

Power Publicity... The Ultimate Referral Source!

by Adam D. Bishop, MBA

Publicity is advertising. Making sure your agency receives positive, informative publicity should be part of your marketing strategy.

The three media that can most effectively publicize your agency, your events and your services are newspapers, radio and television. How do you get publicity? Have something worth reporting.

If you are a new agency, your press releases will deal with the fact that you are new in town. If you are starting up a new service, you will want this publicized. Do you sponsor senior events? Get it in the news. Have you just hired a new nursing director? Type up a press release and send it with a photo to the papers. Are there new breakthroughs in medicine or technology that affect the Home Care industry and would interest the public? Be the first agency to get it in the news. In short, give the editors and program directors a story.

To stand out... Stand Out!

Word of mouth is the best publicity machine out there. But how does your name get around in the first place? Aside from clients and referral sources, public opinion can be shaped by what they see or hear in the news. People feel more comfortable when they recognize your company's name. If they read about you in the paper, they feel more comfortable calling you. Editors and program directors for local stations are always on the lookout for compelling and useful material and news. They look to companies who come across as experts in a particular field to write articles about. Position yourself as an expert in some particular aspect of Home Care.

Several years ago our company placed ads in a weekly publication called TV Guide. Our ads were specifically designed to sell our support services for seniors. One day we had a call from the editor of the local newspaper asking if his paper could do a story about our company and the services we provided for seniors. The article was to run during Senior's Week. The editor told us that he had seen our ads in the TV Guide and decided that we must have a lot of expertise in senior care. So, when he wanted to do a story about seniors and home care services, he called us. We called a few of our clients and asked whether they would agree to be interviewed by the paper and have their pictures taken with their caregiver. Every one of the patients we called agreed to be part of the article. They were excited about being selected. To our surprise, the article ended up on the front page and the pictures were in color! The response to that one article was absolutely fantastic. Within one week after the ad ran, our referrals and hours had more than doubled and continued to increase for months. We more than recovered the cost of all our weekly ads with the increased volume of new business and profit we generated from that free publicity. Once you have established yourself as an expert and have earned a reputation of being exceptional in a particular field, find fresh ways to keep your company's name out front.

How to Write a Great Press Release... and get your agency on more radio and television talk shows.

These are the rules for writing a successful press release. If you follow these simple but proven steps you will increase your chances of getting on TV and radio by ten times.

1. Press releases should be one page and one page only. If you can't tell your story in one page, the producer will think you don't know what you're talking about. There is never a good reason to have a press release go on for more than one page.
2. Your press release should be on 8 1/2" x 11" paper only. Do not use odd sizes, special shapes or "original" designs.
3. Your press release must be written on white paper. Do not use other colors, tints or shade color patterns.
4. You must use plain white paper. No letterhead, no printed borders, no photographs. Absolutely nothing, just plain white paper.
5. Never single-space the entire body copy. This is probably the number one reason press releases are thrown in the garbage by producers or show hosts.
6. Use an easy-to-read typeface—no fancy fonts. "Courier" is a good choice.
7. Use a catchy headline in your press release. Think of what would capture your own attention if you were on the receiving end of a press release.
8. Give just the facts—who, what, when and why?
10. No typos—proofread.

What goes inside the Press Release?

In the upper left corner, you're going to only have two options. You choose the one that's more appropriate for your purpose.

The first option is to put the words "For Immediate Release" in the upper left corner. These words do two things. First, they tell the producer or editor that he can use your information any time he wishes. He can use it today, tomorrow, next month, next year—whenever.

"For Immediate Release" does something even more important, though. These words tell the producer that you know how to play the publicity game. The more of these clues you can put in your release, the more confidence the producer will have in you. Keep in mind that some producers get hundreds of press releases every day. They don't have time to waste on people who don't already know how to play the "publicity game." The only other option you have for the upper left corner is to indicate a "time qualifier." A time qualifier tells the producer exactly when and when not to use your release.

For example, your agency is putting together a release about a Seniors Event that is coming up. In the upper left corner you put "For Release On or Before Seniors Event." Not only are you telling the producer exactly when to use your release, you're again giving him a sign that you understand and use press "lingo."

Not many press releases have time qualifiers. So if you use one the right way, you will score big points with the show producer and will increase your agency's chances of getting on the show.

In the upper right corner of your press release you only have one option. You're going to put these exact words in the upper right corner of every press release you ever write. On the first line in the upper right corner you will put:

"For further information contact." On the second line you're going to put the name and direct phone number of a real, live human being, i.e., Jane Smith – 615-555-5555.

The headline of a news release has one job and one job only—to force the producer to keep reading the rest of the copy. The headline has no other job. As mentioned earlier, write your headline so that you would find it interesting if you were reading it for the first time.

The body copy of your news release has three parts. Part One should tell your whole story in 2 or 3 sentences. If you can't tell your whole story in 2 or 3 sentences, you must practice to learn how.

Part Two of your news release should contain quotes from you along with your credentials and should expand upon the first paragraph of your news release. Always quote yourself. Never quote anyone else.

Part Three of your news release should contain your "call to action."

What do you want to happen as a result of your new release?

All the time you are writing your news release, you must write in a "who cares" style of writing. That means that after every sentence you write, you should stop, read the sentence out loud and ask, "Who cares?" If you can't answer that question, you need to rethink and reword.

Once you have written your news release, the fastest way to reach newspapers, radio and local TV shows is via fax. Phone each paper or station to verify the editor or producer's name before sending a faxed press release. Verifying the contact name in advance will increase your chances of getting an interview. Then fax your release as often as possible. Everyday if you can. Be prepared to respond to same-day interviews, which can sometimes happen.

Some of the smaller markets will phone you when they get your fax release.

Follow up your faxes with phone calls to the editor or show producer.

Many shows get hundreds of faxed press releases per day. Help spark the producer's memory by phoning.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that press releases and free publicity won't work for your agency. In over 25 years we've never had an experience of free publicity—especially on the radio or television that we didn't benefit from. Publicity can help you get your agency started, expand it beyond anything you expected, make you a celebrity, make you an expert and make your agency the name people think of when looking for Home Care services.