

Maximize Your Publicity

by Julia-Isabel Davenport

How to Become Well-Known in Your Community

Setting yourself apart from your competition is a chief concern of every business—and massage therapists frequently find themselves in competition with as many businesses as there are seashells on the beach. You can build your practice and stand out by implementing a low-cost and simple publicity plan.

The best public-relations campaign is done by educating the media about your business on a consistent basis. When done effectively, this increases your credibility and visibility, which in turn attracts new clients.

To create an effective public-relations campaign, you need to know what is newsworthy about your business. The next step is transferring that information into a press release and then delivering it to the appropriate media contacts before their publication deadlines.

By becoming a credible source for the media, you'll receive free exposure in local publications.

For example, when the media is writing a story about ways to relax, rejuvenate, lose weight, manage pain or increase circulation, they will contact you rather than your competition.

What is the difference between publicity and advertising? Publicity is *free* and advertising is *paid* placement. An article written about a business increases the importance of that business in the eye of the reader, as opposed to an ad. Because publicity is a community service provided by news media free of charge to businesses, you are not guaranteed placement; however, using publicity generates credibility while saving

you thousands of dollars in advertising costs.

Tiffany Richards-Thibodeaux, owner of The Back Rub Company of Phoenix, Arizona, finds this to be true. "I started The Back Rub Company two years ago and have never advertised," she says. "Instead, I've used free pub-

Publicity can generate credibility for your business without the cost of advertising.

licity as a springboard for the business. We've received over 20 articles and television and radio interviews since our first release sent in December 2004."

Newsworthiness

Launching a new product or service is a great way to introduce your business to the community. For example, if you begin offering customized oil blends or colored-light therapy, write a press release, even if your competition already offers these services. If you are the only one in your area offering that, be sure to state that in the release. Include a photo of the service or product you want to promote.

Offering a solution to a current hot topic is another great way to get publicity. For example, when Vioxx got a bad rap for arthritis relief, people began searching for options, and PR-savvy acupuncturists received publicity.

People are always looking for gift ideas for holidays like Valentine's Day, Administrative Professionals Day, Bosses Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day. Whenever there is a gift-giving occasion, make the public aware of how you can meet their needs. The story is not just that you have

gift certificates available, but how your services actually improve the quality of life for someone they love.

Be sure to write a press release when you have added to your staff. Include a headshot (photo) of the new employee with the release.

Community outreach is fundamental to a good public-relations campaign. Activities can range from holding a drive to collect food or clothing for a local charity, or donating a portion of session proceeds to a nonprofit.

An effective way to build goodwill is to actively participate in donating to silent auctions. This is a great way for you to get your name out to a new audience, and for someone to try out your services.

"Donating massages to community charity events gets the word out to people about our health clinic and the services we offer," says Lori Arnold-Haas, co-owner of Acadia Health Clinic in Peoria, Arizona.

A grand opening, moving or closing is also appropriate for a press release. If you have been in practice for awhile, but have upgraded the facilities, think about having a grand reopening.

Your business anniversary is one press release topic you can count on every year. Inform the media and your community of how long you have been part of the community. Longevity is a great credibility builder. There will always be new people in your community who won't know how long you have been there, unless you tell them.

Receiving a contract is another great way to toot your publicity horn. It elevates your value because other businesses are doing business with you. For example, Richards-Thibodeaux wrote a press release when she landed a contract with a firm to provide chair massages to office workers.

Reaching a milestone, such as the 1,000th massage

THE TOP 11 NEWS ANGLES FOR YOUR BUSINESS

There are 11 newsworthy angles that your business can benefit from. Each of these will make valuable contributions to your publicity plan to create monthly publicity opportunities:

- 1 Launching new products or services
- 2 Offering a solution to a current hot topic
- 3 Staff promotions or expanding your staff
- 4 Community outreach
- 5 A grand opening, moving or closing
- 6 Celebrating your business anniversary
- 7 Receiving a new contract
- 8 Reaching a milestone, such as the 1,000th customer served
- 9 Public speaking about the benefits of massage
- 10 Serving in leadership capacities for nonprofits
- 11 Giving or receiving an award

—Julia-Isabel Davenport

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When writing a press release, make it readable, include your contact information and emphasize why your business is unique.

given, creates images of stability, longevity, quality and customer satisfaction.

Public speaking is another way to stir up publicity. Contact your local Rotary club, business-networking groups and chambers of commerce and offer a 30-minute presentation to educate their members about massage. Inform the media of your presentation.

Deborah Thum, owner of Zen of Beauty in Scottsdale, Arizona, uses this technique to gain visibility in her community. "Educating my community about the benefits of holistic health and well-being provides me a great platform in creating awareness for my business," she says.

Serving in leadership capacities for nonprofit organizations is another way to generate publicity for your business. If you are elected, nominated or volunteer to serve for any nonprofit, be sure to let the community know—and mention that you are the owner of ABC Massage Therapy.

Awards are another wonderful way to let the community share in your success, whether you are giving or receiving an award. Awards can be given to celebrate your employee of the year, vendor of the year, employee volunteer of the year, and more. Be sure to include a photo of the award presentation.

Writing the press release

Once you have identified your business' newsworthy angles, it is time to focus on writing the release. When writing a press release, the idea is to concisely communicate the message in preferably one page and not more than two pages. By providing the highlights, the goal is to capture the editor's interest. If the news organization has space, it can write a fea-

ture story that includes an in-depth interview, but typically the media uses exactly what you send. Use your best grammar while avoiding industry jargon or undefined abbreviations.

A release usually comprises three paragraphs. The first paragraph summarizes the release, stating the who, what, where, when, why and how in a flowing paragraph. The second paragraph is your quote relating to the subject of the release. The third is the closing paragraph that identifies your uniqueness. The release should always include contact information, including your Web site address, e-mail address and phone number. Format the release with double spacing and an easily readable font.

You should send your release to editors at local and regional publications like the daily newspaper and the weekly business magazine. If you are having an event to give back to the community, send it to the features or community editor. If the press release is announcing your business anniversary, send it to the business editor.

Respond immediately if the media calls you for clarification. They are doing you a huge favor, giving you hundreds if not thousands of dollars of free press. Be easy to work with so that you can continue to create a positive impression in their minds.

Julia-Isabel Davenport is the author of How to Maximize Your Publicity, publisher of the 2007 Publicity Planner, creator of the Community Megastar Award, and the owner of Maximize Your Publicity, LLC. She has helped small businesses and associations effectively tell their stories for more than 12 years. She lives in Glendale, Arizona. For more information, visit www.maximizeyourpublicity.com or call (623) 572-8201.