



Good PR isn't about getting your name in media

By Angela Hagen

As manager of communications and public relations for a local nonprofit, and a former journalist, I am often asked for advice. What can nonprofits and small businesses do to try to get more media exposure?

My first response is, "Don't."

Getting a spot on the TV news or an article in the paper is great, but it isn't everything. It's no substitute for a well-balanced and sustainable communications plan. While a brief splash of publicity can help generate interest in an event or a cause, or bring you new customers or friends, it's what you do and say in the long term – and where and how you say it – that count.

Take control of your own message, and get it out there using a variety of tools that make sense for you and your audiences. Pitching stories to the media is just one of them. (A PR101 workshop March 2 can help you put all of your public relations tools in perspective. See sidebar.)

Taking control probably means using some of the new media tools that allow you to communicate directly with the folks who want or need to hear from you. (In my work, I send regular email newsletters and e-blasts for events, post several times a week to Facebook, update my website frequently, and complement those electronic communications with print materials and mailings as necessary. I don't blog or Tweet – yet.)

A good plan needs a variety of tools, including some that may sound very 20th century:

- Your website. This is the first (and may be the last) place people look for information about you. Your website should be up-to-the-minute, easy to navigate and useful.
- Your staff. People inside your organization can be your best public relations tool, or your worst nightmare. If they are enthusiastic and articulate about what you do, they can spread your message and make new friends like no plan you could devise. If they're ill-informed or fearful or disgruntled, they can make trouble like nobody else. It pays to keep them well informed and on-message.
- Your message. What you say about your organization should be well-written, professional, relevant and easily spreadable across different media channels.
- Your relationships. Whether it's with members of the media, the public, your clients, customers or donors, it all comes down to cultivating good relationships based on communication, transparency and shared mutual interest. Do you answer your emails and

phone calls promptly? Do you do what you say? Are you looking out for other people as well as yourself?

The problem with having so many tools is that the newest and shiniest ones in the box tend to hog all the attention. I see a lot of people these days Tweeting and blogging and Facebooking like there's no tomorrow, but it's not clear they know why. Social media take time and thought to do well.

If you're smart and strategic, you'll take a step back once in a while to rethink how all the tools you're using fit into your plans. You'll use real data to assess how well they are helping you achieve your goals. Then, you'll readjust your plans. Good PR is an ongoing process.

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