



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 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's 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's free. Although some groups or individuals do trade tickets or services for free mention in publication, 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 enterprising might be regional or statewide and your clients and customers may come from hundreds of miles--either in person or by telephone--to use your services. And, if you are the 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 it 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 manufactures of the same products? If you have 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 packed.

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 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. Toy makers bring in children and watch their reactions. Book publishers have people look at covers and decide which one 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 PRODUCT**. 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 the product, you will 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 the publicity, your information must be newsworthy. Anything published in the newspapers, magazines or trade journals must be important 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 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 to your house is a natural for a construction company.

YOUR BEST ANGLE

What is unusual about your product or service that can become a 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 business 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 the local papers.

If you want to publicize an event, consider the radius of the participants. A national trade convention should receive national interest in 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 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 your 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

Whether you are sending products, press kits, or new 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 features on the 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 large metropolitan newspaper is a busy place. Consider the section you'll want your story to appear in. Many newspapers have entertainment, travel, business, sports, and food sections. Contact the 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 release.

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

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

The easiest connection for promoting a new product is with the editors of trade magazines or with a national magazines that have a new product selection. You may want to send a sample, or at least a photograph or a 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 have 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 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 comment to run the release. By pointing attention to the materials, you have a better chance.

NEW RELEASES

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

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 a books at a neighborhood bookstore.

If you want your notice to get into a special edition of a publication, be aware of deadlines. Sunday news editions generally have more readers than 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 business 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 the 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 the 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, where. Use good English, but don't run on with unimportant adjectives or boring information. You can capitalize the first letters of the 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 new habits are equally being 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 other 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 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 out brochure on the most beautiful vacation spots; a dry cleaner gives out a flyer on getting stains out as soon as they happen.

What promotional literature can you tie into your business? And it doesn't need to be product orientated. 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 story 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 a minimum cost. Don't go for an elaborate four-color booklet unless you can afford it. Consider what you can get for the least expensive 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.

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 new 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 after one 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.