



Public Relations for Small Business Owners

Tips and techniques for gaining coverage of your business

It's easy for a multi-million dollar conglomerate to get media coverage and publicity – they've got the staff and monetary resources to do so. But what about small businesses just starting out? How do small business owners create a buzz about their company, or the products and services they provide?

In a perfect world - a world with endless time and resources - you'd start by creating a PR plan that identifies your goals, messaging, strategy and tactics. However, if you're a small business owner with a limited staff, there are other ways to promote your company that are both time and cost-effective.

News Releases

A news release is type of communication directed at the media to announce a new product, partnership, event, or other newsworthy item. Often times editors, reporters, and journalists (especially in small communities) depend on news releases to alert them to new and interesting products, trends and changes in a community's business landscape.

Here are a few achievements that are considered newsworthy:

- Grand opening (for businesses just starting out)
- New product offering
- Addition of new equipment/technology that enhances business
- Significant modification to an existing product
- Changes in corporate identity, such as company name or logo
- New web site
- Joint venture
- Changes in corporate structure (new division or subsidiary)
- Events (open houses, trade show involvement, speaking engagements, award ceremonies)
- Corporate philanthropy (volunteer work, donations)
- New partner
- Significant new customer
- Milestones (customers served, years in business)

News releases, when properly written, are an excellent way to promote your business, the goods and services you provide, as well as charitable work you do within your community. Whenever something newsworthy happens to your business, make sure the local news outlets receive the announcement.

If you're intimidated by the thought of reaching out to the media, don't be. At the local and regional levels reporters and editors are constantly looking for a new and fresh story. They're often seeking a different angle for a story, or a new approach to doing things.

In addition to sending your release to local media, use the Internet to your advantage. Today just about everything is online, so make sure you post all news releases to your website and fill them with keywords for your business. This will increase the likelihood of users finding your news and site when searching for the type of service you provide.

Don't have a newsroom on your website? Create one! Every business needs a news section or press room on its website. News pages and pages designed for the media to use are an excellent way to manage content about events, sponsorships, new products or services, and company news. Don't forget to write your releases with keyword-rich titles that link to different content-filled pages on your site. Doing this helps boost credibility, communication and search engine rankings as well.

Local online event calendars are another resource you can utilize, and they are usually free. If you're hosting an event or educational clinic, post the details on calendars in the local newspaper, radio, TV, chamber of commerce, and other community websites – it's a great opportunity for free exposure and wider visibility.

Writing for the web

Since so much of the content a company puts out is intended to be viewed online, the rules for writing have changed. Business Wire recommends using the following tips to make sure your company news gets the most visibility from each announcement.

1. Determine your keywords, and then use them. Put yourself in your potential customers' shoes. What words are most likely searched for by people who want your product or service or by the people reading your release? Determine these keywords and phrases and make sure to use them throughout your release.

2. Subheads count too! Bold or italicize your headlines and subheads to make phrases and keywords more visible. Emphasized text can help your release stand out and have a positive impact on search engine results.

3. Keep your headlines short. Google recommends headlines between 2 and 22 words for optimum visibility and search results. Also, Google results only display the first 63 characters of each headline, so keep that in mind when formulating these important pieces.

4. Make sure it's still readable. Sure, your goal is to receive high placement in search engine results, but don't over do it. Make sure your content isn't overly repetitive, spam-like or unreadable.

5. Stick to the facts – stay away from puns and innuendo. Legitimate, keyword-rich content will be picked up by search engines, spiders and robots much more effectively.

6. Disseminate news that is timely and useful. If at all possible, try to incorporate relevant tips, advice, or analysis in your press release that pertains to your industry or your customers' interests.

7. Include hyperlinks and anchor text, but don't overdo it. An overabundance of links in your press release can flag it as spam, which will make it completely ineffective. Stick to one link per 100 words. Make sure you link to specific pages you are promoting, and not just generic company links.

8. Be consistent throughout your release. Certain words have multiple spellings – like “t-shirt” and “tee-shirt”. To avoid appearing illiterate, find the most commonly searched spelling and stick with it throughout the release.

9. Keep it fresh. As releases age, they tend to drift lower in the search engine results pages. A campaign of several releases is more likely to drive results than a single press release.

10. Publish releases on your own site too. When you add keyword-rich content to your site, it helps potential customers find you. Don't forget to link to your company newsroom and other specific pages to drive traffic and keep people aware of your announcements.

Other Activities for successful PR: *Please note the following activities are a little more time consuming and require research and planning on your part. However, they are also very rewarding in terms of visibility and coverage. Instead of trying to do all of them at once, try just one activity at a time so you can fully understand the process, while still maintaining your day-to-day business.*

Contributed articles – contributed articles are articles written by you or someone in your organization speaking to a particular subject. They are typically non-product specific, but as the author of the piece, you will gain credibility as an expert in your industry. For example, you may write an article on glass engraving techniques and submit it to a relevant trade publication. To determine if a particular publication accepts contributed articles, review its media kit or contact an editor to find out.

Award opportunities – National and local award opportunities are an excellent way to gain credibility within your field. Whether they are company-based, such as a best place to work award, or product-based, such as best engraving award from the Awards and Recognition Association, award wins make a great news announcement and also establish you as a leader in the industry. To find award opportunities, research associations or groups with which you are a member or check out your local business journal. Remember, award wins are newsworthy – you can share this news with local media, customers, associates as well as featuring it on your web site.

Case studies – Case studies outline how your product or service helped a customer. These are excellent ways to highlight how your business meets different needs of different customers. Some publications accept case studies and run them as features or contributed articles. These can also be featured on your website for potential customers to read.

Public relations is an ongoing process – it's not something you can do once and forget about. To be successful at it, you must keep on top of what's going on in your field and continue building relationships, building your brand, and getting your message out.

You won't build your presence overnight, but properly utilizing the information in this article should lay the groundwork for a solid public relations plan and help you establish your public image, messaging and overall brand.