

HOW TO GET FREE PUBLICITY FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Would you like to expand the volume of your business? You can let thousands of people know about your service, your store, or your new products without paying a penny. Whether you want to make more sales, or get an offer on television, you can broaden the scope of your clients by free publicity.

You don't have to climb a flagpole or hire a dancing bear to attract attention and sales. In fact, with just a telephone and follow up letters and flyers, you can be making much more money than you are.

What product or business are you involved with that needs more clients or customers? You might have a neighborhood store, or you might be seeking exposure for a celebrity or politician. Maybe you have a new invention that you can't get marketed or a recently released line of designer furniture that you want to increase sales on.

How are you presently getting to customers? You may be advertising in newspapers and magazines or trade journals. Or you may be relying on a distribution agreement to retail the products your plant manufactures.

Perhaps you're an author depending on a publishing house to promote your book, but it seems to be waning. Or you could be a young comic, trying to get some more acts to further your career.

Regardless of your business or enterprise, free publicity is available to you. And you don't need any particular background or training to do it. What you do need is the belief in yourself and your product and the diligence and perseverance to continue when one idea doesn't pan out.

Take a look at the variety of types of publicity. Whether you want a local increase in sales, or national fame, free publicity is available to you.

WHAT IS PUBLICITY?

Publicity is making something known to the public, spreading information to the general-local or national-market. It is information with a news value used to attract public attention or support. Everybody uses publicity. Politicians, manufacturers, celebrities-even the Detroit car makers-use publicity to further their causes and gain attention.

And publicity isn't limited to large organizations. Small committees and enterprises use the local newspapers to publicize events and endeavors.

Publicity differs from advertising because it is free. Although some groups or individuals do trade tickets or services for free mention in publications, generally publicity is newsworthy copy that a publication produces.

Publicity is a form of promotion, although promoting a product or service may require other efforts that cost the company money. Good publicity is one of the best ways to let people know you have a worthwhile business.

KNOW YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE

In order to gain publicity, you have to be totally familiar with the product, service or business that you are promoting. If it is your own product, you are the best one to describe the benefits and features. If you want to publicize something else, talk to everyone involved to get the facts and details.

Consider the radius of your market. If you have a local business such as a retail store or service shop, most of your customers are from the surrounding five miles. If you are located in a large city, you may have a larger radius, but at the same time, there may be stiffer competition.

Your enterprise might be regional or statewide and your clients may come from hundreds of miles-either in person or by telephone-to use your services. And, if you are a large manufacturer, your clients and customers may come from the entire United States-or you may have a worldwide audience.

Profile your customers. Who are they and what do they do? If you have a service, how often is this service used? If you have a product, is it something that is bought again and again, or is it a lifetime purchase?

How much do your customers pay for your products and are you competitive with the other manufacturers of the same products? If you have an unusual product, are you reaching the widest audience you can?

SURVEY THE MARKET

What do the customers want? Sometimes, the least expensive price is not the most important element. With today's packaging, many customers expect and will pay for things elaborately packaged. Where do these people go to buy your products? Are they sold at retail outlets or through trade publications or magazines? Or, are they special items available from mail order or from certain regions of the nation or the world?

Finally, why do your customers buy this particular service or product, or use the particular business you have? An architectural design studio produces blueprints for architects to construct buildings for homeowners and industry. But your product may be aimed at a less precise group of people, somewhat hard to define.

You can discover what consumers want from surveys. You can get copies of surveys from special companies that conduct surveys, or you can do your own. The best place to conduct a survey is at a trade show for your product. You might run a drawing and ask people to fill in information. You can have cards printed with boxes to check easily so

people will spend the time to answer your questions.

Manufacturers use surveys with warranties. Appliance makers often include a few questions along with the warranty that the consumer sends back.

Most major manufacturers have their own teams of product testing. Toymakers bring in children and watch their reactions. Book publishers have people look at covers and decide which they'd buy. Even the car manufacturers run surveys and opinion testing on style and pricing.

Before you seek publicity or even advertise, KNOW YOUR PROD_UCT. Be familiar with the people who buy your product or service, and have a full understanding of the general competition and the full scope of marketability.

WHERE TO PUBLICIZE

Depending on your product, you have a full gamut of possibilities for advertising without paying - free publicity. Deciding on the type of media is as important as knowing your product and the people who buy.

As a manufacturer, you want to let retailers know of your product. The trade magazines would be a good place for new products and comparisons of product reliability.

If you want to publicize directly to the general public national publications, metropolitan newspapers and Sunday supplements are ways to tap into the market.

For a local enterprise - either a profitable business or a charity or community service - the local newspapers are the best places for free publicity.

Once your product or news is of national importance, the television and radio can be good sources of publicity. Even the local public stations produce interesting shows about local people and products.

For international significance, the newspaper syndicates and wire services provide the publicity you'll need.

Don't go for the biggest first; move up to the larger markets. Start with the local news, then expand as your product interest grows.

MAKE IT NEWSWORTHY

In order to qualify for publicity, your information must be newsworthy. Anything published in the newspapers, magazines or trade journals must be important to readers - either as information for an event, or interesting insights in the industry.

You may have a new product or product line that can be publicized in magazines. If

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not, you need to come up with unique angles to get the publicity you seek.

An unusual background for the inventor of the product or owner of the manufacturing plant may make good news for the new product.

Or you may need to come up with fresh ideas for your service. For example, a short item about famous people using the service is noteworthy, or an unusual combination in the owner's biography may make a good story.

Some businesses produce literature that points out facts of the particular industry - either historical or contemporary. For example, a television news feature was done on a group of companies that check the quality of houses for interested buyers. Or, a pamphlet on cutting costs on building an addition onto your house is a natural for a construction company.

YOUR BEST ANGLE

What is unusual about your product or service that can become newsworthy? Even if nothing stands out at first, you'll find you can think of several angles that are worthwhile from a publicity point-of-view.

What about anecdotes? Failure stories can be as entertaining as success tales. How people have trouble getting their businesses off the ground can be newsworthy.

And don't forget simple endurance. A business that's been profitable for twenty-five years is a sure bet for local newspapers.

If you want to publicize an event, consider the radius of the participants. A national trade convention should receive national interest in the magazines and publications geared towards that particular industry. More local events can be publicized in metropolitan newspapers. The most local neighborhood events can be publicized by flyers and notices, or through the schools.

Look for common trends in your product or service. Think often about what makes it different from the other thousands of products and services. Make lists List the features of what you want to publicize; list the people who use the product or service; list why people use it.

What do you come up with? Do more young people use it? Do more women, or members of special groups? You may use an angle of publicizing a person not in our typical consumer group purchasing or using your product or service.

The most important consideration in choosing an angle is to make your item newsworthy, so the editor of the publication will print it.

MAKING CONTACT

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Whether you are sending products, press kits, or news releases, the most important element in getting them publicized is to send it to the right person. If it doesn't reach that person's desk, it may well end up in the wastebasket.

When you decide on the media market you want to publicize in, contact the people who will make it happen. On a local level, a small town newspaper will have a features editor, or a specific person who takes care of the notice you want to place. Call up the publication and get that person's name. Speak briefly and say you'll send in a notice.

A larger metropolitan newspaper is a busy place. Consider the section you'll want your story to appear in. Many newspapers have entertainment, travel, business, sports, food sections. Contact that editor.

Editors rarely have time to talk to strangers soliciting publicity, so you might try talking to the assistant. Speak briefly, introduce yourself, and say you'll send in a news release.

For a radio message, contact the program director, or assistant. Make enough telephone calls to be sure you have the correct name of the person to send your release to.

Television programming directors may be more difficult to reach; use perseverance. With active pursuit, you can get your message through to anyone.

The easiest connection for promoting a new product is with the editors of trade magazines or with national magazines that have a new products section. You may want to send a sample, or at least a photograph or drawing of the product. And, you need to include all pertinent facts and features.

Magazine editors can also be difficult to reach-but try. If you can speak directly to the person who handles new products, try it. If not, be sure to contact the person who does handle the feature angle that you have chosen.

As soon as you've contacted the right person to use your material, send it out immediately. If you have arranged a personal appointment, follow up with a short note that confirms the date and time.

A few days after you send out your materials, call that person again. Simply ask if the information was received; don't push for a commitment to run the release. By pointing attention to the materials, you have a better chance.

NEWS RELEASES

News releases, also called press releases, are the most important selling tool of publicity. The release must capture the editor's attention, be precise and easy to read.

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A news release can go to just one newspaper or many publications at once. It can be a community notice about an organization's library sale or an international insight into inflation.

The same standard form is used for every type of news, whether an executive promotion in the trade magazines, or a local event such as an author signing books at a neighborhood bookstore.

If you want your notice to get into a special edition of a publication, be aware of the deadlines. Sunday news editions generally have more readers than the daily editions. Find out when your release must be received at the editor's desk.

Never mix publicity with advertising. If your newspaper features specific businesses in special industry supplements, you may be chosen because you advertise. But otherwise, editors frown on any releases that merely imitate advertising and are not newsworthy.

Don't embarrass yourself by sending anything that is not worthy of being printed in the publication as news. Not only will your release be thrown away, but you will destroy any chance you had for subsequent releases with that editor.

WRITING THE RELEASE

Keep the news release to one page. Type it clearly on white bond paper, double spaced, and never send it with typographical errors. Since the release might be published exactly as it is received, be sure the copy is professional and worthy of publication.

At the top left, put your name and address and the phone number you can be reached at during business hours. In full capital letters at the right, type, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, PLEASE or for release on or after a certain date.

Use a headline appropriate to the event or topic, and keep it short - just like newspaper headings. Capitalize the letters and underline the headline.

Start the copy with a dateline, which is the city and date. Then write the rest within a few paragraphs. Include the important information in the standard who, what, when and where. Use good English, but don't run on with unimportant adjectives or boring information. You can capitalize the first letters of important events such as Public Auction or the name of your new product.

If you have a release to send to many publications at the same time, have it printed by photo offset so the copy is clear and looks original.

Include a personal letter to the editor. Be cordial, but keep it short. If your product is convenient to mail, you may include a sample if the editor is amenable.

Watch the publications and clip the printed publicity yourself. Never ask the publication to send you a copy.

PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE

You can publicize your service or product with a pamphlet or booklet. Topical subjects such as saving energy or cutting costs are always newsworthy. Naming new trends or buying habits can equally be publicized.

Take a look at the magazines and trade journals in your area of endeavor. Are there special sections for interesting tidbits of the industry? Maybe there's a section for new products, or even a section that compares products.

Does your product or service have something special that competitors don't? Maybe yours is the best - and 'best' is newsworthy. Does yours have the longest resiliency, or is it made from the best materials? Maybe your service is noted for complete satisfaction or reliability.

These aspects are especially important for the big manufacturers. Trade journals cater to the special industries, and those in the trade always want to consider the best product investment - especially when spending thousands of dollars.

An oil company sends out free booklets on maintaining your car; a travel agent prints a brochure on the most beautiful vacation spots; a dry cleaners gives out a flyer on getting out stains as soon as they happen.

What promotional literature can you tie into your business? And it doesn't need to be product oriented. Some large companies produce tips on employee relations or benefits. Many print their own newsworthy in-house publications .

Any special message booklet is a public service and is worthy of free publicity. Some interesting information can make a good feature if followed up by a reporter. Or you may write your own feature for magazines.

You can get your literature designed and printed by a local printer at minimum cost. Don't go for an elaborate four-color booklet unless you can afford to. Consider what you can get at the least expense and then work from there. From a small investment, you may get thousands of dollars worth of free publicity.

Always include the name and address and business number of your enterprise on the brochure, and offer copies for the general public as a free give-away or as a bonus for services.

PITCH LETTERS

When you don't have a specific news release or a special booklet to publicize your

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enterprise, you may solicit publicity with a letter to the editor of the section that suits your endeavor.

Rather than providing complete information, suggest the practicality and timeliness of a feature or article on your business or the owner of the business. Some people or organizations are famous in their own right and start side businesses or enterprises. For example, celebrities open restaurants or community theaters; financiers donate art collections; a local orphanage may raise a phenomenal amount of money for a special cause.

A pitch letter is a highly motivating letter to get the editor interested in the topic that will benefit your cause. Type it on letterhead and send it personally to the editor. You might call in advance and use it as a follow up.

Get right to the point. Present the topic and the angle immediately. Then, support the worthiness with some poignant information concerning the topic.

Send copies of local publicity if you're building to a national level, or send copies of other news features that relate directly to your person or product.

Don't deluge the editor with too many clippings or an overload of information. A few choice tidbits will suffice to get that person's interest in doing a feature.

Close your letter with a mention of calling that person and then follow up with a telephone call a few days later.

USE YOUR TELEPHONE

The most important tool to the publicist is the telephone. People who make their livelihoods with publicity make calls all day long. And persistence is the greatest attribute.

Whether you use a hard-sell or a soft-sell approach on the phone, it's a great way to make and keep contact with important people. Just one phone call may seal up a lifetime business relationship with someone who will provide you with thousands of dollars worth of free publicity.

A telephone call is the most efficient means of reaching somebody, introducing yourself and your desires, and firming up a contact for follow through. Don't be afraid of calling people and don't be shy in asserting yourself.

If you have a clear idea about your product or service and believe in what you're selling, your tone of voice will be the best selling feature. Know your facts and present them clearly.

If you are working for a specific person or trying to get a meeting for the owner of Your company, know when you can set up an appointment and settle on it immediately.

Don't forget business lunches - a great way to sell yourself or your product in a relaxed atmosphere. Follow up with a memo that same day to confirm the date and time of the meeting.

When you meet with rejection, don't take it to heart - there are so many ways you can make solid connections that a few nos shouldn't stop you.

COLUMN RELEASES

Some trade journals have specific columns written by a reporter that run weekly or monthly. If you have a newsworthy item for a column, you can build up a working rapport with the writer and supply material from time to time.

The entertainment trade papers have daily columns that keep celebrities in the limelight. Metropolitan newspapers run daily columns that mention politicians. And industry publications have columns that pertain to a certain aspect of your enterprise.

When you write a column release, copy the style of the writer and use the format of the news release. Instead of for immediate release, type in capital letters, for exclusive release to the name of the person.

Use your imagination when you write the column release, and don't get discouraged if it's passed by. Keep building relationships with the columnists and you'll get your news publicized.

PRESS KITS

The press kit is made up to publicize celebrities or new products or a product line. They may be put together for a trade show or convention, or a press conference.

Generally, a press kit includes a biography of the person who is being publicized or the inventor or the head of the company. A news release is included and a photograph or drawing with a caption is attached.

Copies of news stories and newspaper clippings are enclosed-anything pertinent to the item you want publicized. An entertainer's schedule might be included if it's a conference about a tour.

The press kit is usually in a folder or envelope and is handy to send to publications or for press conferences or to give information to the local media.

THE BIOGRAPHY

A bio of a personality - whether a famous celebrity or the president of your company - is fact, not hype. It usually is included in press kits for background information only; it's not meant for release.

Although important information concerning the person's career should be included, make it informative and interesting to read. Many editors or reporters will use that information in a news story or feature.

It should be single spaced, and never make it more than two pages - even if the person deserves a full book.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Regardless of the scope of your news, photographs are an asset. If you are looking for extra publicity for a politician after a town meeting, include a photo of the person with your press release.

New products always deserve to be seen. Whether it is a full expensive professional shot later used for advertising, or a simple black and white photo, it should be clear and uncluttered with extraneous objects.

Generally for a small business, the black and white glossy photo is your best bet. Have a professional take the shot with the product seen in its best light. High contrast photos are the best for newspapers and magazines. If your product is mainly light colored, it will stand out on a black background, and vice versa.

Always have them professionally duplicated and be of the highest quality. Forget about polaroids or anything that closely resembles amateur work. The editor won't take your release seriously.

Have them printed on 5 x 7 or 8 x 10 paper and to enclose a cardboard backing when you send them through the mail with a news release or a pitch letter.

MERCHANDISING

When you do get coverage from your efforts, clip those pieces from the publications and exploit them. You may have seen this done in restaurants. They often enlarge and mount copies of local restaurant reviews and post them in windows for potential customers.

Good publicity in one form may lead to a wider scope of publicity in a larger publication. You can use local newspaper clippings for pitching a feature in a national magazine. And you can use write-ups in large circulation publications to give credentials for a television appearance.

Many businesses exploit reviews. Look at the back of books; they list the quotations from reviewers to promote the product. And films do that too. How many times have you seen a film advertised by quotations from famous film reviewers?

What can you do to use the publicity at its best and spread its effects as widely as possible? Take a look at your metropolitan newspaper. In the features section, there are often stories about interesting people and their enterprises. With a little ingenuity, this coverage can go national.

An obvious way to use good publicity is simply to photocopy it and send it as a direct mail piece to your customers or to include it in your brochures. Even a stack of flyers at the counter can promote your business.

How far do you want to go?

PROMOTION

In most cases, you can use the normal media channels to get the publicity you need for your product or service. And, although you don't need to come up with schemes to get attention, they do work.

Sometimes promotion departments of manufacturers stage marathon events or contests with their products - especially with toys and games. Apparel companies may sponsor athletic races; manufacturers of motorcycles sponsor races.

Although promotion schemes do cost money to stage, the efforts usually pay off in a long run with the number of customers sold on the product.

For local coverage, charity drives and dinners are good ways to get in the paper. Some enterprises strive for a more national coverage with special prizes connected to sports events.

If you are clever enough, and there's no big news break that day, you may get your scheme on television. Even local footage reaches thousands and thousands of people.

What gimmicks can you think of that will pay off for their investment? How is your product or service used that it can commercially be exploited by the news? Can you keep going with it-making it an annual event, drawing customers from near and far?

HIRING OTHER PEOPLE

What if you don't want to do the publicity yourself? If your product or service is a natural for free publicity, you can hire a company or a person to do your public relations work.

There are many free lancers in the large cities who have a number of clients that they publicize. They've already broken the ice with the editors and the media, so they can get their releases printed.

If you want to hire someone for a special project, get a person who has the contacts

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and who specializes in your product line. If you're a celebrity, use someone who has a reputation in the entertainment industry. If you are a manufacturer with new appliances, likewise consider a person with expertise in that field.

Check out the person or firm. Talk to other clients and find out what has been done for them. Have they increased their sales or public exposure?

Investigate the reputation with people in the media you want to publicize in, and be sure there is a clean slate with the local business associations.

Then work efficiently with the person who will handle your publicity. Communicate effectively and be sure your ideas are understood. Listen well and absorb any ideas thrown your way. Between the two of you, you can come up with an excellent publicity campaign that will make your business boom.

TRY IT

The wonderful thing about free publicity is that you have nothing to lose. A few phone calls; a few personal letters, maybe some investment in quick printing news releases. And, you can reap many times that investment in additional sales and orders.

Whether you have an international personality to publicize or a community barbecue, you can get that information to the public at little expense.

What is unique about your service or product? Is it the best? The most used? The longest lasting? Do customers return year after year? Consider all the angles, then consider again.

Be sure to make solid contacts and be thorough with your follow-ups. Being polite and efficient will always create effective business relations. Then exploit your own publicity. Use it again and again; post it in the store or rewrite it for more national distribution. Go as far as you can with your ideas.

And, it doesn't cost you. That is the true joy - with a little effort and persistence, you can reap great profits from free publicity.