefore, your material has to

stand out and in some way, fit in with the information they - the editors - want to pass along to their readers, viewers, or listeners. Regardless of your business product, or service, you must build your press release - write it - around that particular angle or feature that makes it beneficial or interesting to the readers, viewers or listeners of the media you want to run your press release. Without this special ingredient, you're lost before you begin!

The timing of your press release is always important. Try to associate your press release with current events in the news. A story on job layoffs and increased unemployment carried in the newspapers, on tv and radio would prompt us to get a publicity release out to all the media on the help and opportunity offered by our product. Say there's a deluge of chain letters and pyramid schemes making the rounds - the media picks up on it and attempts to warn the people to beware ... within 5 days, we would get a publicity release out, explaining the availability of our report on chain letters, and pyramid schemes - a report that explains everything from A to Z - where the winners and where the real losers.

There's another kind of timing also to keep in mind ... publication deadlines. For best results, always try to time it so that your material reaches the editor in time for the Sunday paper. This is because that's when the papers have their greatest circulation; the most space is available; and the people have the most chance to read the paper.

For articles you'd like to appear in the Sunday paper, you'll generally have to get your releases in at least nine days prior to the date of publication. If you're in doubt, call and ask about the deadline date.

IN SUMMARY

Choose the media most likely to carry your press release. Select those that carry similar write-ups on a regular basis.

Always use a cover letter of some kind. It pays to call ahead to find out the name of the person you should be sending your press release to.

Use the proper press release form, complete with a headline that will interest the man deciding whether or not to use your item.

Be sure your press release is letter perfect - no spelling mistakes - and don't photocopy it. Always have each letter individually typed or printed.

When your item is used, send a thank you note or call the editor on the phone and thank him for using your press release.

Never, but never call or write an editor demanding to know why he didn't use your press release why he had it rewritten, or cut it short - just try, and try again!