

How to Publicize Your Store

GETTING GOOD PRESS

Paid advertising is often an integral part of marketing a special event in the store, but one of the advantages of sponsoring a creative promotion is that there is a good chance that it will garner some free publicity. There are two advantages to this type of press coverage: You don't have to pay for it, and it has greater credibility with the public than the advertising you *do* pay for. The disadvantages are that you can't ever count on getting free press coverage, and you have little control over the content of the coverage you do get. Most newspapers and radio and television stations maintain a policy of keeping commercial advertising and editorial coverage separate, so spending a lot of money on ads is unlikely to have any effect on how much feature coverage you are able to generate. You should, however, try to coordinate your marketing and public relations campaigns so that one supports the other.

Because free publicity is a gift, it pays to be very nice to anyone from the press. Many years ago an article about our shopping area failed to mention one merchant, and she called the newspaper and read the poor reporter the riot act. I'm sure that the next time that newspaper wanted to do a feature on a specialty shop, hers was not the store they called. We are approached from time to time by reporters working on a seasonal shopping story or by a TV station needing a kitchen in which to film a segment on new trends in cooking, and we always do our best to cooperate, even if we don't end up being mentioned by name.

When you are contacted by the media, cooperate in every way, keeping their deadlines and other restrictions in mind. Do what you can to make it easy for them to get the information and footage or photographs that they need. As Jay Conrad Levinson, Rick Frishman, Jill Lublin, the authors of *Guerilla Publicity* (Adams Media, 2002) point out, "The media feeds on information. It devours massive amounts of content that must constantly be replenished."

Remember that some days, such as Sundays, are slow news days, so your chances of getting some television or radio coverage are much greater than on a busy weekday. Even if you haven't sent out an official press release in advance, you may be able to get a reporter and camera person to come on short notice to cover some interesting event at your store if the station is short of feature stories for that day's news.

If you are to be interviewed for television or radio, ask if you can get a general idea of the questions you'll be asked a few minutes before the interview begins. Tell the reporter how you would like the store's name pronounced and try to get him or her to mention the location as well as any other points that you feel are important. Speak clearly and briefly. Very little of what you say—just brief sound bites—will be used, so choose your words carefully. Never say anything to a reporter that you don't want publicized, even if you are speaking off the record.

The Press Release

A press release announces an event, a unique new product line, important personnel appointments or promotions, an in-store visit by a celebrity, or other newsworthy information to the media. The more human interest there is in your story, the more likely it is to be used. Remember that a press release should not sound like ad copy.

Press releases should be sent to TV newsrooms, magazines, and all local newspapers, including the smaller papers in nearby towns. You may send them by mail, fax, or e-mail. Shorter press releases are appropriate for community calendars and other radio coverage. Be sure to send out press releases at least two weeks prior to an event and even earlier than that if you hope for coverage in a monthly magazine. All press releases have similar basic elements:

- *To:* The name of the publication or station and the name of the editor or other contact person
- *From:* The store name, address, telephone and fax numbers, and web site; and the name and title of the store's contact person for the media
- *The date of the press release:* If the item can be printed right away, add, "For immediate release." If the news is not to be announced until a certain date, indicate "For release on"
- *The facts about the product or event:* For events, be sure to answer the questions *who, what, when, and where*. State all key facts in the first sentence. Write as if you were writing an article, not an ad. Limit your release to one page, and be sure to mention the most important information in the first paragraphs. If the story has to be shortened, the final paragraphs will usually be dropped.
- *Enclose good photographs:* If this is not a possibility, mention that they are available via e-mail as digital files (JPEGs). Be sure to indicate the store name and telephone number on the back of all printed pictures, together with a caption and the photographer's credit line. Include a signed release for any individuals in the photo, especially if they are customers or other nonemployees. To avoid duplication, send photographs that will not appear in your paid advertising.

When writing about an unusual new product, you might also enclose a sample. This can also be an effective way to grab the attention of a media person for a special event—for example, delivering a small box of chocolate along with a press release about a chocolate festival. Keep in mind that photographs and samples usually are not returned.

When you send out a press release, consider enclosing a general fact sheet about the store. This information probably won't be used by the press, but it can't hurt to supply it. The fact sheet, press release, and any photos can be mailed or delivered as a press kit in an attractive folder with the store name on the cover.

It pays to know in advance the name of the best person to contact at each publication or station and to make sure the information goes directly to that person. For important press releases, follow up with a telephone call a few days later, asking if the release has arrived and if there are any questions you can answer. Most people don't do this, and the follow-up can make a real difference in the likelihood of the story being carried.

Schroeder, Carol L. Specialty Shop Retailing: Everything You Need to Know to Run Your Own Store. 3rd ed. John Wiley & Sons, 1997.