

Is Your Product Newsworthy?

Product publicity in the print media -- newspapers and magazines -- is one of the most effective and least expensive ways of promoting a product or service. And many times an individual or company can do that promotion job without the assistance of professional news writers or a communications firm.

Why is product publicity so effective? It costs very little (paper and postage -- and a little time if you do it yourself). It is easily targeted (a properly selected newspaper or magazine does all the work). And there is a quick turn around (that is, you get results fast).

In order to effectively promote a product, you should know a few tricks of the trade, used by professionals to get their clients into print and before the eyes of their customers.

This article focuses on the major points of do-it-yourself promotions, so you can get the publicity you need to grow.

Select an Audience and Write to It

The first and most important consideration in product publicity through the print media is your audience. You must determine to whom you want to sell your product. Don't fool yourself into thinking this is an easy decision. Many times, the more specific a target audience you can select, the better your product publicity efforts will work.

Let's say you have a new product that will cut the time required for insulation contractors to do their job. You would obviously write your new product press release to insulation contractors, and in a publication serving that industry.

However, if you developed a new multi-surface cleaner which might be used by a variety of customers, your market would be too large to effectively reach through one product release or one type of magazine. In this case, and since media editors require that articles be especially written for their readers, you should consider writing several new product releases -- each designed to appeal to a specific audience.

A different magazine might target each of these audiences. Magazines are often listed in special

directories available at your library. When mailing your article to any publication, address your product release to the Business Editor.

Writing for the Reader

Once you have determined who your readers are, tell them how your product will benefit them. Remember that buyers are like anyone else. They want to know what you can do to make their lives easier. They are not too concerned with how your product is made or how many widgets are in it. They want to know how they will benefit if they buy your product.

For example, don't write: "Our new X19G all-purpose cleaner is the finest of its kind. Twenty years of experience went into its formula and we don't think you'll find a better product at any price."

Instead, write: "We know from customer reports that users of X19G all-purpose cleaner are able to cut the time it takes to finish a job by 50% or more. It saves labor and energy costs, too."

The difference is clear. The first write-up tells the reader what the manufacturer is proudest of. The second write-up tells the reader what the reader wants to know to make a purchase decision. If you want to reach the buyers of products like yours, answer their primary question: "What's in it for me?"

Types of Publicity Articles

There are three basic types of publicity articles that can be most useful. The "new product release" is the most common. It describes on one or two pages (making it quick and easy to read) what the new product is, what is unique about it, what it does for the customer and how the reader can order one or get more information.

Remember when you are writing product publicity that you are trying to get the reader to react to what you are saying. Thus, you must give him or her a way to react. Often this is simply a company name and address where the reader can write and get more information. Or it may be a statement that the product is/will be available by a certain date in stores in a specific area.

Remember to put the user benefits first in the new product release. Follow with a description of the product and its operation. Third, explain any options or accessories. Conclude with how the reader gets more information.

"Case Histories" are articles, usually five to eight pages (double-spaced), focusing on a customer and how he achieved better-than-normal gains by using your product. The article should quote the customer throughout and be cleared with the customer before you offer the story to any publication. In short, this type of article follows the following format: "How A used B to gain C."

"Bylined" articles are frequently used to inform readers of useful information that can help them and their businesses. Occasionally, such an article also informs the reader that the writer is available to help them in a particular area. Readers of bylined articles in trade publications sometimes seek further information from the writer through the magazine.

Selling Your Article

Product publicity is not paid advertising, and editors are under no obligation to publish your article. Rather, they are published solely because the editor believes the information in the article will be useful to his/her readers. Therefore, you must "sell" the article to the editor.

To do this, make sure your article is newsworthy. And only offer your article to publications that reach readers who are likely to be interested in your news.

Some communications firms will help you write your publicity articles and will select target magazines for your articles. This is often money well spent, since communications firms have access to large mailing lists and can help you reach more magazines -- and thus, readers -- with your release.

A Word about Cover Letters

When sending an article to a magazine you should accompany it with a brief cover letter to the editor. Describe in the letter why you think the article will be of special interest to the editor's readers. It is important when writing a

good cover letter to sell the article and not the product.

Remember, the letter sells the article, the article sells the product. For example, don't write:

Dear Editor:

A new fiberglass insulation is saving the XYZ plant over 100 dollars a day since installation. This is because the advanced binder formula...

Instead, write:

Dear Editor:

I think your readers will be interested to learn how a New Jersey plant is saving over 100 dollars each day since switching to a new type of insulation. The whole story is here for your review. I hope you can use this in your magazine.

The difference is clear. The better letter focuses the editor's attention on his readers. And it doesn't tell the story, steering the editor to the story instead.

A Few Other Tips

Make your headlines and subheads as attention getting as possible. They will attract the editor's (and the reader's) eye and assure the article gets read. Keep in mind that editors often change headlines and subheads (no matter how good they are) to fit the magazine's format and style.

Write clearly. Make the information easy to understand. Help the reader understand the sales message you are presenting. Don't risk losing the reader by supplying too much technical information.

Doing your own product publicity can be rewarding for you and your business. The rewards come in both increased sales and the pride of seeing your work in print.

This article was written by the principals of ARLAN, Inc.

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