

Managing the Media: Successfully Navigating the Waters of Public Relations



In the third in their series of marketing features, Irving Stackpole and Elizabeth Ziembra discuss how to work with the media and the importance of public relations.

Once you have worked through the first four Ps of marketing and have developed a concise and accurate message about your business, you are ready to engage in public relations promotions. Whether launching a long-term campaign to develop media savvy and organisational presence or to respond effectively in a crisis situation, public relations are a key component of successful marketing.

For far too long, negative stories about the social care sector have gone unanswered. Little has been done to generate a stream of positive coverage to counterbalance unfavourable press. Care home owners and managers can either cower in fear waiting for the next bombshell to drop or take charge of media relationships to promote positive media coverage.

An effective public relations campaign has several benefits including the ultimate goal of building brand name recognition and awareness. By proactively engaging in a public relations



campaign, you learn the media ropes while establishing sources of information that are crucial to successful management of your business. Relationships with media representatives are two-way streets and you can become a trusted, reliable source of information, establishing expertise and credibility for yourself and your organisation.

Crisis planning requires a public relations component. The time to build media relationships is before something newsworthy goes wrong. A crisis will happen. It is a matter of 'when', not 'if'. Having a reserve of media equity available to draw upon can be invaluable when an untoward event occurs.

Steps to a Public Relations Media Campaign

When creating your public relations campaign, make sure your message is ready to be used across all media outlets: print;

electronic including radio and television; and Internet and wireless communications such as websites and RSS feeds. With growing numbers of media outlets available, you can develop a professional, no or low cost campaign across a variety of sources. For the innovative manager, public relations can be affordable to implement with a high return on investment of time and talent. Get your message out and build relationships!

Begin your campaign by creating a wide list of media outlet targets. Develop a database of names, addresses, editors, reporters, websites, telephone numbers and email addresses. Start with a broad focus, as the outlets used will vary from story to story, tailored to meet the needs of various audiences.

When contacting the targets on your media list, gather information about word limits for feature stories, acceptable formats for photographs, publishing deadlines, calendar listings for events and other requirements for submitting content. Is there an opportunity to establish a by-line? Explore the options and remember that media outlets are always looking for quality content.

Develop a media schedule

Decide what types of content you can create, how often you can reasonably deliver it, and calendar each item with specific media outlets targeted. Are you hosting a conference with a notable speaker who will draw a wide audience? Cast a wide net across many media outlets with your press release, then follow up to make sure it was received. Then follow up again to make sure it is going to be published. Your personal contact is an opportunity to create connections with media representatives and answer questions about your organisation. Remember to invite media representatives to your events. An invitation is a great way to foster relationships and generate interest in a follow-up story. But don't be surprised or personally offended if a confirmed media guest does not show up; he/she is under intense deadline pressure and probably had another story to pursue.

Plan your topics and stories in advance

Create a list of newsworthy stories to have ready as part of your calendar. Content for stories can include events, exceptional staff members and residents, or distinctive programs that trumpet your success as a compassionate, people-oriented organisation. Drip, drip, drip your positive messages over time and in a variety of media for increasing name recognition.

Measure your results

Track the effectiveness of your media campaign. Count the number of times and places your content gets picked up for publication. Large organisations can afford a media scanning service and anyone with internet access can use Google Alerts, to learn where and when your organisation is mentioned in the media. Ask people who contact your business how they heard about you. Ask staff, residents and their family members as well as key contacts in the community if they saw your story or photograph. The results of your informal survey will help you identify your best sources and refine your campaign for better coverage.

Leverage your success

Spread awareness of your positive media coverage on your website, in your newsletter and by providing copies to important ►

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► constituents like health authorities. If you feature a staff member or resident, be sure to send a copy with a personal note to the person with extra copies for their family and friends. It is great advertising and it is free!

With the essentials of an on-going media campaign assembled, organised and launched, you will build brand equity and be in a much better position to handle a crisis when it occurs.



Lemons into Lemonade

Situations do arise when circumstances go wrong. After all, we are people caring for other people and mistakes will be made. Here are some tips for working with the media when your organisation is in the hot seat.

First and foremost, own the problem at the highest level possible such as owner or managing director. Do not wait and do not hide from the media and difficult questions. The public quickly jumps to the wrong conclusion when it is reported: 'No one could be reached for comment'. Avoid giving yourself a black eye by acting quickly and intelligently.

Immediately develop three or four consistent messages for your internal (residents and staff) as well as external (community, media) audiences. Express sincere concern for the health and wellbeing of those served. State clearly what you are doing and going to do to address the problem (we are assessing, investigating, cooperating). Then repeat your concern for and commitment to those served, your staff and the community. All of this can be accomplished without admitting liability. You can apologise for inconvenience, damage, or injury without referring to fault.

Successful recovery in a trying situation depends on your organisation doing what it says it will do. Follow through is essential and your efforts to rectify the situation must be communicated along with an expression of concern for those affected.

If you have trusted, established media contacts, your side of the story can be told without inflated negativity or excessive

In our last issue CMM published an article "the door dilemma" We have now asked Mark Batt-Rawden, Director of Holdfire Door Retainers to answer some of the typical questions that arise:

Q: Must I have closers on bedroom doors in a care/nursing home?

A: In almost all cases, yes. Any bedroom door leading out to a common means of escape risks compromising the escape route in the event of fire. See page 37 of HM Government Guide for Fire Safety in Residential Care for a diagram showing typical layouts of buildings and self closing doors.

Q: Is any type of door closer acceptable?

A: No, door closers must comply to BS EN 1154 including the 2002 amendment that makes provision for DDA access requirements as specified in Document M of the Building Regulations. Furthermore, any fire door closer must be of a minimum power size 3. Many types of door closer are not compliant with this requirement including the Perko™ shown here - 

Q: Is it true that door holding devices can sometimes cause doors to twist and permanently warp?

A: Yes this can be a real problem and replacing doors is expensive. Most door holders are fitted to the bottom corner of the door and the closer at the top. Consequently the door is being twisted across the diagonal all the while it is held open causing it to warp. Both Holdfire systems are designed to avoid this.

Q: What are the prices for these devices?

A: This is probably the most common question of all and in reality it is the wrong question. In general enquirers look at the initial capital costs and miss the fact that some of these systems cost a fortune in ongoing expenditure. Unless you are in business only for the short term, in addition to purchase price, proprietors should be calculating:

1. Cost of any additional services necessary for operation, (installation costs, additional sounders, release switches, power supplies, controllers, etc.)
2. Value of any guarantee (up to 10 years can be obtained on some products)
3. Cost of any ongoing maintenance activity, (servicing, replacing batteries, broken units etc)
4. Working life of the device, (how many will you need to buy over say 10 years?)
5. Cost of damage to doors, carpets etc. (A huge cost if the door system reduces their useful life)
6. Savings in other areas, (Holdfire Carefree and the Briton 998 will save the cost of buying and maintaining separate door closers)

Depending upon the answers obtained to the above, the installation, maintenance and other costs can vary from £200 to over £800 per door over 10 year period. My advice to Proprietors when considering which technology to use based on price alone, would be to ignore headline figures and speak with an existing user to get the real costs. If you need any assistance, we would be pleased to help.

For a more Q & A's like these please visit www.holdfire.com or send your questions to Mark at CMM or direct to markbr@holdfire.com

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drama. The ability to mitigate damage to your organisation's reputation can rescue a difficult situation, preventing it from spinning out of control.

A well-researched, consistent and highly organised public relations campaign will generate goodwill and brand equity for your organisation while preparing you to deal with a crisis when it

arises. Jump in and get your feet wet. Build good media relationships and build audiences for your business.

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Irving L. Stackpole is President and Elizabeth Ziembra is a Senior Associate of Stackpole & Associates, a market research and training firm. Visit www.stackpoleassociates.com for more information.

BE READY FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Know your message and have it ready with examples, facts and stories. Remember: Everything you say **IS** on the record!

PRINT INTERVIEWS:

Expect to be recorded.
Tape your interview for accuracy.
Tell the interviewer you are taping.
Offer photos and other related materials.

TELEVISION INTERVIEWS:

Ask if it is live or taped?
Keep your message short.
Smile.
Get professional coaching on messaging, clothing and makeup, especially for live programmes.

RADIO INTERVIEWS:

For call in interviews:
Use a landline for a clear connection.
Stand up when talking.
Turn off background noise including electronics like BlackBerries.
Talk in a room with sound absorbers like rugs.

FOR ALL MEDIA CONTACTS:

Follow up with a 'Thank you' note.
Politely correct inaccuracies.
Use the sound clip and story on your website and marketing materials.
Leverage each media event for more public relations opportunities.

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