

Publicity 101

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We all know it takes money to run a business and even more to keep that business healthy. Rent, equipment, supplies and staffing costs are just the start. Add in promotional materials, gifts to client and vendors, advertising. The list goes on and on. We can all use a little break when it comes to our expenses, especially if it helps to grow our revenues in the process. That's where publicity comes in. Publicity is free, free is good. In short, free publicity is great for business. In this two-part series we'll talk about publicity, why it's good for you and how you get it.

Publicity is more important than advertising in a number of ways unrelated to its lower cost. Publicity impresses prospective clients and validates the buying decision to existing ones. It gives you the opportunity to spread the message, or story, of your business and get the word out as to who you are with more than just an image and a slogan. Publicity also acts as a great reminder to those who are already familiar with you. The fact that it is not paid-for promotion also makes it more valid to onlooker than traditional paid advertising.

When an existing client reads about you or sees your product on television, they'll be likely to talk about their connection to your business to others, who in turn may become new clients. By nature, people like to be associated with things, places and other people that are well respected and well known. Again, it validates the buying process. Besides, they've got bragging rights, they helped you get where you are. Take the opportunity to encourage that feeling. Encourage the emotional connection to your brand and their part in its success. Thank your clients when you receive special recognition, make them know that you appreciate them.

That emotional connection, as well as the publicity that helped grow it, will last much longer than advertising. Putting your money into an ad that will flipped past in a magazine for example, may get your name out there briefly, but fails to create any emotional or meaningful connection to who you are. Creating that bond through story telling via publicity is key to getting people to want to become a part of that story, your story.

The frequency of the publicity you receive is another key aspect of getting your message out. A news piece ten years ago, about your spa opening, won't do much for your business today. The most successful brands get publicity on a very regular basis. Their name is in front of their prospective buyers often, and that repetition helps to reinforce the validation of the business. How will you manage to keep people interested in publicizing your business for you over and over again?

In a large market like London, this can be difficult for a small business, but by no means impossible. In smaller cities and towns, it can be much easier.

The local newspaper, monthly magazines, town newsletters and other publications can be wonderful sources of publicity. Local television news stations also are great opportunities. Let's not forget the all-important internet, one of the best publicity machines ever invented. In either case, small towns or big cities, you have to take a chance and introduce your business to the media. But how do you get them to take notice? How can you guarantee that they will be interested in hearing from you. Unfortunately you can't. It might be a long shot, but a long shot is better than no shot at all. If you tell one hundred people in the media that you exist and only one person contacts you, that's one more than would have if you hadn't contacted them at all. You got one, now repeat the process. Eventually you will peak more and more peoples interest in what you are all about and you will begin to see more interest in communicating with you and about you. How you go about it is three-fold, mail, e-mail and telephone. It's as much about the follow up as the initial communication.

But you have to come up with what you're communicating about in the first place. What's the most interesting things about your business. Do you offer a service that is exclusive in your

area? Do you have the most experienced staff in town? Have you won an award for your high standards of service? Think about what would make a writer want to write about you. List these things out and then determine who your audience for each area.

If your spa uses only organic products, you might want to contact a magazine or website whose sole focus is organic products and organic-only businesses. If you are introducing a new service that is all-the-rage in the fashion world, contact your local beauty or fashion editor and invite them in for a complimentary service. Make the connection logical and provide your contact a good reason to want to call you back. In our next column we'll take you through the basics of writing a good press release and communicate it to the right people. For now, let's look at what you'll be telling them.

Back to that list we were starting. First, record all the important details about your business, especially those that might be perceived as noteworthy, interesting or exclusively yours. When you got started, why you started the business, where you are located. Your next step should be listing out everything you do in your business, what products you sell, what services you offer, who your people are. Once you have a list of the many things that make your business *your business* you are one-third of the way home.

Next, add to each of items on the list a sub-listing of who would be interested in knowing you offer that service, carry that product or got started the way you did. A stressed out business person might want to know about your *Relaxation Therapy Treatment*. When this list is complete, you're two-thirds of the way there.

Finally, take that list of who would be interested in hearing about all the great things you do. Review it and make a new list. Yes, sorry, another list. This one will detail where those people get their information. The magazines and newspapers they read, websites they visit or places where your potential customers hang out. That business person we spoke about might get their information from the local morning newspaper. You'd do well to have that paper include you in an article on stress reduction for today's business person. Is this all starting to come together now?

Okay, so next time we'll look at how we communicate, write our own press release and determine the best ways to try to sell our business to the media. Until then, you've got some homework to do, let's get to work on those lists, shall we?