

Chapter

Talking Heads

The Cost of Free Publicity

Media outlets are always on the hunt for new content, and consultants are a ready source of fresh topics and perspectives. But, committing the time and energy to cultivate media relationships, prepare newsworthy material, and train for and make appearances means that being a talking head is anything but free.

And contrary to conventional wisdom, in this era of 24/7 news, there *is* such a thing as bad publicity. Just ask 2004 presidential hopeful Howard Dean. One overzealous speech after the Iowa caucuses—replayed and talked about over and over again—damaged his image at a critical time in his campaign.

WHAT IS PUBLICITY?

Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines publicity as “the measures, process or business of securing public notice.” Consultants might define publicity as free media exposure for their practices.

If you want notoriety, any publicity will do. But like all marketing tools, the purpose of publicity for guerrillas is to grow their practices. Guerrillas look for results, not glitter.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF YOUR PUBLICITY?

Your publicity program could include the following objectives:

- Developing your firm's market identity
- Building your networks—of potential clients, collaborators, industry contacts, and media representatives
- Identifying leads for new projects
- Winning new clients
- Giving something back to the community

To capture a worthwhile return on your investments, your publicity campaign must have a well-designed strategy and be skillfully executed. In keeping with the “One Size Fits None” principle of guerrilla marketing, consultants must first decide what role, if any, publicity will play in their marketing plans, and they must decide on the objectives of publicity for their practices. Both will vary from firm to firm.

Some consulting firms make publicity the center of their marketing efforts; others just react when a media request is lobbed over the transom. For some firms, it makes sense to have a small publicity program running at all times. Or, you may decide that you don't want any media exposure. Part of the decision involves cost, in both time and money. But the role of publicity may also depend on the type of consulting you do—whether the business you are in lends itself well to media exposure and if you stand to gain from it.

If you decide to pursue publicity, developing objectives for your program is critical for two reasons: first, so that when you're in the spotlight you can remind yourself why the heck you agreed to an interview; and second, so you'll be able measure results.

■ ASK WHAT PUBLICITY CAN DO FOR YOU

Publicity offers tremendous benefits for consultants because it can generate a high degree of trust. People tend to give greater credence to items they read in newspapers, hear on the radio, and see on television because they are provided by independent sources that the audience perceives as being objective. The mere fact that you appear on television or are interviewed by the press automatically positions you as an expert in the minds of most people.

Publicity can produce extraordinary benefits for consultants who use it skillfully. In addition to establishing you as an expert, it can create leads for your practice, build your visibility in your industry, and generate business. Though not really free, publicity can be less expensive than other forms of promotion, such as advertising and direct mail.

Media coverage can strengthen your other marketing materials. Use the publicity you receive to enhance your client presentations and proposals and to add punch to your Web site. Reprint articles in which you were interviewed or featured and distribute them at speaking engagements, at industry functions, and at meetings with your clients. A big plus of publicity is that it has a long shelf life; it can lodge in peoples' memories and pop up long after a media event.

■ ARE CONSULTANTS IDEAL MEDIA DARLINGS?

Scan any major publication or periodical and you're likely to find a consultant quoted. Consultants are natural sources for the media because they have

- specialized expertise;
- independent opinions;
- strong communication skills;
- documentation to substantiate their statements;
- well-reasoned positions and insights.

On the flip side, though many consultants are highly informed experts in their areas, they are often too long-winded for the media. Consultants are used to giving clients what they want—detailed answers and thorough, well-reasoned analyses. That mode of communication is suitable for clients, but makes consultants poor interview subjects. What works for the media is not dry recitation of facts, but short, snappy, direct replies that instantly connect with audiences.

Guerrillas train themselves in the art of media presentation to make sure the media will value their input.

■ CONSIDER THE TRADE-OFFS

Although you don't have to buy airtime or pay when features about you run in newspapers, getting publicity isn't simple and doesn't

bear fruit overnight. You'll need repeated media exposures to gain the visibility that will get clients' attention. And keep in mind that publicity items don't stay in your control: Once representatives of the media have an item, they can do whatever they want with it.

To obtain results, you must learn about publicity, cultivate your media presentation skills, and build and sustain media relationships. You also have to write and distribute articles, press releases, media kits, and publicity materials. As with all marketing tactics, guerrillas look carefully at the trade-offs between the benefits publicity can provide and the time and effort it takes away from other marketing efforts and client service.

Be patient and persistent. Don't waste your time trying to get publicity on a one-shot basis; it simply won't work. If you participate in an exceptional event or development, you may get your 15 minutes of fame, but the hoopla will die down quickly and you will end up essentially where you began.

■ THE COST OF FREE PUBLICITY

To integrate publicity into your consulting practice, you must expend time finding, courting, and developing solid relations with the right media people. You also may incur costs for media training as well as for preparing and distributing materials to the media. Media training is essential because in addition to covering the news, the media wants to give its audience highly entertaining features. If you are a well-trained subject, you'll make yourself substantially more attractive to the media.

Hiring an expert to help you learn about getting publicity can be expensive. In the beginning, you may want to hire a public relations consultant to teach you how to create media lists, write press releases, and use appropriate directories, as well as instruct you in proper media etiquette. Books such as *Guerrilla Publicity*, by Jay Conrad Levinson, Rick Frishman, and Jill Lublin¹ can also give you a solid understanding of the industry. Building a publicity program isn't rocket science, but it does involve managing numerous details.

■ USE PUBLICITY EFFECTIVELY

To be effective, publicity about you must reach your client markets. The best way to accomplish this is with a focused Rolodex of media contacts. The media list you develop should reflect quality over quantity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GUERRILLA PUBLICITY PROGRAM

To ensure effectiveness, a guerrilla makes sure a publicity program:

- Includes clearly defined objectives and a way to measure success
- Targets potential and existing clients
- Brings coverage from appropriate media outlets
- Entails minimal out-of-pocket expense
- Has a systematic approach, instead of relying on one-shot publicity events
- Strengthens client, community, and collaborator relationships
- Makes a valuable contribution to clients, your industry, or a good cause
- Helps clients understand your firm's capabilities, instead of just recognizing its name
- Undertakes activities that play to your firm's strengths
- Results in leads for new projects

Targeting a select group of well-placed contacts will use your time more efficiently and yield better results than seeking contacts from a huge generalized list.

Consultants in the natural resources industry, for example, may fare better with coverage in the *Journal of Forestry* than in the *New York Times*. If you're a consultant for the auto industry, being published in the health care press won't help you attract the clients you want.

The next step is to translate thought into action by combining the preceding elements with your objectives. The list of potential publicity activities on the next page can serve as a starting point for your program.

■ MANAGE YOUR MEDIA EXPOSURE

To benefit from media exposure, you need to educate yourself about how the media works and how best to use your media connections. You must identify yourself as a resource for the media and understand the media's needs.

GUERRILLA TACTICS: POTENTIAL PUBLICITY ACTIVITIES

- Publish articles or letters to the editor.
- Conduct a survey and send results to targeted media outlets.
- Propose speeches to local business organizations.
- Hold a seminar on a relevant topic and alert the media.
- Cultivate media relations.
- Sponsor an event for your targeted clients.
- Undertake a project for your industry association.
- Join the board of a local community organization.
- Undertake a pro bono project for a community organization.
- Appear at a trade show.

This list is not exhaustive, but should give you some ideas. Optimize any activity you undertake by making sure your media contacts know what you are doing. The point is to get good press from your activities.

➤ **Become a Media Resource**

The media needs a constant stream of news and information for features it runs. Despite the flood of information now in circulation, the media still needs more. Its people are always looking for additional stories to keep the public informed, entertained, and up-to-date.

To be a media resource, become recognized as an expert in your chosen area. You want to be the “go-to person” the media seeks out for information, insights, and quotes on features in your field. If your expertise is in human resources, your objective should be to become the first expert the media contacts for stories that involve employee layoffs, downsizing, transfers, and related matters. Make your media contacts think of you whenever news breaks in your field.

Try to anticipate when the media may need your help. Think in terms of pithy quotes and clever headlines. Learn to write one-liners that will instantly grab people’s attention. If the media considers you a “good quote,” your phone will be ringing.

Always deliver accurate, timely, and complete information. Build a reputation for having unique insights as well as access to terrific contacts in your field—other people who can provide great quotes.

Verify all your sources, and if you have the slightest doubt, tell your media contacts. Send the media well-written press releases that they can publish verbatim, adapt, or excerpt as they wish. Write attention-grabbing headlines; insert tight, informative leads; and bullet-point your important facts. Have backup documents or research on hand if they need additional material or verification.

Ask your media contacts about the items they are working on and see how you can help. If you can't help but you know someone who might, give them that person's name or arrange for them to speak with that contact. Suggest stories; fill them in on exciting trends and developments that they should watch. Extend yourself for the media and they will help promote you.

Think of yourself as a news source. Issue press releases about your business and your clients. Send releases when either you or your clients win awards, have other successes, introduce products or services, or have financial news. Inform the media when you are

GUERRILLA TACTIC: SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Program to Forecast Profits Announced

Thursday, December 2, 2006 Contact: Jeff Bing at jbing@pcg.com

Plastics Consulting Group (PCG) will announce its newest consulting service, **The Profitability Quotient**, to over 800 attendees at the World Plastics Conference next week in New York. The Profitability Quotient is the first service to examine the impact on company profitability of forecasted changes in worldwide market prices for polymers. PCG will use data from its proprietary research, competitor analysis, world supply/demand analysis, and price forecasting models to pinpoint clients' future earnings.

According to Ruth Grant, Managing Partner of PCG's New York office, "The addition of this new service allows PCG to provide specific and valuable planning information for our clients. This service goes beyond the product perspective to help each company plan its overall strategy in the context of global supply and demand."

PCG provides strategic business planning services for the worldwide plastics industry. The firm maintains offices in New York, Paris, Tokyo, and Sydney. Find out more about The Profitability Quotient and PCG at www.pcg.com.

moving your practice, going into new businesses, building a new identity, getting a new logo, and hiring new people.

Send press releases to promote events that you are sponsoring. Tell the media when you are providing services or your clients are donating their products or services for a charitable cause. In your releases, find a unique angle or tie it to news or upcoming events.

Sponsor contests and events and award interesting prizes to the winners. Reporters prefer to cover events that provide good photo or video opportunities.

► **Develop Newsworthy Content**

Publishing articles that display your knowledge and express your opinions can be an outstanding publicity vehicle. Start by submitting letters to editors on subjects about which you have unique knowledge. The “Letters to the Editor” section of publications is a good place to be controversial, to take a stand, and to express your opinions. It gives you a forum to begin what can become fascinating exchanges that will help get your name and positions known.

Identify specific topics on which you can provide information that can get you publicity. Make a list of the subjects you know inside and out. Include the issues involved in current projects or those you’ve recently completed. Ask yourself how you would reply to a friend who inquired, “So what are you working on now?”

- How would you make your current project seem interesting to an outsider?
- What facets of the project would be of interest to your friends or to a segment of the public?
- What elements of the project fascinate you?
- What unique, creative approaches have worked for you?
- What parts of the project have unusual or far-reaching implications that would interest your media contacts and their audiences?

Usually, topics will pop right into your mind. Be forewarned, however; issues that captivate you may put others to sleep. Or, they may interest only a small niche or group that you may not be able to reach.

To find ideas for stories, review information in your computer, your briefcase, and your e-mail. Check all news sources to see if the issue is being covered and, if so, the slant they took. Use Internet

information-gathering sources such as the Google News Service, or the numerous news crawler software programs that are now available.

Try not to get sidetracked by the lure of broad audiences. Frequently, broad media concerns won't be interested in your submissions anyway. Focus on media outlets that concentrate on the segments of the industry you serve. Remember—your primary objective in publishing is to obtain business; fame is a secondary bonus.

Target your markets precisely. Submit only to publications that will reach your target readers. Don't approach a food writer with a sports story.

It takes practice to spot publicity opportunities and develop content that will interest others. But before long, spotting opportunities will become second nature.

► **Build Your Network of Media Contacts**

Approach your media list as you would client relationships. Start by identifying writers and reporters who have covered stories in your field. Conduct research to find out how long they've been at the job, their work history, and the areas they cover. For media outlets, find out what they publish: their requirements, policies, and preferred approaches. Get copies of their earlier pieces and read them. Look for common threads, their "spin," favorite topics, and what they won't touch. See how extensively they use experts in their pieces and how liberally they include quotes.

Use online services like Media Finder (www.mediafinder.com), Bacon's Media Lists Online (www.medialistsonline.com), and Burrelle Luce (www.burrelles.com). They provide names, addresses, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and Web site addresses for newspapers, radio and television stations, newsletters, and magazines.

Create a list of target media sources. Include contact information and notes on individuals' backgrounds, experience, and accomplishments. Create profiles of writers, editors, and producers with whom you would like to work. Summarize features they have authored or produced, when and where they ran, and the perspectives that were presented. Read their articles and watch or listen to their shows. Many media people will ask you directly if you are familiar with their work. If the answer is no, the conversation is likely to go downhill quickly. Update your list at least every three months because media people constantly move.

When you read an article, or see or hear a feature on your area of expertise, send the writer and/or producer a note or an e-mail stating how much you enjoyed the piece. Offer additional information,

anecdotes, insights, and ideas for follow-up pieces. Set forth your expertise and encourage them to call you if they need quotes, sources, or other information. Don't write a book; simply provide enough information to bait the hook and hope that you'll get a bite.

Dedicate a specific time each week to work on publicity. Use that time to identify subjects and prepare materials to send to the media. Also use it to contact people in the media and to update your media lists.

► **Aim for the Perfect Pitch**

Approach a media contact in the same way that you approach a client meeting. The media is inundated with press releases and promotion requests; they get truckloads of them. So make your pitch sound compelling, exciting, or unique. Don't waste your time sending run-of-the-mill press releases.

Build your pitch around a compelling hook. If you send a press release, stress that hook in your headline and explain it in the lead sentence. If you capture a media person's interest or curiosity, you may get a call asking for more information.

If you call or send an e-mail to a media contact, write a summary of your pitch that you can say in 10 seconds or write in one sentence. "Our study found that employee turnover can be cut in half, at no new cost to employers, by following three easy steps." Then have a fuller explanation on hand that you can reel off in 20 to 30 seconds or two or three more sentences.

Send a short e-mail that includes your summary statement and lists each item that you're sending. Make it a brief cover letter. It should be direct and easy to read. Don't include lengthy materials such as surveys, white papers, or media kits, but have them on hand if the media requests additional information.

Prepare both online and hard copies of all documents. Direct your contacts to the media section of your Web site. Be prepared to send information in whatever format is needed.

► **Give Them What They Want**

Understand, respect, and be prepared to accommodate the special dynamics and requirements of the media:

- *News.* First and foremost the media wants news. The media reporter's basic question always is, "Will our audience care about this story?" If the answer is no, little else matters.

GUERRILLA INTELLIGENCE: TIPS FOR THE PERFECT MEDIA PITCH

Members of the media are pulled in many directions each day. Without a perfect pitch, you'll have a tough time getting any attention for your story. Here are five quick tips for a great media pitch:

1. *Talk trends.* Connect your story to a current social, business, or political trend. Instead of pitching your new consulting service that helps hospitals design more efficient emergency rooms, find information that supports the need for this service, like the rapid rise in emergency rooms as the primary health care facility for many patients.
2. *Go against the grain.* When big stories break, there's usually a chorus of similar opinions on the implications. While others are spouting off about the economic justification of moving business operations to other parts of the world, pitch a story about companies that are reversing course and bringing jobs back to their home bases.
3. *When in doubt, roll out the facts.* Credible statistics and surveys on relevant topics grab reporters' attention. If you have a substantial study, for example, showing that Internet shopping is declining in several major purchase categories, you're likely to get a call about the survey and questions about what retailers can do to reverse the trend.
4. *Align with the seasons.* During holidays, you may well find some slow news days that are perfect for your idea. If you propose a story about how to reduce graffiti during Halloween, it's likely you'll get a call.
5. *Remember the audience.* As you pull together your ideas, keep in mind a clear profile of the audience you hope to reach with your story. If you pitch a story about a new process for handling returned merchandise to a reporter who focuses on issues facing banks, you've wasted your time.

► *Picking your brain.* Like it or not, you are a source for information addicts. As an expert, you must gladly let them pick your brain. Consider every opportunity a chance to show that you're a reliable resource of continuing value to them.

► *Quick action.* Media contacts are always facing deadlines so they don't have time to dawdle or engage in small talk. Give them

information quickly and when you promise more, deliver it on time, and as promised.

► *Constant help.* Because of their crushing workload, media people always need help—identifying stories, finding good angles, putting stories together, documenting and substantiating them, and meeting deadlines. In other words, they need help with virtually every step of the process.

► **Follow-Up**

If you've contacted the media but have not received a response, follow up with a call or an e-mail. Ask if you can answer any questions or help in any other way and leave your name and telephone number, but keep it brief. Busy media people usually won't listen to long telephone messages or read lengthy e-mails. Extended communiqués will only irritate potentially important contacts.

Don't badger your contacts with endless follow-up attempts. Assume that after a call or two, your message got through. Thereafter, keep on the contact's radar screen by sending periodic e-mails or information. However, only send material that is related to subjects of interest to your contact. Unsolicited, irrelevant submissions are the equivalent of spam, so avoid them. Keep your name in their minds, but don't be a pest.

Many ideas won't result in stories. Many of your media contacts won't include your quotes. Much great information gets cut. Don't take it personally; move on.

When media contacts reject your pitch or cut you from an article, accept their decision. Don't try to convince them to change their opinions. Concentrate instead on maintaining good relations. Turn your defeats into opportunities. After rejections, thank media contacts for their interest and ask if they can give you names of others whom you could contact. If they provide information, get permission to use their names.

If you haven't established a close working relationship with a contact, never say, "You owe me one." Never forget that the media doesn't exist to promote your business.

► **Prepare for Interviews**

Okay, so you've studied up on the media and what they want, made your pitch, and your media contact thinks it's a great idea. An interview is arranged and you are set to go. But are you really ready? Before you do an interview, the single most important step is for you to

GUERRILLA TACTIC: TWELVE STEPS BEFORE A MEDIA INTERVIEW

1. Complete media training.
2. Anticipate questions the interviewer might ask.
3. Rehearse quotable answers.
4. Prepare data and examples to support your major points.
5. Develop a focused theme for your message.
6. Compile additional sources to amplify your points.
7. Review your notes on the interviewer's past work.
8. Make sure you know the publication's audience.
9. Understand the slant or main theme of the story.
10. Clarify in your own mind what you *don't* want to say.
11. Find out when your quote, story, or interview will appear.
12. Confirm the date, time, and attendees of the interview.

get some media training. Training can give you both the confidence and the insider information you need to handle interviews by telephone, in front of a microphone, or in front of a camera. You'll learn what colors not to wear for the camera and where to look; how to judge the tempo of the interviewer; when to speak up, and when to wait patiently.

Preparation for an interview can be summarized in the 12 steps above.

After an interview, call or write your media contact to say thanks and offer to help put the piece together. Your help may not be needed, but the offer will be appreciated.

■ WHEN TO AVOID PUBLICITY

Publicity opportunities may arise that cannot help you. In fact, they could hurt you or place you in an awkward position. When a chance for media exposure teeters on the edge of your expertise, walk away—fast. Invariably, you're looking at a no-win situation in which you may have to bluff or repeatedly say, "I don't know." Broadcasting even the implication that you are uninformed or not up to speed is poison for a consultant and not worth the risk.

Don't accept an opportunity when you lack adequate time to prepare for it. Again, you risk coming off as being poorly informed. Don't take a chance when you feel uninformed on the key points that are likely to be raised. Also consider whether to appear when you haven't rehearsed your presentation or have not had time to find out about the interviewer. Most media members will try to make you look good. However, a few have agendas and have built their careers on demolishing guests. So think twice about going forward when you don't know enough about the person you're dealing with or you're on shaky ground with the material.

Cautiously respond to requests for comments on your clients' business. First, it's not your role; you are a consultant, a secondary source, and if they want reliable information, they should go to the source. Second, as close as you may be to your client, you may not know everything about that particular situation, including your client's plans and motivation. Your answers could be wrong and might embarrass or jeopardize your relationship with the client.

Also avoid media opportunities if you have had insufficient media training. Frequently, this occurs the first time that you must give a press conference on negative or damaging developments. Prior to new situations, get help; call in professionals. Don't go it alone.

The glamour of publicity can be alluring, especially when your past efforts have been successful, fun, or both. The temptation to repeat past successes is hard to suppress, and publicity efforts can provide a welcome break from the unrelenting pressures of your practice.

■ CONSIDER PROFESSIONAL HELP

Sometimes you need professional help with your media adventures because you don't have sufficient time or expertise to properly handle your publicity efforts and your core consulting business. Frequently, when you attempt to do both, you do neither well. Consider what your practice can gain from using a public relations firm.

PR firms and consultants can be invaluable in helping you get started. They can teach you about publicity and lay out what's involved. As experienced professionals, they usually have knowledge and ideas that might take you years to acquire, if you ever could. They also may have contacts that can cut straight through the electronic fences that make members of the media so difficult to reach.

GUERRILLA STRATEGY: SHOULD YOU USE A PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM?

The most obvious consideration about using a PR firm is whether you have the funds to support an outside service provider. Such services can be pricey, depending on how you use them. A PR firm or consultant can:

- Save time in developing your publicity strategy and objectives
- Provide expertise in planning and implementing your campaign
- Help create publicity materials, such as press kits, media lists, and press releases
- Obtain media introductions for you
- Arrange interviews
- Gain momentum for your publicity program
- Assist with story ideas
- Provide media training
- Assist in evaluating your media success

Experienced PR professionals know the best media outlets for you or how to quickly find them. They are equipped to perform tasks that could be hard for you. They include developing story ideas, writing press releases, preparing media kits, planning and staging events, and building momentum for your campaign. They can provide you with media training as well as book you for and produce interviews and appearances.

Selecting the right PR firm can be as hazardous as picking the right consultant, and you face almost as many options. You can choose between firms of all sizes and different individual practitioners.

Choose your PR firm carefully and use its services judiciously. Be precise about your needs and your budget. You could easily blow your whole publicity budget on a professionally orchestrated campaign. And you may not need such comprehensive service. Decide what you need professional help with and what you can do on your own. Use the pros to fill in the gaps in your experience and knowledge about publicity.

GUERRILLA INTELLIGENCE: EVALUATING PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

Evaluate PR firms by asking basic questions:

- What's the quality of their relationships with the media? Can their team help with access to the media representatives you need?
- Who would actually do the work? In some firms, senior PR professionals handle client matters for the firm's largest clients, while smaller assignments are handed off to less experienced staff. Understand where you fit in the client pecking order and who will work on your account.
- How are limits set on scope and costs? PR campaigns can be complex, requiring the time of many people. Even with the best intentions, the scope and cost can easily creep beyond your expectations.
- Who else is out there? It's wise to shop thoroughly. Like consulting firms, the number of firms offering PR services is staggering and the quality of service they offer varies widely.

■ ARE WE THERE YET?

An effective way to use a PR firm is in evaluating the results of your publicity program. Do you remember the objectives you chose for your program? Well, don't neglect to circle back and determine whether your media exposure is fulfilling its purpose—to bring you business and grow your practice. If it's not, the cost of all that free publicity is too high.