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Wednesday, March 26, 2008

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MEDIA DARLING

*How to be your own press flack. And save money doing it.*By VALERIE MILLER
BUSINESS PRESS

Expensive advertising campaigns abound everywhere: Catchy slogans and jingles blare from radio and television stations, full-page ads for businesses plaster newspapers and billboards try to catch drivers' attention while on the road.

For many companies, the luxury of diverting profits to advertising is just that, a luxury they can't afford. Businesses on shoestring budgets need not despair, however, consultants say. Successfully pitching the media yourself is still possible, even in this era of the full-service public relations firm.

Don't pick up the phone or jump on the computer to contact your local reporter just yet. Consultants, public relations professionals and media professors advise entrepreneurs to first become media savvy by learning the right way, and the right people, to approach.

The first step is education, observers say. Researching the business' customer base and learning what media it consumes will save time and effort, said Paul Traudt, an associate professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies.

"It's just simple marketing, depending on what type of business you have. The more information you have about your target market, that tells you who you have to pursue," he said. "Sometimes you have to pay out the wazoo (to learn) what kind of media is utilized by the target market."

Often, mining those facts just requires a little legwork. Local libraries and universities are valuable resources for business owners. A lot of



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free assistance exists for business owners with the initiative to seek it out, Traudt said.

The UNLV professor cited steps his students have taken to find similar information.

"They look at economic factors, political factors and shifting winds," he said.

Although students may have more access to university resources than members of the general public, nonstudents can also use UNLV's Lied Library and public libraries.

"Then (the businessperson) gets to the public library and they'll get these librarians who would love to help them," he said. "They find books on their profession that tap into academic research on the business, consumer behavior and marketing."

That may sound like an overwhelming amount of material to go through, but Traudt said it needn't be.

"(You) can read the (article) abstracts while you are there," he offers as a tip.

Customer feedback can also be used to judge customers' media tastes. At times it can be a pricey tool, but a small- or medium-size business owner can do it on the cheap if necessary, said Elizabeth Troser, an account executive at the Las Vegas-based public relations firm MassMedia.

"There are a couple things you can do if you can't afford a PR firm," she said. "Find out what your customers read. Use a focus group on your clients. You can conduct a focus group on your own. Invite your clients in for lunch and find out what they read and what they are thinking."

Troser, a 20-year public relations veteran, advises business owners to find out how businesses get their information by using questionnaires, surveys and focus groups. Offering incentives for your clients' participation is recommended, she adds.

"Say, 'Go to our Web site, fill out a survey and get \$5 off a product,'" the publicist suggests.

By doing small-scale research, businesspeople can determine how to best use their time and resources.

The next step is to contact the best media source to pitch the product. But first, Troser advised, learn how to approach the often-busy recipient of the pitch.

"There are some classes that talk about how to write a press release and pitching it to the media," Troser said.

Then, there are the basics.

"It is very important to know what the reporter covers. Make sure you are talking to the right reporter and tell them what makes your company different," she said. "And never talk bad about a competitor. That is one of the worst things you can do."

Finally, getting the company name in print or over the airwaves doesn't mean the effort is over, said Laurel Tiellis, a journalist-turned-media consultant and author of a book titled "The Girl's Guide to Getting on Top: Positioning Your Business Through Media Placements."

2008 CAREERFAIRS

GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR.

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The advertisement features the logos for 'LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL' and 'LAS VEGAS SUN' at the top. The main title '2008 CAREERFAIRS' is in large, bold, red letters. Below it, the slogan 'GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR.' is in orange. The text 'Meet face to face with employers. Dress to impress and bring plenty of resumes.' is in white. At the bottom, there is a line of italicized text: 'Click here to check for updated information on participating companies and to place your resume online early.'

LIVE LIKE A QUEEN LAS VEGAS STYLE

Find some choice deals on hotel/air/car & more.

Research your next Vegas getaway by checking out the Travel section on reviewjournal.com

The advertisement features a woman with blonde hair and sunglasses, smiling. The text 'LIVE LIKE A QUEEN LAS VEGAS STYLE' is in large, bold, red letters. Below it, the text 'Find some choice deals on hotel/air/car & more.' is in white. At the bottom, there is a red box with white text: 'Research your next Vegas getaway by checking out the Travel section on reviewjournal.com'.

Tielis, a former reporter with the Miami Herald and People magazine who's now a national media consultant, emphasized the importance of building a relationship with writers and reporters as a "source."

All too often, once business promoters attract media attention to an endeavor, they never talk to the journalist again. This can make reporters feel as if they were only cheap first dates, Tielis said.

"I think most people don't have a strong sense of how to help reporters," she said. "I tell people to deal with people as 'press relationships' rather than 'press contacts.' (The source) then behaves better and treats people with more respect."

Sending thank-you cards, e-mails and small gifts is a good idea, even if the reporter isn't allowed to accept gifts, Tielis said. After all, she added, it is the thought that counts.

"People would contact me and didn't get my name right," she recalled. "It is very important to get the reporter's name right."

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