

Insider Secrets On How To Get Publicity



| By **Julie Morgan** |

Public relations (PR) agencies generate great media coverage for their clients, but not all small- to medium-sized businesses can afford to pay big-agency fees. Thankfully, hiring the professionals to do the job is not the only way to get publicity. Armed with insider secrets, you can do your own PR and get great results.

Wanting to see your business make the news and appear in your target publications, but having only a tight marketing budget, is a common dilemma for business owners. The good news is that you can get media coverage by doing it yourself. The secret to generating editorial coverage comes down to four key elements: how news savvy you are; your contacts; your timeliness; and adding the 'wow' factor.

Being News-Savvy

Being news-savvy means knowing the type of content that your target news outlets, publications and programs contain. Most PR agencies know because they work with the media everyday. One magazine might accept editorial contributions or opinion pieces for instance, while another may do product reviews. Another publication may prefer to receive case studies and have a dedicated section for business deals and new staff appointments. Understanding what makes news in the media, and knowing the different sections within the various publications and programs, will help you to know what is newsworthy in your business. It will help you craft tailored and relevant story ideas that increase your chances of getting media attention.



It also means that you can stay across your industry 'hot topics', and if you notice that a particular issue has generated media attention that is relevant to your business, you can jump on the opportunity to make a timely comment proactively. By knowing what is being reported on in your industry, you will also avoid pitching the same story idea twice. Remember that news is fresh and, generally, needs to appeal to a wide audience. So watch, read or listen to the media you want to get your business in front of and follow journalists on Twitter to get some inside information.

Your Contacts

One major reason why businesses contact PR agencies is to access their established media contacts. Media contact-lists have typically been held tightly by PR agents but now, as more business owners are doing their own PR, more media lists are becoming available for purchase online. You need to be wary that you do not purchase a lemon, however.

At a base level you should double-check when the list was updated (to ensure the details are as up to date as they can be), and the format the list is supplied in. The best ones are editable and supplied in Excel (not as a PDF), which means you can update them as you need. Also check the fine print. Some lists let you use the information once only, so look for ones that let you use the information repeatedly and for as long as you please. Lastly, make sure it contains media contacts relevant to your business – buying a 'business' list, for instance, is much better than paying for 'national news' contacts if business editors are your targets.

Alternatively, do the grunt-work yourself and track down contact details by phoning the media outlet directly or looking up contact information online. This can be time-consuming and you do not always get email addresses, so if you have a junior member of the team to delegate this task to, it could save you some time and money. Things to find out when developing your own media list include the name of the editor (or relevant journalist, such as the features editor), their email address, phone number and their editorial deadline.

As a rule when contacting journalists, it is best to personalise emails to them rather than take a scattergun approach and send your press release out far and wide. Good PR is about knowing where to place a story rather than playing a numbers game by hoping that if you contact enough journalists, one will follow your story.

Aside from having good media contacts, particularly for service-based businesses, having

strong customer case-studies is a key part of generating good news stories. Make an effort to build relationships with your customers and ask them if they would be willing to talk about their experience of your business. Offer to write these up for them and have them on file, if and when a media opportunity arises. Remember to capture the problem, the solution and the results. The more specific you can be, the better. These can also be used as testimonials and add credibility to your website.

Your Timeliness

Understanding media deadlines is crucial to getting publicity for your business. You could have a ripper of a story but pitch it to the media at the wrong time and you have lost your opportunity.

Make sure you are familiar with deadlines and lead-times. A deadline is when a final story is due; lead-time refers to how long a journalist has to produce a story to meet a deadline. With TV news, for example, you can send your press release the day before; magazine-style programs such as morning shows, conversely, need a few weeks to plan and produce more in-depth pieces.

Remember that getting into the news is competitive, and whether or not you get coverage depends on how your story stacks up to other news items or events of the day. Your story idea may not be an ideal fit the first time you approach the media for a number of reasons, including the fact that they may have competing stories already secured. But do not be put off. Re-work your angle and pick another date to re-pitch that idea a few months down the track. Just avoid sending the exact-same story idea.

The 'Wow' Factor

Lastly, to get the media's attention you need to make sure your news stands out. This means being able to present your story idea or news succinctly and convincingly in just a few sentences. It may also mean involving a high-profile spokesperson or celebrity, or perhaps staging an amazing photo opportunity. A good way to test the strength of your 'wow' factor is to test it out on a friend or colleague outside of your business. Do they get excited? Are they impressed?

When pitching your story idea to a journalist via email, you should ideally:

- Have an attention-grabbing subject line.
- Keep your email to three or four paragraphs in length, and use bullet points wherever possible; journalists are time-poor and want information quickly.
- Tailor the story idea to the media outlet – and get the journalist's name right.

- Include key statistics and numbers – the media wants specific facts, not vague statements.
- Tell them who your spokesperson is and include a short biography if appropriate.
- Pay attention to your presentation and ensure that you have no spelling or grammatical errors.
- Refer to any further information, photos or case studies available.
- Include your contact details at the bottom. It is a good idea to accompany your pitch with a well-written press release.

Send your product to journalists to get their attention and because first impressions count, ensure that your packaging is perfect, that it, it reflects your brand, and that your delivery is timed to when the journalist is actually in the office. Contact the journalist before sending them a package, particularly if it is fresh produce.

Doing your own PR does get results and, in doing so, you establish great personal contacts with the media. **ABS**

Julie Morgan has been working in PR for more than 20 years. She is founder of the do-it-yourself PR website, prguru.com.au, and the award-winning, Melbourne-based PR agency, JMM Communications. She is a member of PRIA (Public Relations Institute of Australia) and PRIA Registered Consultancy Group. Follow her on Twitter @prguruau.