



How to Win Trust and Influence Buyers

Using Product Publicity to Enhance Your Marketing Objectives

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Let's define *publicity* as managing the relationship you have with your "public"—your customers, your prospective customers, and your peers. As in all relationships, you want the other party to have a high opinion of you; to see you as trustworthy; and to consider you a friend who is also an expert.

Publicity, unlike advertising, is not bought. So it's likely to be perceived as trustworthy and credible. Publicity increases awareness and helps create a preference for your company's products and services. Publicity gives your message the implied—or outright—endorsement of a third party. For example, a publication that is read by your target audience publishes an article written by you or quoting you. If the article is helpful to the reader, you're building their high opinion of you. If your publicity appears often enough and is helpful enough, your audience will begin to think of you as a trusted source—a friend.

Now that you understand what publicity is, the following can help you see *why and how* product publicity—communications that help promote the sale of your company's products and services by means of the editorial and news sections of the media—can benefit your company or product.

PRODUCT PUBLICITY OFFERS CLEAR COMMUNICATION ADVANTAGES

Publicity is one of the most powerful communication tools available for disseminating information about your company, its products, and its people. It allows you to get added mileage from published material—think reprints. And it should afford you a larger return on investment than, say, advertising or direct marketing.

There are some main advantages of publicity versus other marketing tools; principal, though, is the cost. No form of mass communications offers the value of public relations. The low cost allows you to expand the scope and coverage of your message, to talk about more products to more audiences when you want and when you need to. Finally, because public relations stories must be vetted by editorial staff, readers find the messages more believable. Employ a program of bylined articles, and your staff becomes thought leaders for the marketplace. Develop and publish case studies to chronicle your successes, and your best practices become models from which the marketplace grows.

To sum up, worthwhile media are often tantalizingly out of the reach of your advertising budget—not so for public relations. The low cost translates into advantages that include coverage, scope, and believability.

WORKING WITH YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM: WHO DOES WHAT?

Before we discuss specific tools of the trade, let's clarify how the work gets done. That is, what is your role in working with a public relations firm?

As ghostwriters and placement specialists, your publicity firm stays comfortably behind the scenes—although they will need to capture your expertise through interviews and source material review. The agency collects the facts and writes. They use their media contacts to manage placements, often securing those in advance. You must make time to help your publicity firm prepare, and you must review the finished piece. Nothing is published without your consent, but a good public relations firm will get the piece a long way toward done before they engage you.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES THAT ARE EFFECTIVELY SERVED BY PUBLICITY

You need to know what you want from your publicity program, right? Put it into words and state a goal. For example, declare that you want to increase leads or brand awareness. These are often the most obvious objectives. However, the more specific you are, the more your public relations counselor will be able to fine-tune the program. More specific objective statements include a desire to introduce or renew interest in a product or a technology (new or old). Another would be to overcome misconceptions about your product or company. Finally, product publicity can be a wonderful tool for gauging the effectiveness of various markets and then specifically the publications in that market. In short, a magazine that delivers quality leads from your press release is often a good bet for delivering ROI on your ad dollars.

Once the program goals have been set, Cunningham Baron can determine the particular publicity tools that will do the job best.

FORMS OF PUBLICITY

There are a great many forms that public relations might take. You might hire your public relations firm to sit in on city council meetings, to create a buzz for your product in the blogosphere, or to write speeches for presentation at key industry trade forums. There are too many to detail in full; instead, we will tackle below the most common forms of written-for-placement public relations.

Mass Releases

The single most cost-effective form of mass communications, mass releases are what they sound like: news sent to a *mass* audience with the hope for broad pickup in journals across many industries. Frequency is the key, and the main intent is to keep the company name in as many primary, secondary, and tertiary publications as often as possible. Examples include New Product Announcements; New Literature Announcements; and Corporate News Releases, a category that includes personnel appointments and promotions, major new business announcements, new facilities, and significant new manufacturing or processing equipment. The individual releases aren't as important as the benefit of the whole program—dramatically increased brand awareness.

Mat Releases

Note the difference in the name here—mat releases vs. mass releases. The mat release name comes from the old days when newspapers were **formatted**, and although everything is digital

now, the name has stuck. The method here is as old as the name: Write a soft, general-interest news story to become a consumer-related article that newspaper editors can use to add content to their publications. This is largely a business-to-consumer tactic that works well to supplement staff-written stories to fill soft news sections of the paper, such as automotive, home and garden, or food. Next time you read about the colors of the year in the home and garden section and they mention Sherwin-Williams paint, consider that you've read a mat release. That top-ten tips list you just read on keeping your engine running cleaner—consider that Pennzoil may be stocking up in an auto parts store near you.

Feature Articles

Feature articles written by your public relations firm, on which your key staff members have the bylines, are especially valuable in establishing those individuals and, by consequence, their companies as authorities in a field.

Articles strategically placed in publications, given a determined amount of frequency, create “industry leader” status. From how-to articles—“How to Bid More Competitively on Prevailing Wage Jobs” or “How To Improve Food Safety in Commissary Foodservice”—to round-up articles such as “Hand Protection Solutions for Quick-Serve Restaurant Workers” and “Types of Cranes and When to Use Them,” feature articles position the author as a thought leader ... the kind of leader that customers want to call for a business-building solution.

Picture-Caption Stories

Cunningham Baron has been very successful in obtaining cover exposure for our clients, and we can show the results. Your product, often with its well-placed logo, prominently positioned on the cover of a magazine becomes a great mailer to prospects or meeting starter for sales rep. ... “just wondering if you saw this month’s issue of...”

A smart public relations practitioner positions himself/herself to editors as a trusted source for images on a particular topic.

Case Histories

A case history tells a success story featuring your product or service in an actual situation. In fact, it is a powerful testimonial from a satisfied customer. Published or not, your successes should be chronicled so that sales reps tomorrow—or five years from now—can repeat the successes.

A good case study means your customer has to first admit that they had a problem—not an easy subject to broach. Cunningham Baron is successful at assuaging the fears of reluctant customers. The story can showcase the customer as well as your solution, and it becomes a wonderful marketing tool for them, too.

Word-Of-Mouth Publicity

Conversation is communication at its most basic level. Today, online communities and citizen journalism are playing a more important role in publicity plans. From viral marketing to community and government relations, sometimes just being at the table is the key to achieving your long-term objective. Your public relations counselor can help you develop forums for people who share an interest in the brand and providing support to these communities with tools, content, and information.

Blogging

Blogs (short for weblog) are increasingly competitive sources of information for users’ time online compared to mainstream media. The big tip here: talk to your own customers and don’t mine for new ones under the false notion that you are incognito. Any wide-reaching blog worth your attention is packed full of “smart sniffers” who can smell your pitch and then turn your clumsy, bull-in-a-china-shop stumble into the blogosphere into a

well-read rip on your brand. Your public relations practitioner can help you determine whether blogging is right for you and then help you establish transparent blogs in which you openly discuss issues that are of interest to *your* public with the hope that this will bring both sides closer together.

We can also help you set up a spider to monitor and then retrieve data from major blogs and Web sites for mentions of your brand or products, including new product introductions. This important information will, at a minimum, make you aware of what the buzz is and, at best, allow you a forum in which to reply directly or formulate a strategy for keeping the buzz on a positive note.

Special Events

Bringing your public to you is a special art and requires an A-game performance. What makes a business event a special event is largely up to you: Think new development open houses, closed showroom dinners, invitation-only dealer days, awards ceremonies, sales meetings, and even trade show galas. Planning, scheduling, budgeting for, and achieving the perfect event is no easy task—and you have better things to do. Depending on the event, media invitations can help ensure you get the traffic you need and the exposure you want both before and after the event.

Press Conferences

In addition to printed publicity, several other productive publicity activities are worth considering. Press conferences are invaluable in presenting a truly significant new product, technique, or service. Your publicity professional should know how to plan the conference, how to stage it, and what materials, such as press kits, are needed to implement it. They determine who should be invited and how to persuade key editors to attend.

PUBLICITY PROGRAM COSTS

Given the great number of arrows in the quiver, how does a public relations firm determine the right mix and establish a cost for the program as a whole? And, as most clients might ask, “Why not pay per piece?”

A public relations firm only has its hours to bill. They have no manufactured product, and results are often measurable only in the distant consideration of some long-term objective. Their fee, determined by agreed-upon program objectives and tactics, is the only way they can regulate varying costs caused by spikes and valleys of effort.

For example, one release may come easy. The next may be a new product introduction that a client may want “worked” a little more into the editor’s favor. Perhaps exclusives are negotiated in trade for guaranteed placements. A feature article could take 30 hours to write and edit. A personnel announcement could take 30 minutes. Whatever the case, if the time is variable then so is the cost—unless a fee keeps the cost capped.

The fee approach makes billing predictable—and predetermined—keeping your own overhead costs low. Plus the fee allows you to affordably keep publicity specialists at your disposal. I once heard a client describe it well this way: “The fee should be mutually beneficial; we shouldn’t mind asking, and you shouldn’t mind doing.”

MEASURING PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFECTIVENESS

As we have outlined, the goal of product publicity is to increase awareness and help create a preference for your company's products and services. But how do you evaluate whether your publicity program is indeed doing these things? Effectiveness can be evaluated in various ways.

Inquiries

Leads, leads, leads. They say a third of all leads are good ones (will buy from someone — you or a competitor), which is another way of saying two-thirds are bad. So, before you set leads up to be a measure of program effectiveness, consider whether you have a strong mechanism in place for closing down leads. All the marketing in the world can't make someone buy your product. A salesman (often a third-party distributorship) has to make the sale happen.

That said, if you have a strong and established product line and practiced sales staff, including channel support and training, and feel that you can effectively close leads, that one-third makes for a hefty jump in bottom-line sales and therefore a pretty decent measure of success.

Volume

If you have distributed multiple mass releases to a large number of publications and other media, then a count of known appearances is a valid indication of effectiveness. Consider the cost of the equivalent amount of ad space in a given book or to a given market, and it becomes clear pretty fast—public relations can provide great value as a complement to traditional advertising.

Your publicity firm should offer clippings services. Either done in-house or provided by a third party clipping service, clippings are a useful indicator of pickup for each release. They won't catch them all, but you will get a 10,000-foot view of the hits in your market.

Significance

Is your publicity program designed to build your image or repair it? How do you determine the optimal means to that end? For a particular client or in a given market, the *count* of items published may not signify program success. One article published in a respected journal could be enough to satisfy program objectives, whereas a great number of hits may mean very little.

Lyric and simple explanation courtesy of Dr. Hook: "Now it's all designed to blow our minds / But our minds won't really be blown / Like the blow that'll get you when you get your picture / On the cover of the *Rolling Stone*."

IN CONCLUSION ...

Product publicity can do more for less money than any other form of marketing communications. Cunningham Baron would be proud to be your publicity counselors. We established our firm on a solid foundation of public relations know-how. We can demonstrate success on behalf of our clients. And we believe in the power of public relations to produce compelling messages that yield measurable results. If you do, too, please call us today and let's get started.

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Cunningham Baron is a full service marketing communications firm offering public relations, advertising, branding, literature development, and complete graphic design services. For additional information contact Pete Zeller at 216-579-6100, extension 2.