



SEVEN ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN PLANNING A PUBLICITY PROGRAM

Publicity can be a powerful tool in your overall awareness strategy, if it is used correctly. Publicity is more credible and often less expensive than advertising, and it is one of the most reliable ways to attract new customers and maintain awareness with current ones.

Here are seven questions to ask when establishing a program to gain publicity:

1.) Do I know the differences between publicity and advertising?

There's a saying that "advertising is what you pay for, publicity is what you pray for." But even though you don't purchase the space, publicity is not free, as some people believe. It costs time and money to develop a good publicity program that will yield more than one or two media "hits". And it takes time to establish momentum, so you can't expect to be a media darling overnight, even if you've got a great story to tell. Generally it takes about a year for the media to get to the point where they consider you a reliable resource.

Remember that since publicity is unpaid, you will not have control over exactly what is and isn't said about you. Members of the media are independent and objective and will generally delete any strictly promotional materials. Also keep in mind that sometimes pre-scheduled features or segments are dropped at the last minute when unexpected hard-news events occur. So if you need to be sure specific information will appear, or your message is sales-oriented, advertising is a better route.

2.) Do I know what's "newsworthy"?

If you consistently provide information that is newsworthy and helpful, you can build an outreach to both the media and your community. To identify newsworthy opportunities, ask yourself 'what's new'? Train yourself and your staff to be on the lookout for opportunities. They're all around you: issues that affect your business or customers, events, new people, new services, new and improved facilities, accomplishments, new contracts, research, public appearances or any other activity that's unique or interesting.

Another tactic for creating news is to provide the media with information that is relevant to a timely topic. You can develop a system for doing this by creating a seasonal calendar of media opportunities. For example, spring is a prime time to provide information about how to save time and/or money when doing home repairs. But you'd also find some media interest in the fall when people are starting to think about winterizing their homes.





3.) Do I know how to “pitch” the media?

You can get and keep media attention by keeping two things in mind: editorial interest and readership interest. In other words, you need to sell the editor on the idea first. This person is trying to find information that is of interest or helpful to his or her audience.

You can make your information more newsworthy by making it timely, brief, distinctly local and helpful. Also, visuals are important, especially for television.

4.) Do I know what to send the media?

There are some tried and true methods for communicating with the media. One of the most widely-used tools is the media release. In most news releases, the first paragraph is the most important.

A quick glance at the first paragraph will tell the editor exactly what follows, or will intrigue the editor enough to want to go on to the second. If neither of these things happens, the release will usually be thrown away.

5.) Do I know what I’ll do if a story comes out wrong?

Be realistic about coverage. Expect a few minor errors or omissions, but if a story completely misrepresents your company, write a polite letter that requests a correction.

Unless the correction is critical, don’t call or question the reporter’s professionalism. And never go over the reporter’s head to complain unless you want to burn the bridge forever.

6.) Do I know what to do when the media calls?

Media interviews are opportunities to provide information to the public, but you must prepare to make the best impression possible. Here are some tips to help you shine.

§ **Stick to Your Key Messages**—Remember an interview is an opportunity to tell your story and get your agenda across. So in advance, prepare your key messages and use every question as an opportunity to address your agenda as well as the reporter’s question.

§ **Anticipate Opposing Points of Views**—Opposing perspectives make a news story more interesting by presenting both sides in a balanced manner. Learn about the other side and be ready to present your side without appearing defensive.





§ Know the Media—You’ll be more effective if you know the media demographics. This will help you position your remarks in a way that will be most appealing to readers and viewers. For example, some television stations have an older audience, some cater to men and women who live in the suburbs and have families, and some speak to a younger, hipper, more fast-paced audience.

§ You Don’t Have to Know Everything—If the reporter asks questions you can’t answer because they are out of your area of expertise, don’t guess or make something up. It is perfectly acceptable to say: “You know, I’m not an expert on that, but I can tell you someone who is...”

§ Dress for Success—Wear what you wear to work in, no matter how the interviewer is dressed. If you feel uncomfortable, you’ll look uncomfortable and the audience won’t take you seriously. For television, avoid pure white shirts or suits with stripes, checks or small patterns. And don’t get a haircut right before the television appearance.

§ Be Brief—News is presented in small bites of information. Keep your messages down to a few lines (a ‘soundbite’) and make sure to make your point often.

§ Speak in Language Everyone Understands—Every industry has its own jargon, which some reporters may understand, but the general public may not. Be careful to explain abbreviations and avoid industry jargon.

7.) Do I know how to maximize publicity?

Once you begin to receive publicity, there are several things you can do to maximize it. Be sure to pull together a portfolio of placements, both print and broadcast, and frame any print articles that are especially impressive.

Also consider sending relevant clips to specific clients in case they miss them. If you have a web site or newsletter, reprint articles there. Keep a running total of all media appearances by category (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines) and update it regularly.

If you’re going to be on a radio or television program, send out postcards to customers, newspaper reporters, or anyone else you would like to have tune in. Then be sure to tape the program. You can be as creative with maximizing your placements as you were in obtaining them.

