

Can Media Coverage Build An Online Business? You Bet It Can!

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By David Leonhardt

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As someone with expertise in media relations, I've been asked if media coverage and publicity can build an online business. The real question is whether what happens offline really matters online. And the answer is unquestionably, "Yes!"

Here are ten reasons why media coverage can help your online business grow:

Every one of us, even if we spend four to eight hours a day in front of a computer screen in our underwear, still lives in the real world. Our opinions, desires, priorities, and decisions are heavily influenced by television, radio, books, magazines, and newspapers. Every business, online or offline, can benefit from positive media exposure.

Almost no business can afford to be absent from the Internet these days; even a local real estate agent gains a competitive edge from having a web site. By the same token, an online business gains a strong advantage by having an offline presence. Online and offline marketing of all types support each other.

Search engines won't bring most web site owners business. I just did a Google search for "books", and found about 85.2 million entries. Ninety-five percent of searchers will likely click on the first two (Amazon.com and BarnesAndNoble.com), most of the others will never get to the second page of the searches. This means that 85,199,990 web site book sellers cannot rely on search engines. How about searching for the word bookstore? Still almost seven million entries, and guess who the top two are?

You can't cheat the search engines. Try a search for books and carpentry. The odds are much better, with only 106,000 entries. That still means 105,990 web site book sellers will rarely be found. How about books and promotion? Almost two million entries. If a million carpentry book sellers are reading this article, five are smiling. The rest will only smile with an offline presence, such as a great article in

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their local newspaper or a call-in show on a radio station half way across the world.

The media can create interest in your product or service if they feature you as part of an interesting story. Online or offline, that's what media coverage does. A good story is gold.

The media is just starting now to wake up to the exciting things happening online. Timing is everything and this is the time.

The media are now working increasingly online. The online and offline worlds are converging more than ever before. Articles that appear in local papers, industry magazines and even commentary on radio broadcasts find themselves on the Internet. That can often mean powerful links to your web site. Publicity offline means promotion online.

If you are running a contest, placing a new interactive program on your site, winning an award, taking

donations for a charity or doing anything noteworthy online, it is of interest in the offline world. The media can act as a funnel for people who spend less time than you and I do in front of a computer screen.

In the mainstream media, you are trustworthy. If they see it on TV or in the newspaper, people believe it. (Funny, they SAY they don't trust the media, but their actions speak louder.) Since web marketing is about relationships and trust (That is your strategy, right?), you can build that relationship with people who are only now getting online or who may not even be online for another couple years. By the time they are ready to buy from you, the relationship has already begun because they have carried your offline credibility (that's the biggest value of media coverage) with them onto the Internet.

In the mainstream media, you are real. I know many people who still don't buy anything online. They simply do not trust someone they cannot see. Sure, you might be honest, but how do they know? You could disappear into the ether tomorrow. While bricks-and-mortar stores can close just as fast, there is an impression that they are more real and more permanent. You can increase your realness and permanence through a media presence, and thereby increase your customer base.

Media relations is not always easy and not everyone can make it. You have to have something interesting to tell and have a creative way to make it newsworthy. But it is a low-cost way to drive traffic to your web site. And you may not need to get onto the front page of USA Today to succeed. You may simply want a mention in a few niche magazines where your targeted traffic can be found.

So if you don't like the idea of being a million entries down on a web search, or even 60 entries down, consider a low-cost, effective alternative - the media. With the right angle, media relations and publicity can expand your engine faster than search engines.

After a decade and a half as one of Canada's top consumer advocates, often conducting over 600 media interviews each year, David Leonhardt is sharing his knowledge with others. Pick up a copy of his special report "Get In The News!" at

Public Relations Strategies: Focus PR Campaigns with Media Coverage Analysis

By Richard Cunningham

Prior to launching a new public relations campaign, evaluate the media coverage you've gained and dig deep into the coverage your competition has received.

One of the first steps in defining a public relations strategy is to understand how you and your competition stack up in terms of media coverage. Taking the time to document and analyze press announcements, bylines, sourcing, thought-leadership, and overall media relations helps to focus and streamline PR campaign tactics.

In the audio book, "Sound Advice on Public Relations," author Susan Misukanis says it is important to "identify who, in your marketplace, is winning in terms of positive press coverage." Evaluate who distributes the most press releases, and whether they are actually picked up by the media.

"Know who is continuously being quoted as an expert source within stories," says Misukanis. "Quantify how many articles are being contributed, or bylined, by your competitors." From this, you begin to identify whether the companies being bylined are considered thought-leaders.

Finally, obtain media kits from the publications in your market space, and study their circulation and reader profiles. "You can understand with whom your competition is building mindshare - which constituents' categories your competition is reaching," says Misukanis.

Weighing these findings, you'll be surprised how focused your PR campaign will become, and how clearly you can position your company's public relations vis-à-vis the competition.

Susan Misukanis offers advice on public relations strategies each week in the free audio newsletter from What's Working in Biz,

Richard Cunningham is a principal of What's Working in Biz,

, a publisher

of business audiobooks and online audio programs on marketing, sales, and small business strategies.

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