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DIY Public Relations

By Louise Third

Ever felt aggrieved that other entrepreneurs make the headlines but you don't? Louise Third,

founder of Integra Communications, the enterprise PR specialists, says it's not as tough as it looks; it just requires planning and the application of some basic rules.

Kevin and Dawn Hartley, the owners of Mozart's Restaurant in Nottingham have tangible evidence that a planned use of PR can significantly improve sales. The couple, who opened the 40-seat restaurant in November 2002, decided to take every opportunity to contact their local press and radio with 'news' and comment. Their opening was marked on Radio Trent FM with champagne and canapés and was followed a month later by a 2 hour Christmas Show broadcast live from the restaurant. BBC Radio Nottingham carried a Valentine's recipe on the website and 50,000 listeners enjoyed a live cooking session in association with the Nottingham Restaurant Awards.

"Our biggest media coverage success came on National No-Smoking Day in 2004 when we took the decision to announce that Mozart's had become Nottingham's first totally non-smoking restaurant," says Head Chef Kevin. "Not only did BBC Radio Nottingham interview us then, but when the government White Paper on smoking was published last November, we were bombarded with requests for interviews." Kevin and Dawn found themselves on several local radio stations, and in front of regional TV cameras. Although the media requests were quite demanding, the couple made themselves available for interview, thus helping the journalists complete their work and gaining a profile for the restaurant. As a direct result of their PR efforts, the Hartleys have enjoyed a 15% rise in trade.

Inside every small business is a story bursting to get out. Start with that positive attitude and you will get thinking creatively about possible media coverage. A clever use of public relations will help people to understand what you offer, will gradually build your reputation and keep you at the forefront of people's minds - ahead of the competition!

Basic rules The fact that Kevin and Dawn planned a media campaign as part of their overall sales strategy brings us to the first rule of sound public relations:

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1. Use PR as an integral part of your marketing plan: once you have decided the level of sales you need to breakeven and then to make a profit, identify those who need to know about you and what you offer. If you have opened a new shop, customers may be very local but if you specialise they may travel from much further away. Perhaps you coach senior executives to cope in stressful conditions: then your potential clients may be the UK's FTSE 100 companies or large public corporations. You may decide to use a combination of direct mail, networking so you get referrals/recommendations and publicity.

2. Identify what your target customers read, watch and listen to. This is likely to be a mixture of local, regional and national papers, trade or professional magazines, local and national radio stations and TV, not to mention all the 'New Media' options. If it is practical, ask them; if you are visiting their premises, what publications can you see in reception? Make a list, find the name of the most relevant editor or feature writer and call them to see how they would like to receive your news. The fax machine used to be widely used to issue press releases; this was then overtaken by email, but ironically many PR firms are reverting to fax; it can't be erased or ignored and is still cheaper than post. Then there's

the direct call to the journalist or news desk.....if you have a very strong story. However, be realistic. Don't set your sights on regular television coverage, but equally don't rule it out (at least regionally).

3. Find the 'news'. Be ruthless and think like a journalist, otherwise your release will get tossed in the bin. The journalist will be looking for things their readers will find interesting, amusing or useful. Here are a few ideas, but there are as many permutations as there are businesses:

- a significant new contract · launch of a survey / report · a new appointment · sponsorship of a local charity / event · welcome or condemn new policy/proposals · claim first/last/biggest/latest (but avoid best!) · launch a campaign / involve a celebrity · letters to the Editor

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I helped a client, Linda Russell, to launch a new shop in north-Nottinghamshire. Not that newsworthy you may think, but this was no ordinary shop and Linda is no ordinary lady. Having recovered from breast cancer and reconstructive surgery at the age of 31, Linda launched 'Perfect Fit', an online service selling the latest designs and styles of lingerie for women with post-operative needs. The shop would allow Linda to display her stock, provide a professional fitting service and offer a sanctuary for women to meet and talk. We issued a pre-opening media release with the headline, 'Linda's Perfect Fit helps Breast Cancer 'blues'' and linked the launch to Breast Cancer Awareness month by including a quote and useful statistics from the regional Cancer Research UK representative. This small campaign had all the necessary 'hooks' for media coverage and gave the journalists what they needed. As a result Linda received full page and editorial coverage in the main regional press, feature and interview slots on local radio and a phone-in on BBC Radio Nottingham. Timing, planning and sensitive delivery was all it took.

4. Write the media release. Although you want to encourage the journalists to use your story, this is not a sales pitch, so avoid gushing praise of yourself and your product. Here are some basic guidelines:

- Cover the facts in the first paragraph including who, what, why, when, where and how as clearly as you can.

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- The second paragraph should build on the first and carry any significant facts
- Include a quote; this adds personality and endorsement to the story
- Use Notes at the end to carry background information which reporters can use for research. Remember to include a contact name and number.
- Choose a simple, attention-grabbing headline which re-enforces the overall message
- Type MEDIA RELEASE at the top, date it and indicate when the information can be published.
- Use A4 paper, 1.5 line-spacing, wide margins and type
- ENDS to indicate you have finished.
- Limit your release to one page if possible, two at the most. Short, informative and interesting goes down well with busy reporters.
- A well constructed, high resolution (300 dpi) photo can turn a mediocre story into the one that gets coverage.

· Proof-read the release before it goes out. Then get someone else to do it again. It's amazing what you can miss.....

5. The follow-up. So far so good, but now comes the tricky bit: you need to check that the right person has got your release and if so, talk to them about the chances of it being used. Always assume the journalist or editor is busy and ask if they are free to talk. Be prepared as they may have additional questions and may need convincing of the strength of your story. Don't say anything you wouldn't want reported if it sounds as though they are interviewing you. Radio stations will either pre-record an interview in person or over the phone, or ask you into the studio, again to pre-record or go live. Check that you know exactly what to expect; it is not unreasonable to ask what the questions might be.

Kevin Hartley of Mozart's Restaurant has learned a great deal from the experience and has no doubt that working with the media is good for business. "You need to make yourself media-friendly; that means being very flexible so they can meet their deadlines. You need to build a list of contacts at the local radio, press and TV offices and be bold enough to pick up the phone when you have some news. We now seem to be in their database, so journalists wanting a restaurateur to comment on something seem to ring me." It just goes to show how even the smallest business can make headlines .

Finally, as media relations is a commercial activity you should try to measure the effect any exposure has had. It can be as simple as monitoring phones calls and website hits in the period immediately following the coverage. If you convert these into sales, all the better. If people are more aware of you, introductions become that much easier. Stick at it and you will be amazed how a little effort can go along way.

Mozart's Restaurant:

www.mozarts.co.uk

Perfect Fit:

www.perfectfit-online.co.uk

Louise Third is a Partner in Integra Communications

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Alongside the agency, Louise provides a coaching service, giving PR guidance to smaller businesses who might not be able to afford an agency but are prepared to do the legwork themselves.

How To Get The Media To Cover Your Story

By Ana Ventura

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There are two big misconceptions that a fair amount of business professionals hold about the media and their attitude towards those in the public relations field.

The first misconception is that the media despises anyone in public relations. Some people tend to think that journalists or other news writers prefer to dig up all their stories from scratch, and not get ideas from outside sources.

The second and opposite misconception about the media is that they are lazy, and simply print press releases sent out by PR groups word for word. It is thought sometimes that the media runs stories or news about a particular company in hopes of getting more advertising dollars in the future.

In actuality, the media recognizes public relations simply as a part of their field. Many times, public relations efforts bring about many interesting opportunities and stories for media folk, and the media does not avoid using nor actively seek out public relations material.

There are a few things that you can keep in mind when putting together material for release to the media. The number one most important thing is that the job of an editor is to find

interesting and pertinent material for their audience.

Think about it this way: you write an ad and decide to place the ad in a few national newspapers and magazines. Your main interest is that the ad is catchy and convincing to the readers of those publications. You are not concerned that the magazine or newspaper editors will like the ad, because it's not up to them—you paid for the placement. But, when submitting material for public relations purposes you have to keep in mind that the material has to suit both the editor and the reader.

If the editor finds your work acceptable for both the publication and the intended audience, you are well on your way towards a great public relations relationship with the media.

So, the media are not much different from anyone else that you might find out and about in the working world—they are just

doing their job and trying to get material together. Keep their needs, the reader's needs, and your needs in mind, and your PR skills will be top notch.

Ana Ventura specializes in helping businesses, organizations, and individuals get media coverage. She is a PR expert at DrNunley's <http://FullServicePR.com>, a site specializing in affordable publicity services. Reach Ana at <mailto:ana@fullservicepr.com> or 801-328-9006.



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