4 Easy Ways to Get Publicity for Your Business

Leverage these simple PR tactics to generate awareness and buzz.

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Whatever your line of work, I'm sure a family member, friend or neighbor has asked you for some professional advice. I can't tell you how many times someone has asked me for advice related to marketing and public relations. "How do I get the word out about my business? How do I promote it without spending a lot of money?" I often get this question from small-business owners who typically have just a few employees — the kind of entrepreneurs who wear many hats.

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Delivering a great product or service is the best PR strategy.

Before I share a few of the DIY PR tactics I would implement, I'd be remiss by not saying that all the publicity in the world will be useless if your business doesn't deliver on its value and promise to its customers. If you do not believe you are providing an exceptional product or service, stop reading this article and fix that first. A parade of happy customers spreading the word about your business is the most effective public relations strategy any company could ever have. Your message is only as good as your products.

The last time I got the “How do I spread the word out about my business?” question, I was at the local gym watching my son’s basketball game. I was sitting next to a local accountant whose son was also on the team. I initially pointed out to him that there is a ton of useful how-to information online about doing your own public relations for your small business. But, of course, he pressed on with, “C’mon, I’m just looking for a few tips.”

So, here are a few bits of advice I offered to the accountant while we watched the last five minutes of the basketball game. I put myself in his shoes and thought, *if I didn’t know anything about public relations, what would I do to generate some publicity for my small business?*

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The free weekly newspaper in your driveway is read by your customers.

When people mention the word “publicity,” they’re usually referring to press coverage. If you’re a small-business owner, a positive mention of your business on a national TV program would be amazing, but let’s face it: Your customers are probably reading the free local newspaper that gets thrown onto your driveway each week. You know the one. I read it. You read it. We all read it.

Before you pitch your favorite national publication a story idea about why your business should be on the cover, make a connection with the reporters at the local newspaper your potential customers are most likely reading. At the end of the day, public relations is about reaching the public, and even just a mention in the free weekly newspaper that can be found in most communities will guarantee visibility with an audience of potential customers .

The next step is identifying the PR value of your business that your local reporters will find interesting and newsworthy. Is there a seasonal event (“tax season”) that is related to your particular business? Are there topics and trends being covered where your expert commentary would be useful (“new tax rules”)? Contact the appropriate reporter, introduce yourself and share your idea. Don’t be discouraged if you don’t land a mention in a story overnight. Developing a PR platform is a process of building and growing relationships. If one pitch doesn’t work, stop, hit the reset button and try another story angle.

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Social media is still media.

You’ve heard this one before, but it’s true: You need to be active and savvy on social media. Brand your social media handle. Use your full name or the name of your city or town and make it clear what your expertise is. If you’re a CPA, add that to your handle (@FullName+CPA, @NameofTown+CPA). Write a short blog post on your website about a topic related to your business (“the new tax rules”). Link to the blog post across your social media accounts. If you follow your customers, some may follow you back and share your posts with their followers. You will watch your social network and audience grow as you cultivate your social media presence.

Find the local Facebook group that never sleeps.

Every town has one. It’s the go-to-destination for local news and information. I can’t tell you how many times I have crowdsourced the names of vendors on my community’s Facebook page. If you’re not already engaging with this group in your area, start now. This is your community, these are your

neighbors and they are all potential customers. Have a presence and join in on the conversation. Share your opinion on local topics and happenings. There will be a time when other members will seek out references – "Anyone know a good accountant?" If you're engaged with the community, local customers will naturally find you.

You wear a lot of hats as a small-business owner. Who's wearing your hat?

Back to the basketball game. I asked the accountant this question: "Isn't that guy sitting next to you a real estate agent?" He looks over at him, shakes his head and replies, "I don't know. I don't know him." To which I replied, "Look again." When the accountant looked back at the other guy, he noticed he was wearing a baseball cap marked with the logo of a local real estate agency. My point has been made. Is the guy a real estate agent? I don't know. But if he's not, I bet he knows the real estate agent who gave him that hat.

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In the marketing world, this is called "swag." There is a cost associated with this PR tactic, but T-shirts and hats emblazoned with the name of your company are PR gold. Give the T-shirts and hats to your closest family and friends with one request – if they're headed out to the ball field, mall, restaurant or other populated location, wear the shirt or hat. Major corporations engage professional athletes and sports stars to be walking billboards for their brands. As for your small business, your best friends from high school will do just fine.

And that brings us to the end of the basketball game. As I

walked down the bleachers with the accountant to congratulate our sons, he was quick to point out a person wearing a hat with the name of a local landscaping company on it. The accountant smiled and said, “Swag.” He’s an expert now.

Perhaps you’ve already tried these tactics and found success for your small business. There is no end to the number of ways you can generate awareness and publicity for your business. As I mentioned earlier, you can find a lot of articles online about PR, marketing and social media. I encourage you to do your own research and learn what you can.

As a small-business owner, what you lack in financial resources you make up for in heart and hustle. Just remember, the greatest PR is happy customers. Get that right and the rest will take care of itself.

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