



*Communicate  
with your local  
media to build  
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through  
third-party  
endorsements.*

PEOPLE DON'T GO into business with the idea that they will fail. A business owner may fear the possibility of failure, but she isn't planning the demise of her business as she plans her inventory.

However, entrepreneurs who fail to build public relations (PR) into their business plans are, as the cliché says, planning to fail.

By Lee Scott Morrell

## Isn't Advertising Enough?

To understand the effect that a sound PR campaign can have on the success of your business, you must first recognize the similarities and differences between marketing, advertising and PR.

A marketing budget generally consists of money put aside to—no surprise here—market your business. Because so many similar salons compete for the same clients, a good marketing strategy will give you the edge in maintaining your bottom line while simultaneously building on that foundation.

Marketing is how we inform people about our businesses and, in turn, sell ourselves. A multilayered marketing

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strategy involves determining the message your business wants to send and identifying who will receive that message. Marketing is predominantly comprised of advertising and PR (though it can also include direct mail, e-mail, telemarketing, Internet marketing, and many other techniques).

Advertising is the better known method of the two; advertisements

dominate our world, from the sales sections of newspapers that overflow with coupons to the deluge of commercials that air during your favorite television programs.

Advertising is, at its core, a simple transaction. You buy space in a publication or on a broadcast outlet to share your message with the consumer. In exchange, the outlet delivers an

### Nine PR Tips to Promote Your Business

Whether over the airwaves or in the morning paper, every time your salon's name is mentioned to a potential client, you're one step closer to having that person become your client. Nail tech Judi Rohleder, Rocking R Hair Studio, North Liberty, Iowa, profited from a press release after attending a *Nailpro* Nail Those Profits at Sea Cruise. When she returned home, she wrote a press release describing her experience and telling local media outlets about the new techniques and products she's bringing to her salon. Her story received coverage in two of her local newspapers. The first paper printed her press release word for word. The second changed some sentences around, but both garnered great exposure for her salon. Plus, the exposure was free! This same space in her local papers, if purchased for advertising, could have cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

How do you get the same free exposure? Follow these nine tips:

**1** Everything is worthy of an announcement! From a new tech working at your salon to making a charitable donation, every piece of information you announce that subsequently gets carried by local media earns a third-party acknowledgment of your business.

**2** Make friends with your local media. Whether you deal with a business writer or a features reporter, make your relationship with each as business-friendly as possible. Business owners who've established relationships with the media are more likely to get their names in print.

**3** Reach out to the community. Charity isn't always about giving money. Donate products, host

events, do whatever you can to benefit the community—then write a press release about it.

**4** Remember your anniversary. Stories about local businesses can always be crafted out of round numbers. If you've been in business for 5 years, 10 years or 15 years, your story is significant. Your commitment to your business shows longevity and understanding of both your business and your community.

**5** Comment when you can. Read the business sections of your local newspapers and when a story appears that relates to a subject on which you can comment, drop a note to the reporter and introduce yourself as a businessperson who can offer insight for future stories on that topic. New contacts

are a reporter's best friend.

**6** Study the media in which you want to appear. Every outlet has its own style and voice. If you are unfamiliar with these, you do yourself a disservice when you try to pitch your story to the outlet without speaking its language.

**7** Don't be modest. Being a business owner means that you cannot be a shrinking violet. The media you talk to will only know as much about your business and your accomplishments as you're willing to tell them. If you downplay your importance, any possibilities of a mention will likely disappear.

**8** Don't be too arrogant. While modesty is a bad move, so is its opposite, arrogance. No

media contact wants to tell the story of someone she perceives to be too self-important. Walk the fine line between too much and too little confidence, and you'll receive just the right amount of attention.

**9** Hire professional help. Between running your business, supervising your employees and doing everything else that your job requires, when will you find the time to develop relationships with the media and write press releases? Well, you don't have to if your time is limited. Plenty of professionals who have the expertise to assist you in this task await your call and can accomplish your goals for you, which prevents you from taking time away from your busy schedule.

audience of a certain size that is expected to see or hear your message and respond to it. While the concept has always been successful, the advent of “consumer attention deficit disorder” (best illustrated by channel surfing) has lowered the perceived value of advertising.

On the other hand, PR is witnessing an upsurge in popularity. With lower cost and higher return on investments than advertising, PR has captured the attention of successful business owners.

## What Is PR?

Most businesspeople confuse advertising and PR and simply assume that by setting some money aside for advertising, they have also addressed PR. This commonly held fallacy has cost new business owners more money and more lost business than can be imagined.

Let’s put PR in perspective: It’s the act of utilizing that old friend, word of mouth, to promote your business. PR can be as simple as a satisfied client telling her two friends about your work, those friends telling two friends, and so on down the line.

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PR is centered on building your reputation through third-party endorsements. The best scenario occurs when someone who isn’t paid or benefiting from saying so sings the praise of a business. And that’s what PR does: It identifies members of the media who want to tell your story in a newspaper or a magazine, or on a radio or television show, and tell it in a way that will make people want to utilize your salon services instead of the salon down the street.

Scan the pages of your favorite newspapers or magazines. Where do you think the editors collected all of the news they’re writing about?

- A reporter who attends the opening of a new restaurant and rates the food and service in an article the next day probably read about the event in a press release.
- A fashion reporter who quotes a local boutique owner saying, “Black is the new white,” probably got the quote from a press release.
- A sports reporter who tests a new pair of Rollerblades probably received the Rollerblades through the mail along with a press release.

Truth be told, many of the best stories you see in the news originate from a PR pitch.

The President of the United States has a press secretary—a PR person. Celebrities have publicists—PR people. Fortune 500 companies have departments made up of PR

people. Do you think Oprah Winfrey decided on a whim to give away 267 Pontiac G6s this past September on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*? Of course not. The stunt was a brilliant PR move orchestrated by an auto manufacturer that decided to market its newest model to women.

## How Do I Make PR Work for My Business?

Frankly, PR efforts can be implemented by any business owner who wants to see a marked difference in her business' bottom line. But that is a simplistic answer to a complex question.

The real question is: How can I make PR work for me, no matter how large or how small my marketing budget? More importantly, how can I take advantage of the PR opportunities I have to best secure success for my company?

A brilliant press release that tells a great story will fall on deaf ears if it falls on the wrong ears.

The most important step you can take to ensure that PR will work for you: Do a self-inventory. Envision your business like a newspaper editor would: What stories do you have to tell that you think people would be most interested in? Then, using the list you've created, determine what is most important and what will make the most impact. You have created a "potential impact list," a list of solid news stories that your business has to share.

But the news doesn't tell itself. You must put your news into a usable format (a press release) and get it into the hands of the news outlets that are most likely to run it. Then you must make sure they run it by placing a follow-up phone call—or several follow-up phone calls.

## The Press Release

A press release should be written like a story that would appear in the newspaper, except your initial audience is the editor, not the reader. Make the story interesting and engaging but not overly fluffy or personal. Relate the news in the opening paragraph so that the editor doesn't have to read through pages to find the core of the information. You want to give the editor the news up front so that she's not tempted to immediately file the release in the "round file" (a.k.a. trash can).

Targeting your intended audience is the key to a successful press release campaign. A brilliant press release that tells a great story will fall on deaf ears if it falls on

the wrong ears. Before you start writing your release, you should have a general idea of where you want to send it so that you can write for your intended audience. A press release about new nail art trends may be perfect for the fashion editor at your local newspaper, while a press release outlining the latest in salon sanitation practices may be ideal for the health editor.

After you have composed the press

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release and have a good idea of where you want it to go, print the document on your letterhead—or a sheet of paper with your logo on it—and send it off to the appropriate targets. Then—and this step is important—follow up after a few days with a phone call to the editor who received the release. Introduce yourself to editors and ask if they have questions about the release. If time goes by and you haven't seen the information in an article, make another call. Don't be a pest, but be aggressive.

Additionally, some writers and editors like to see multiple press releases from a company before they run the information; they want to view professional consistency.

PR is a fantastic tool to make your business more relevant and familiar to the public. If you put in the effort to compose a sound PR campaign, you can grow your current business, boost your bottom line and let potential clients know that you exist. ▼

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*Lee Scott Morrell is the president of John Q PR, a Santa Clarita, California-based full-service promotions and media relations agency that specializes in small business communications. He can be reached at [lee@johnqpr.com](mailto:lee@johnqpr.com).*