

blowing your own horn: publicity tips for marketing your own business

by kathryn hall

You've taken out the loan. You have your business cards, your stationery, your mission statement, your product, and your web site is up and running. You are well on your way to living your dream. But how do you get and then, stay, on the map??

"In the seed is the tree." —old Dutch adage

Let's start at the end, which actually starts at the very beginning.

Fundamental to staying on the map is your own belief in yourself, your product, your services, and your commitment to providing high quality product and services over and over and over again. How do I dazzle them today?

Kind of the myth of Sisyphus model: roll the stone up the hill; watch it roll back down. And do it all over again. At least it can feel like that sometimes. Staying on the market radar really is created by religiously stacking up one stone on another stone on another and discovering that through a dedicated daily practice and routine, you see growth and sustainability and fruition. (Yay!)

So now that we've dispensed with the long-term perspective, how do you get the attention you need to get on the map in the first darn place?

Here are some tips.

While it is in vogue to bash the media and boast about never watching television and not even owning a TV, this is actually cutting yourself off from a very vital source of context for your business. Watching television and listening to the radio offers the opportunity to get a sense of what folks are talking about these days and to see how your own products and services fit into the context of what I would call *The Current Conversation*.

Why do we need to know that?

Let's say you have decided you are going to avail yourself of the free (!!) opportunity radio and television interviews provide to get the word out about what you do and why you are special. By tuning in to local radio and television shows one educates oneself about the interests and formats available within one's own geographic radius. By learning the editorial agendas of local media personalities you have a real leg up on getting yourself in front of that camera and/or microphone to announce to the world what you are about!

Word to the wise: doing media interviews is an art.

Let's say you have decided to go for it. If you have never done a media interview before, practice at home, not in public! Find a friend with a video camera and do a mock interview you can critique afterward in the privacy of your own home. Practice, practice, practice! Do this until you feel comfortable with your style and material. Tip: decide what three key points you want to make. Stick with those. If the host

asks you a different question don't be afraid to adroitly shift the conversation back to your points with a big smile and a "That's an interesting question, Sally, but the point I really want to make here is....." (This takes practice to pull off, but it can be done.)

If you have set up an interview for television be prepared to look really good. Wear beautiful colors with no designs. (You don't want the camera hitting a herringbone jacket and making you look like a psychedelic fruitcake.) Wear extra makeup, tastefully applied, as the camera will eat it up. Remember the camera will add ten pounds to your frame, so wear clothes that will anticipate that. Cross your legs at the ankles and pull your feet back and away from the camera. Keep jewelry simple. I will never forget an author whose big chance came on *Oprah* and her long earrings kept hitting the mike at her neck! No, no, no!

What about print?

Now if you are interested in newspapers, take yourself to your favorite bookstore and gather up sample copies of the local newspapers. Familiarize yourself with their editorial interests and pitch yourself to the appropriate editors at the papers you feel would be interested in you and your services.

The best professional avenue entails first sending the targeted editor a press release about your story. Type FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE across the top. Be especially creative in trying to tie what you are about with a local angle. Do you serve a particular segment of the population? Would senior citizens be a market? Can you tie your service

into African-American History month (February)? Would *Southern Living* be interested in you because you are a unique caterer? Find a good hook.

Word of advice from an aging pro: follow up your press release with a polite phone call or two or three (until you get through to your targeted editor) but always, always respect the editorial agendas of your editors. You are there to serve them, not the other way around. Your job is to provide high quality copy and stories of interest to their public. Do whatever they say. Show appreciation. Take as little of their time as you possibly can; be prepared to be brief and succinct. If they say *no* this time, maybe next time they will say *yes*, so you are building a viable relationship here from the get-go. So don't offend by being too persistent or insistent. Find the balance between being assertive and being polite and it will pay off in the end.

Go get 'em, girlfriend!

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