

A Four Letter Word That Begins With "F"

A strong marketing plan is an essential element to the growth of each and every company. Marketing can be a financially significant proposition, but it brings a great return on investment if properly executed. What many companies tend to forget is to leverage free publicity (the other four letter word that begins with F). Media outlets are always seeking newsworthy stories, so it's important to take advantage of opportunities to attract the attention of potential customers in a way that advertising alone just can't.

The public is overwhelmed by thousands of advertising messages a day. Advertising messages tend to be of limited effectiveness when used alone in marketing campaigns because consumers question, discount or simply ignore them. Filtered by media gatekeepers, public relations (PR) seems far more authentic to consumers. Unlike advertising, consumers perceive PR as credible. When used effectively, PR can break through the clutter of commercial hype and leave customers clamoring for a new product or service. Thus, it's essential to include PR as part of an integrated marketing strategy.

PR is by far the most cost-effective way to send your message to a large-scale audience. You can buy advertising, but you can't buy publicity. That's a clear separation of church and state in the PR world.

Getting into the media is by no means an easy task. Below you will find several key factors to realizing success in all of your PR campaigns:

1 » DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF PRESS RELEASES!

The press release is the PR workhorse. A carefully targeted, well-written press release can saturate the media landscape. Make sure that your message is newsworthy and will benefit the audience of the media outlet you're targeting. When writing your press release, come up with an eye-catching headline to attract interest (i.e. A Four Letter Word That Begins With "F").

2 » WHERE THERE IS A WILL, THERE IS A WAY

There are many opportunities for sending out press releases, and new opportunities can always be created. Take, for instance, new product and service launches, promotions, awards and industry recognition, speaking, involvement with local charities, and results of interesting or controversial customer surveys.



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3 » CREATE AN UNBIASED PRESS RELEASE THAT DEPICTS YOU AS THE EXPERT

Editors may not pick up your story the first time, but if you can successfully position yourself as a credible expert, the editor will most likely contact you in the future for other story opportunities. Be cautious with pushing your product or service. Editors try to remain neutral, so even though the story may not plug your product or service, you will be viewed as the resident expert, which will generate more business in the long run.

4 » NEWS STORIES RARELY COME TO YOU

You must go to them, so don't wait for your phone to ring! Get to know the media and the outlets that will benefit from your stories. Build a database and relationships with editors that cover the appropriate topics.

5 » MAKE THE MOST OF EDITORIAL CALENDARS

Most media outlets will place an editorial calendar on their website. An editorial calendar is simply a schedule of topics that editors will be covering within the calendar year. The editorial calendar exists not only to alert advertisers of content that will be complimentary to their product or service but also because editors are seeking out experts to contribute to stories. Take advantage of the calendars and find topics for which you can add value to the story.

6 » GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT TO THE MEDIA AND FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP, FOLLOW UP

Always follow up with every contact on your media list. Be prepared to supply materials for an editor or producer's "time sensitive" request. In order to produce a story, an editor may request video, hi-res images, fact-sheets about your company, product or service or even a spokesperson for an interview. Act fast—reporters work on very tight deadlines. If you don't get the story, at a minimum you want to build a relationship for future opportunities.

7 » MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE MEDIA

Was your press release or message picked up by any outlets? Counting the number of placements and assessing the breadth of media placements is one way to measure your objectives—and an important one—by itself does not tell a complete story. You need to gauge the quality of these placements. Your key objective is to secure coverage that amplifies your core message and positively supports your market positioning. What will readers come away with? What actions will they take? Always analyze and evaluate the success of your campaigns.

8 » REMEMBER THAT WITH PR, IT TAKES TIME TO MOVE THE NEEDLE

PR is less about acceleration and more about momentum. Indeed, it may take a year or longer before you make discernable progress in burnishing your reputation, building your brand awareness or asserting market leadership. Assessing the quality of PR communications, measuring PR outcomes, understanding the short-term and long-term impact of all initiatives and connecting PR to business objectives are all critical to your ability to maximize your PR ROI.

Keep your PR machine rolling and always analyze what tactics worked versus what didn't. You will then be able to work to develop complimentary marketing and PR strategies that will maximize your opportunities for success.

