

The Power of PR

By Rich Kizer and Georganne Bender



P. T. Barnum once said, "Without promotion something terrible happens ... Nothing!" A master promoter, Barnum would sweep into town with a flourish. He'd parade the elephants through the streets and send clowns to visit children in local hospitals. He'd offer tours of the Big Top and hold contest after contest to attract crowds. The people loved it, and so did the media, who showed up in droves. Barnum was a master at publicity. You can be, too.

But what's the difference between advertising and publicity? Easy! Advertising is best described as visibility, and public relations as credibility. You pay for advertising; PR is free. You can present your business anyway you'd like to in an ad because you have complete creative control over how the ad will read, and how the ad will look. You can even choose where and when the ad will run.

Publicity is a different animal all together. In a PR campaign you send out your press release and hope for the best. You have no control over what the media will say, how they will say it, or even if they run it at all. But when they do, you have instant credibility! After all, those wonderful things reported about you are being said by a credible source. Publicity is a great way to enhance your reputation and position yourself as an expert.

We recently decided to take Barnum at his word and create a little flourish of our own, so we contacted Ruth Furman, publicist and press agent

extraordinaire. We thought the media would be interested in learning what stores do to attract shoppers. Ruth agreed this was a great idea, so she sat down to create a press release that would get us noticed. And boy, did she get us noticed!

In a matter of days, we were hot property. A number of nationwide newspapers, including the Christian Science Monitor, the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, and the Las Vegas Business Press called for interviews. We were picked up by the Associated Press and other wire services. Television stations called. And a senior reporter from Crain's Chicago

WRITE THE BODY OF YOUR PRESS RELEASE USING AN "INVERTED PYRAMID." THIS STRATEGY DICTATES THAT MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION MUST COME FIRST. THIS STRATEGY HELPS THE EDITOR ADJUST THE STORY TO FIT THE SPACE AVAILABLE WITHOUT LOSING ESSENTIAL INFORMATION.

Business spent the day shopping with us, resulting in a two page spread – with color photos!

Ruth says, "When your company makes news, publicity will follow. Catalog all the things you do in your business that build your brand; the trade shows you attend; the things you do for customers; even unique or unusual projects, products or applications. Use every opportunity to use the media to toot your own horn!"

So, how do you do that? P.T. Barnum also said, "There's a sucker born every day!" but when he said that he probably wasn't referring to editors – they can smell an attempt at free advertising a mile away! To get your press release noticed you must think and write like a reporter. It's easy when you know the rules:

01 Every successful press release follows a specific format; a format set by the media. If you do not follow this format, your press release is likely to go unread. The good thing is once you create your own "cookie cutter" format, all you have to do is fill in the blanks each time you send one out.

02 Use your own letterhead. Your contact information goes at the top. Make sure that you include all of your contact information: Name, address, telephone number, cell phone number, fax number, email address, and web address.

03 Type the words "PRESS RELEASE" or "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in capital letters, across the top of the document. The words "PRESS RELEASE" can be a future event, but "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" means act fast – the event is happening now.

04 Write a killer headline! And do it in ten words or less. Your headline needs to summarize the entire press release. Make sure its intriguing enough to catch the eye of an editor skimming through a handful of press releases.

05 The first paragraph contains virtually the entire story, so pack as much information into the first sentence and first paragraph as you can. You can add details later on in the press release. This paragraph is the

hook that gets the reader interested in your story. Make sure you put these five important words to work: Who, What, Where, Why, and How.

06 Write the body of your press release using an “inverted pyramid”. This strategy dictates that most important information must come first. This strategy helps the editor adjust the story to fit the space available without losing essential information.

07 Write your press release enthusiastically, but be careful to avoid unnecessary hype. It’s okay to add all the important information, but read it out loud to make sure it doesn’t sound like an ad.

08 Use lots of quotations. If you don’t have anyone to quote, quote yourself!

09 Use a basic type font such as Times New Roman or Ariel.

10 Double-space your press release. Editors need space to make notes, double-spacing allows them to easily make their notes in-between the lines.

11 If you send your press release as an email attachment, send it as a Word document (or similar) so that the editor can easily cut and paste information from your press release into his/her article.

12 Your closing paragraph should repeat all important details, including your name and contact information. If your story has a shelf life, add “Please run before” and “Don’t run after” dates. This will help ensure that your story will be run on time.

13 End every press release with # # # centered at the bottom of the page. This indicates the end of the document.

14 Always, always, always include a photograph!

15 Compile a list of local media contacts. According to Ruth, when you are able to send your press release to a specific person, it’s more likely to get noticed.

There are several ways to get your press release to the medias. You can send it yourself via US Mail, fax, or email, you can hire a top notch publicist like Ruth, or you can subscribe to a press release distribution service.

We’ve decided that this PR busi-

ness is just too hard to pass up. We’ve committed to do a press release each month, more often if we can swing it. We think you should, too.

On a slow news day, everything becomes a hot topic. Take photos at all in-store events. Take a photo of yourself at NSSEA’s Ed Toy & Gift Showcase or School Products Expo. Corner the NSSEA Board of Directors and the editorial staff of Essentials magazine take a photo with them as well. If a vendor has a celebrity in their booth, wait your turn on line for a photo and a quote. And when you get home send out a press release. Think of the impact you’ll make in your community! You may not be able to afford to run ads consistently in major market newspapers, but you can afford the small amount of time it takes to write a press release, then hit the send key. You’ll become so famous in your own town that people will line up to have their photo taken with you!

Rich Kizer & Georganne Bender are retail anthropologists. They stalk and study that most elusive of mammals – the retail consumer. They are nationally recognized experts on customer diversity, “messing with the media”, marketing & promotion, and everything retail. In 2004 they were named two of the Retail Industry’s Most Influential People. Kizer & Bender have been featured on ABC National News; their client list reads like a Who’s Who in American business, and their book, “Champagne Strategies on a Beer Budget!” has helped thousands of retailers improve their bottom line. Their award winning articles can be monthly in a variety of business and consumer publications. Their popular column, “Georganne & Rich on the Road”, which appears monthly in Craftrends Magazine, won the American Society of Business Publication Editors (ASBPE) Award of Excellence in 2004 and again in 2006. Contact Rich & Georganne at 888.215.1839 or visit their Website: www.KIZERandBENDER.com.