

Why You Should Embrace –Not Fear–the Media

How Publications Can Help You Sell Your Services and Products

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Executives and professionals often shy away from granting media interviews because they are afraid they will say something stupid or be ambushed with unpleasant questions. And so they ignore the most influential method of getting out their marketing messages.

Media content analysis shows that very few articles negatively depict businesses...unless your company has just spilled toxic waste or stolen millions of dollars. If that's the case, then you engage in "crisis communications," something you'll rarely do during your career. If done properly, most media coverage you get will have positive marketing value...or at least it will be a neutral, factual account of your product or service.

Scan the trade and business publications or journals that have the most impact on your company or organization. In how many of those articles is a company or an executive getting negative treatment? None, is usually the answer. So why not be a player and better promote what your company is selling? Articles are much more valuable than ads. Why not get your share of exposure?

Well, for one thing, it is not easy to get media coverage. Editors and reporters receive at least a hundred story pitches a day and can use only a couple. So you have to develop an effective PR strategy, then implement it with vigorous tactics. And who has time for that? Your industry leaders, most probably. They are the ones who keep getting featured when you aren't.

Publications Need You...As Much As You Need Them

That's right. The overwhelming majority of published material comes from public relations campaigns. Newsrooms are short-staffed these days, which means that they must rely on others to bring them story ideas. Some publications even use much of what you send them word for word.

To bolster their content, many trade publications accept "byline" articles--ones that you write on topics that you understand. These highly desirable placements position you as a thought leader in your field and convey a third-party endorsement effect.

I know dozens of reporters and editors who are so busy they rarely leave their desks and must depend on information that PR people and organization leaders provide them. Quite often, they develop their own stories and blend what you send them with material from others, so you must position what you send them effectively. And you often need to be prepared to answer follow-up questions.

Why Reporters Love Their News Sources

I spent the first 15 years of my communications career as a reporter and editor mostly in Atlanta and in Washington, D.C., so I know how important *news sources* are. What are news sources? That's you...whenever you provide information to a reporter.

Reporters fear their editors more than even the mafia or terrorists. So when an editor assigns a story to a writer just hours before deadline, he doesn't want excuses. He wants the story. That means the reporter must have expert sources *she* (a majority of reporters are women) can turn to quickly to help her understand often complex issues. When you provide a reporter useful, accurate information and perspectives in a timely manner, you will make a very good friend. Later, when you want to pitch your own story, your reportorial friend will pay much more attention to you than to the guy who didn't return her call by deadline. It's just human nature. And if you goof up once in a while, that same reporter will be slower to pounce on you.

Journalists with extensive, reliable sources tend to rise faster in their careers, because they file more comprehensive timely stories. Did I mention that reporters also thrive on tips—and reward their tipsters? Inside information about important stories is gold to journalists. They can't be everywhere and must rely on insiders for scoops.

How to Stay Focused on Your Own Agenda

Having a leadership role in your organization probably means that you are a fairly social person. As such, you want to respond to people around you. When someone asks you a question, you are inclined to try to answer that question. That's not always a good idea in talking with journalists. They are like gossips on steroids. Telling many thousands of people things is what they do for a living. So, when they ask you something, take a beat. Or two.

Should you answer that question? Right now...never...or tomorrow, once you've had more time to consider. You might think this is common sense, but remember, you're gregarious and you want to sound like a leader who has no trouble answering questions. Wrong. Once you say something, you can't take it back. Not with a reporter.

What do you do? You will show respect for the reporter and her readers if you simply say that you will have to research that question and get back, because you don't want to provide information that you haven't thoroughly researched and considered. Then you have the opportunity to position your answer in a way that benefits you and your organization. And you will also provide more useful information to the journalist.

Bottom line, reporters and editors will value their relationship with you, if you provide them with honest, timely information. And they can become good friends willing to exchange information and insights.

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