



Do-It-Yourself Public Relations

Eight How-To Tips for Basic PR in an Economic Slump

When do you know you are ready for public relations? You may not know it. But there are a lot of reasons for that. If you own a store, perhaps you are tied up in the buying process, re-stocking or learning new inventory control software.

VERB! doesn't drill its own teeth or lay concrete. Dentists and masons would thank me for my good sense. That being said, employing all, or some, of the following ideas will keep you on the right track in a competitive climate while funds, and time, may be tight.

1. **Identify your goal** – do you want to increase sales? Create awareness about your service or product? Launch a new location? Share good health or self-improvement information with a larger audience?
2. **Can 'talking about' your business help others?** The key to a really great PR campaign is sharing information and advice that can help another person, group of people or community. Will sharing news and information from your company make someone's life healthier? Easier? More beautiful? Knowing this will help with your elevator speech when someone asks what it is you do!
3. **Who's buying?** Now that you have identified your goal, and focused on how it can help others, *where is that audience?* Is it in your community? Across town? Do your bread and butter come from an Internet audience instead of a walk-in one? Are they readers? Do they have kids? This is something you should already know based on your business plan, but you would be surprised to learn how many people have NO idea who their target audience(s) are. **Know where to invest your message.**
4. **Create a database** – once you know who your audience is, and you find them, ask permission to include them on a mailing list. This can include your friends, neighbors, colleagues, professionals you meet at networking events, business cards and emails you collect from trade shows and other sources. A database is your lifeline to the world. You will find that people who hear from you regularly, but not abusively, will continue to grow with your company as they learn more about you. Chances are, they will also share your information with their friends, family and colleagues if you give them **information worth having**. The more people know about you, the more you increase your possibility of sales.
5. **What is: Information Worth Having?** – are you offering a discount? Having a free seminar? Telling someone how to eat healthier, save more money or keep their kids safer? Devise announcements, newsletters or alerts, complete with your logo, and send them via email and/or via the post office. Offering individuals something of value is always a good reason to stay in touch. If you want to increase your star-power with email, go to an on-line media marketing resource, like Constant Contact or VerticalResponse.com, where you can work with professional templates and upload your own graphics, logo or photos.

6. **Blog It** – Share your information in a blog. Many sites offer blog space for FREE. This is the best kind of exposure. You can start by going to www.blogger.com but you can also search for free blog sites and information just by typing in: **free blog**. Not only can you tell your clients and would-be clients you have one, but you can send out alerts once a month about what your upcoming topics will be. Perhaps you want to share expert advice about winterizing homes or gardens; maybe you have something to say about re-financing a business or buying the right kind of pleasure boat for next summer and tips on how to find it. There are a lot of people out there on the blogosphere, but even so, when people search for topics in your area of interest, your blog may be among those that the search engine finds for them!

7. **Volunteer** – the best reason to volunteer is because you want to and because you desire to give back to your community. But sometimes volunteering can reap rewards beyond those of doing a good thing. If your business has a direct link with a potential non-profit, then that's probably the best tie-in to pursue. For example, if you own a dress or menswear shop, or operate a commercial retail property, chances are you should hook up with Suits for Success or Dress for Success, non-profits that match business clothes with individuals on their way to self-sufficiency. You'll meet other people who share your goals, create a positive impact and possibly create a niche for yourself in your community that is very positive. If you run a financial advisory firm, perhaps your donation of time and resources would go toward financial literacy for teens or adults.

8. **Holiday Cards** – even if you NEVER have the chance to talk to someone during the year – now is the time to start running your address labels or hand-writing the envelopes of holiday cheer. A card in the mail is worth 20 in an email inbox – **so get to work!** It's always a pleasant surprise to open a card from someone we haven't heard from in awhile, and provides an even better excuse for calling them in the New Year. There is very simply NO better way of saying "*Hey, there – I'm still out here!*" ...and don't forget to wish them well!