

## Marketing Minute ~ Intelligent Tools to Communicate

The ultimate goal of PR programs (to communicate your messages to your market) differ, but most have in common the need to generate positive media coverage in the publications and outlets that are read by your (or your customer's) organization's target audiences. Whether the media coverage you seek simply promotes the results of a survey, reports on a new product or service, or marks the beginning of a campaign to influence the public on a particular issue, there's a good deal of advance preparation that needs to take place before you land that story.

There are three tactics (tools) that you can use to generate the desired media coverage needed for a successful PR/marketing campaign. These tactics are:

1) **Targeting, connecting with and influencing the appropriate media.** The most important aspect of a PR program is knowing the target audience and where they go to get information that drives their business decisions. Is it the trade publications that cover their industry? Is it the business reporter at their local newspaper? Or is it where your competitors are advertising? Talk to customers and industry experts to find answers to these questions. The reporters who write for these publications are the ones you want to target.

A second factor to consider is today's media environment. The 24-hour news cycle brought about by the internet and cable television has created news holes that need to be continuously supplied. Yet, despite this need for news, many outlets around the country and the world are operating with fewer reporters than they did five years ago. The resulting pressure to churn out more content with less staff can open doors to opportunities for coverage because of a need to fill these 'holes' with interesting, newsworthy information that might not have otherwise been available.

Build a media list. After determining what sources your target audiences use, it's time to build a list of these and related media outlets. For each outlet, determine what reporters cover news related to your company, client or issues. There are many ways to do this: some more timely and cost-effective than others. For instance, subscribe to the publications, use search engines to find online editions, follow media-focused newsletters or publications, or use a media database. Make sure to determine your delivery options to distribute your news release or article idea, such as the wire, a media database and individual correspondence. Also, consider the timing, if the release is not urgent, avoid the time around the open and close of the stock market when a flood of announcements that could overshadow your news. Also, there are four times in the year when public companies report earnings, and reporters, especially business reporters, tend to focus on earnings ahead of other events. These quarterly periods are:

- January 15 through February 15
- April 15 through May 15
- July 15 through August 15
- October 15 through November 15

2) **Developing experts and promoting them to the media as a reliable source.** If you have someone in your organization who REALLY know the business, industry and service or product, develop them as an expert. Effectively playing the expert game requires a bit of imagination and creativity. Your goal is to have your key journalists seek information and advice from your 'experts'. How do you do this?

Identify who can talk effectively about which topics. The most sought after experts are those who can provide a different angle on a topic, who are somewhat controversial, who are willing to speak candidly with a reporter, who are unflappable, and importantly, those who will be available to the media when an interview is requested. Forget your business/organization objectives and regard the world as a reporter would. Identify 'What topics are of interest? What angles are fresh and provocative? Which experts and what level of expertise would make an article a really interesting read?'

Profiling key spokespersons on your website or in widely available expert databases provides reporters with easy accessibility to these experts. It is also a good idea to consider services that enable profiles to be linked directly from a news release. This provides more in-depth information to reporters reading your news and that may increase the potential for pickup. Consider sending out a media advisory (if your expert can talk about a current 'hot topic') alerting reporters to the availability of such a spokesperson and his or her position on the topic. This advisory can be more effective in the form of a pitch rather than a release.

A news release essentially packages ideas for reporters en masse. A pitch, however, is tailoring an idea for a single reporter. In a tailored pitch, you are saying, "I think you'll be interested in this person because..." When writing a pitch, the tone should be friendly and familiar and not at all vague. Make sure to have ideas that can be used in news releases and others that can be saved or tailored for pitches.

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### 3) Monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of your efforts.

Monitoring is the act of scanning websites and other information sources such as newspapers, magazines, wire services, etc. for mentions of an organization, its executives, its competitor or the industry as a whole. This includes providing links to where these mentions appear in articles online or in print. How do you do this?

- Identify keywords associated with your brand
- Define what you want to monitor
- You can do it yourself or sign up for RSS (real simple syndication) feeds. You can receive RSS feed content in your 'RSS Reader' (free at <http://allrds.com/rssreaders.html>) as you would receive an email.
- Monitoring services are available for a fee.

Measurement is the act of evaluating, based on determined criteria such as tonality, volume, share of voice, and so on, the aggregate coverage an organization receives in the media. Proper measurement will provide a basis for which you can evaluate a PR/marketing program and determine if it is meeting its intended objectives and the objectives of the organization/business. Specifically, conducting appropriate measurement should yield:

- Volume of coverage vs competitors'
- Opportunities to view vs competitors'
- Equivalent ad value vs competitors'
- Coverage by publication type or media type vs competitors'
- Evaluation of tonality (positive, negative, neutral) and quality (based upon articles' length, placement, publication and several other criteria)
- Share of voice in articles as compared to competitors'
- Tracking of messages, issues and spokespeople

With a marketing program or campaign that includes all three of these fundamental tactics/tools, you have a full circle approach to your public relations efforts. Each of these can be managed on your own, just to be sure to consider your objectives and identify where your time is best spent. But, with help on some of these tools, it can free you up to spend your time doing strategy, pitching, talking to and cultivating relationships with journalists, reading up on your industry, those things you can't outsource.

