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**PR: The Wildcard Marketing Strategy**

**By Dali Singh**

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What is the true purpose of public relations and how can it really help impact the growth of your small business? In order for the media to succeed, they need information that is both useful and entertaining for their readers. This is where you, the business owner or marketing executive, come in.

When thinking of public relations, many things may come to mind, like: Sweaty palms as you pick up the phone to try and convince a reporter how great your business is; getting writers block while trying to write a press release about your company; countless hours of faxing your story to hundreds editors just to find out that your piece did not make it to print.

However, public relations does not have to be such a daunting effort. If done right, public relations can also bring rewarding thoughts to your mind, like: The constant ringing of phones in your office of people interested in your products or services; gaining credibility and becoming a leading expert in your industry; or thousands of people learning about your company in a matter of days without costing you a dime!

This is the type of public relations that every business owner should strive for. First of all, let's analyze the true meaning of public relations. The Webster dictionary defines public relations as "Communication with various sectors of the public to influence their attitudes and opinions in the interest of promoting a person, product, or idea." Sounds easy enough, right? Well, if that's the case then why do so many companies struggle with implementing effective PR campaigns?

Most small business owners think that public relations is too time consuming of an effort. This may be true in cases where small businesses have very limited resources (i.e. staff, budget), but this should not discourage you from doing it. It is just a matter of prioritizing your goals and leveraging the resources that you do have available to take advantage of what is an invaluable marketing tactic. Now that we have established the importance of PR for your business, here are a few tips to get you started in the right direction:

## PR: The Wildcard Marketing Strategy

1. Create several creative story pitches. The way to get into the hearts and minds of the media is through a great story pitch. Shamelessly promoting your business or its products is not going to do you much good. Not only that, but editors may classify you as that annoying self-promoter that won't stop pitching their product line, and then refer you to the advertising department. When developing story pitches you should ask yourself the following questions:

What makes this story different from the hundreds of other stories being submitted? Will this benefit readers financially, professionally, emotionally, or even spiritually in any way? Is this really entertaining or fun to read? If the answer to any of these questions is "No", then it is time to adjust your story until the answer is "Yes".

2. Match your target audience with the right media channels. If your company's main customer base is women in their 30s, then you probably don't want to focus on media channels that target a

demographic of men in their 50s. Really understanding your target audience will help you in the next step of your PR plan – targeting the right media channels.

Even if you were to get exposure in these "A List" publications, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will get the same results than if you had a write-up in a more targeted publication that focuses specifically on Human Resource issues.

After getting your initial list of potential media targets together, rate each one on how good it fits with your target markets, and go after the ones that fit best first, regardless of the circulation or popularity of the source.

3. Have a spokesperson or PR firm represent your company. So let's assume that you have executed your calling campaign and have sparked interest with an editor or reporter looking to secure an interview with someone at your firm. They contact your office but no one is available to take their call. One thing that journalists and editors lack is patience, and rightfully so – they have deadlines to fulfill! The last thing you want is to be unavailable when an editor or reporter wants more information about your company or products.

4. Take advantage of your opportunities when they present themselves. PR results do not happen overnight. You must be patient and persistent. However, when activity comes up, you must ensure that the company is rewarded for the hard work put in! So do not forget to include your company information including a 1–3 line sentence describing your company, author byline (if applicable), and a URL of your web site. Media professionals will sometimes forget to include this information so it is your job to include it in your press release, articles, or interview. If you have a welcoming relationship with your media contact, see if you can check the article before it goes to print. If you are doing a talk show, make sure they mention your company name and/or web site on the bottom of the television screen.

5. Follow up with your contacts. Now that you have received press, do not forget to thank the reporter or editor who wrote it. Maintaining solid relationships is essential to the success of your PR campaign. Taking a reporter out to lunch or dropping them a kind note every now and then doesn't hurt either.

In sum, PR is a wildcard marketing strategy that can yield tremendous results if implemented correctly. Companies need to have either an in-house or third party person dedicated to PR, at least on a part-time basis. This person needs to be the champion of the company, products or services, in a tireless fashion. Don't forget that your number one goal is to get in front of your target audience. In your next marketing plan review or initial development of one, make sure to give PR serious attention and the resources necessary to implement a long-term PR strategy.

Dali Singh is the Managing Director for Blueliner Marketing, a full-service marketing and communications firm based in New York City. Visit her website at

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## **September National League Trends**

### **By Sebastien Veilleux**

It's time to go over the National League and see how teams are trending. What's a trends sheet? Basically, I will run down each team in the National League and alert you to what teams are hot, heating up, cooling down or cold. The game is heating up as teams start to get desperate. Let's take a look at the National League to see who's worth putting down some hard earned money on.

**New York Mets:** The New York Mets have had the NL East wrapped up for most of the season. As of this writing, their lead was 15.5 games with just a handful to go. They look to be resting somewhat. They are not as hot as they once were and are bouncing up and down.

**Florida Marlins:** They continue to be one of the hottest teams in baseball. They are winning at a 70% clip and look to be in a prime spot for the NL Wildcard.

**Philadelphia Phillies:** The Phillies have cooled down slightly. They are still treading water—winning about 50% of their games. They are battling for the NL Wildcard.

**Atlanta Braves:** The dream of going back to the playoffs is fading fast. They gave it a run recently, but they have cooled some in the past two weeks.

**Washington Nationals:** They are winning 45–50% of their games and are pretty predictable.

### **National League Central**

**St. Louis Cardinals:** After a brief scare from Cincinnati, the Cardinals are now back in first by a handful of games. Their play is up and down, but so is the rest of the division.

Cincinnati Reds: They are right in the thick of things for the NL Wildcard, but they are just treading water, which means they are slowly losing ground.

Houston Astros: They have been cooling off over the past two weeks. The writing appears to be on the wall.

Milwaukee Brewers: This team has continues to spiral down over the past two weeks. I won't say they are ice cold, but there are pretty close.

Pittsburgh Pirates: The Pirates are no longer in last places thanks to their better play recently. They are heating up.

Chicago Cubs: The Cubs are freezing cold. They are winning about 20% of their games of late.

#### National League West

Los Angeles Dodgers: Just when it looked like the Dodgers were going to catch fire and run away with the West, they cool down. They are winning about 50% of their games now.

San Diego Padres: The Padres are primed to take the NL Wildcard spot and they are heating up.

San Francisco Giants: The Giants are hoping it's not too little too late. They are on fire right now—winning about 70% of their games.

Arizona Diamondbacks: The season is pretty move over for them and they know it. Their play has deteriorated of late. They are cooling off.

Colorado Rockies: The Rockies are up and down. They were cooling down, but they have played well over the past week. Count on them to win about 45–50% of their games from here on out.

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