



## Any Organization Can Win High Visibility and Build a Strong Brand by Using Smart but Inexpensive Public Relations Tactics!

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Even if you don't have a big marketing or public relations budget, you can still raise your organization's profile and build a strong brand among customers, members, potential members, the news media, and other opinion leaders if you use a few proven—and inexpensive—PR tactics to raise your visibility.

Reporters are always looking for compelling stories. You can help them and, at the same time, win press coverage for your organization, your issue, your products, and services. Also, with new online tools, *you* can be the media and build your own audiences. Here are tactics that will help you build your visibility at little or no cost.

- **Messages.** Before you send out any communication, get your organization "on message." Write out a half dozen compelling statements that address the *specific* benefits of your organization and the issues or services you represent. Get your team using those messages for *all* formal and informal communication (the Web site, press releases, sales and marketing materials, media interviews, presentations, proposals, elevator speeches, and even the way in which the receptionist answers the phone). Unified and focused messages are powerful tools.
- **Pitching the press.** The most important skill in getting press attention is the ability to "pitch" a story. Anyone can do it. Here's the process: 1) Identify something newsworthy in your organization or a trend in your industry that would make a good story. 2) Get the names of "experts" you can provide as sources. 3) Select the publication(s) that will help you target your audience. 4) Identify reporters who cover your topic.

Now put together a "package" for each reporter that includes 1) the story idea, 2) a short description of each expert, and 3) a reason why the story idea is timely (link it to something in today's news?). Be confident that you have something of value to offer them, and be persistent. Reporters say they don't want phone calls, but if you have a really good story to pitch, give it a try. Otherwise, e-mails work best.

- **Take note of a "First in a Series" article.** If you and your organization would fit into the series as good sources, contact the reporter immediately with reasons you might be included in the next article in the series.
- **Spotlight newsworthy people** in your organization. For example, if a staffer is a noted writer, musician, civic volunteer, or athlete, pitch the story to the appropriate editors of the newspaper. That way you'll have a chance of getting your organization mentioned in the Arts, Sports, Local, or Business sections depending on the nature of the story.
- **Use social media** if you are ready (and you have useful information to share). Don't be daunted by blogging, Facebook, and Twitter. They are just tools. Learn about them even if they might not be right for you today. Using social media helps increase visitation to your Web site by creating fresh content that search engines will latch onto (if you send out a blog, for example, be sure to provide a link back to your Web site). To see how blogging works, go to Technorati.com and read others' blogs. Find those that interest you and leave comments. That will give you the "feel" of the medium before you start your own blog.

- **Be the media.** For now, sending a short, monthly e-newsletter with useful information might be all the social media you need and a good way to make sure contacts remember you. Google "email marketing" to find inexpensive, template-based, e-newsletter tools (e.g., constantcontact.com) or hire a designer to create a template for you. Important: provide useful information, not just a "commercial" for your organization, products, or services.
- **Article marketing.** This is one of social media's best-kept secrets. There are thousands of legitimate Web sites that want content from people with your expertise. Write a short byline article, post it on one of those sites (start with ezinearticles.com, which has hundreds of topics). Be sure to include a link to your organization's Web site. Other Web sites will spread that article around the Internet, and it will boost your presence on Google searches. Don't have time to write an article? Somewhere in your organization is a white paper or speech that you can cut to 800 words and submit. Also send those articles to newspapers as Op-Eds or to trade publications or local business journals as "expert" columns. Buy reprints and add them to your marketing materials.
- **Network strategically.** Once you have attended a few organizations' networking events, choose a group or two and join. Being part of the "family" gives you great exposure, especially if you are on a committee. Get key members of your team to do the same with other organizations. If you are attending a large event, find out if press is attending and be sure to meet them. Come prepared with a story pitch! If you are a member, event organizers often will give you the attendee and press lists in advance.
- **Press releases.** Rumors about the death of the press release are very premature. A press release is only a format, not a medium, and still a good way to structure news. They do work if concise, newsworthy, and timely. And thanks to the Web, releases can go out to many more audiences than just traditional press. A regular "drumbeat" of releases (one or two a month) keeps your visibility high and helps keep you current when reporters do Internet searches to look for information. Try posting your releases for free on topic-specific Web sites (see "Article marketing" above) and send them directly to your contacts and to bloggers in your industry. You can create your own press lists, buy lists, or use release distribution services such as Business Wire or PR Newswire. Some Web-based services are free but coverage is spotty. Try [www.free-press-release.com](http://www.free-press-release.com) as an example. Keep releases under 400 words, and make sure they are newsworthy (focus on benefits, not features). Regular distribution of good releases will build your online presence and credibility in addition to winning media coverage.
- **Commission a study or survey,** the results of which need to appeal to news outlets you most want to reach. Co-sponsor the survey with a well-known industry organization to boost visibility. Online companies (e.g., [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com)) let you process surveys via the Web at very small cost.
- **Determine ROI.** How do you know if your PR is working? A stack of newspaper clips is not always the best indicator of good press coverage. Go for quality over quantity. Look through your clips. Are your most important 5-6 messages (see "Messages," above) found in that stack of articles, TV/radio interviews, product reviews, testimonials, industry survey results, blogs? A media article that includes a couple of your key messages is golden. It tells the reader exactly why he or she should contact your organization and how you can help them.

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