

Get in the know

Many times, putting together an ad or press release falls to a rental store employee or owner — someone who knows the business, but may not have the background in marketing. To assist rental professionals in putting together advertisements and marketing information, the American Rental Association has created the *Know Marketing Guide*.

"ARA has a national advertising program to promote rental as a category as well as renting specifically from ARA members," says Jennifer Vrban, ARA's public relations and advertising manager. "The advertising program encompasses four target markets: construction professionals; do-it-yourself homeowners and hobbyists; party professionals and caterers; and party consumers, especially brides."

The *Know Marketing Guide: Marketing 101 for ARA Members*, is a basic introduction to marketing that provides education about marketing, advertising, ad creation and placement, as well as additional resources. "The pieces people are really going to be interested in are the templates," Vrban says. "Based on the national advertising campaign, we've created templates that members can use in their local area. They can plug in their own company name and contact information or customize the ad in other ways as well. There is a list of inventory items in the template, which they can change based on what they carry."

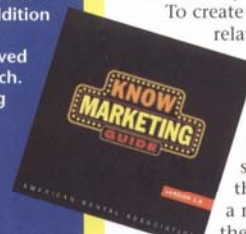
"We have so many members call and request this type of thing," Vrban says. "They want an idea generator, something to get them started. The plus side is, it's consistent with the national advertising campaign, so it helps promote rental as a category, in addition to their local store."

All member stores and branches received the *Know Marketing Guide* CD in late March. The guide includes case studies, branding information, pros and cons of various advertising methods and additional resources, including links to *RENTAL MANAGEMENT* articles and related books.

"The case studies include rental store success stories of their own advertising efforts," Vrban adds.

The *Know Marketing Guide* is the first of a multi-phase plan by ARA to assist rental professionals in promoting their business. "Additional marketing information is planned for the future," Vrban says.

Members who are interested in getting the *Know Marketing Guide* should call Vrban at (800) 334-2177, ext. 270, or e-mail jennifer.vrban@ararental.org. **RM** — Whitney Carnahan



Maximizing your publicity

How you can be 'newsworthy'

By Julia-Isabel Davenport

Helping distinguish yourself from your competition to attract clients to your business is a chief concern of every company. With so many marketing options available, sometimes the public relations aspect is overlooked.

Public relations is a marketing function that creates publicity and goodwill within the community. Educating the media about your business, when done effectively, can increase your credibility and visibility.

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

Planning your publicity is fundamental to creating exposure year-round to the media. After all, you want to educate them about your business so that you eventually become a resource for them. You want to create a

new release every month about a different topic. This shows that you and your business are productive. For example, I host Business Strategy Lunches™, a monthly lunch on various topics. Each month I send out a release about the current topic.

There are several newsworthy angles that businesses can use to generate free publicity.

- Send a news release to local newspapers, magazines, radio and TV news departments and to other news outlets, such as association magazines or newsletters if you have recently launched a new product or service or plan to offer something new in the near future. People can't buy what they don't know about. Build your visibility by educating your consumers about your business by using free publicity. Other related company events or milestones also can be newsworthy, such as a grand opening, a new location, an anniversary, a new contract or a new major customer.

- Offer a solution to a current hot topic. If your area has had some flooding, perhaps you can offer a news > Page 40

MARKETING *From Page 38* release about pumps with safety tips regarding water removal. On the party and event side, you could put out press releases about how to host the perfect Super Bowl or New Year's Eve party. If you rent lawn, garden and landscaping equipment, perhaps you can send a news release about how lawn aerators can help homeowners improve their lawns. You can position yourself with the local media as an expert on a variety of topics, which can enhance your position as an expert with existing and potential customers.

- Write a media release when you have added to, or promoted, staff members. Include a head shot photo with the release. This type of release might take several weeks to get printed, but it is a great opportunity for your business to get free exposure. Did someone in your company recently graduate from the American Rental Association's Certified Event Rental Professional (CERP) program? Send a photo and a release to your local media. Recognize that individual's achievement and let others celebrate his or her success.

- Conduct a class, seminar or conference for customers. If you have a light construction/general tool rental business that caters to the do-it-yourself homeowner, try holding a class to demonstrate how to strip a hardwood floor by using the equipment you rent. Or, show how

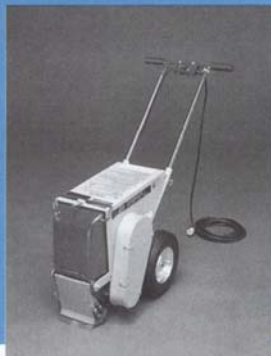
pressure washers can be used to clean and beautify older wooden fences and decks. Invite the media, including local TV news crews.

- Serve in leadership capacities for local non-profit organizations. As a leader with a local service organization or chamber of commerce, you can elevate your standing as a community spokesperson and become more of a resource for local media.

- Give or receive awards. Awards can be given to celebrate employee of the year, vendor of the year, customer of the year or anything else you think might be appropriate. Include a photo of the award presentation with the release. Be quick to nominate yourself for appropriate awards. Typically, award programs run by chambers of commerce or other organizations do not get large responses, so your chances of winning are greater than you think. Applying also gets your information in front of others and helps raise awareness of your business.

- Plan or participate in community outreach events to generate publicity and goodwill. Community outreach activities can range from holding a drive to collect needed items, sponsoring a walk to raise funds or donating a portion of proceeds to a charity. You can also give away services or products in celebration of a unique date. Allow enough time in planning the event to meet publication

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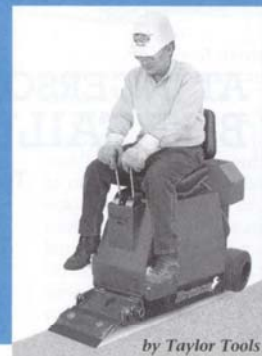


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deadlines to maximize your publicity. That could be as long as three months out. You always want to let the media know when you are helping the community. It gives the public an opportunity to join you and make the event even more successful, as well as create goodwill for you. This type of publicity lends itself well to two releases — one announcing that you are having the event and then a follow-up story about the results.

Once you determine what you think is newsworthy, then it's time to write the media release. The idea is to concisely communicate the who, what, when, where, why and how on one page with a captivating headline. Use your best grammar while avoiding industry jargon or undefined abbreviations. Use action verbs rather than passive. For example, "She is running for office" rather than "She will be running for office." The goal is to capture the editor's interest and if they have space, then a reporter might be assigned to do a feature story.

A release usually comprises three paragraphs. The first paragraph summarizes the news. The second paragraph is your quote relating to the subject of the release. The third paragraph identifies your uniqueness. The release should always include contact information you are willing to give to the public, including an e-mail address, telephone number and a Web site.

Once you have determined what is newsworthy about your business and have written the media release, who do you send it to? If you are having an event to give back to the community, send it to the community editor of the local newspaper, radio or TV station. If the release announces a business anniversary, send it to the business editor. The key is to send it to many reporters and editors, even at the same publication. The media list is your tool for distributing your media releases. Identify what media outlets your target customers are more likely to use and make those newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations your primary outlet for your releases.

Identify the correct contact person and find out what type of contact that person prefers, whether it's telephone or e-mail.

Add public relations to your marketing efforts and you will enjoy increased visibility and name recognition. **RM**



Julia-Isabel Davenport, owner of Maximize Your Publicity™, is a speaker and author who has helped small businesses and associations tell their story for more than 12 years. She is the author of "How to Maximize Your Publicity," the publisher of the 2007 Publicity Planner™ and creator of the Community Megastar Award™, which recognizes micro businesses across the country for their community involvement. For more information, visit www.MaximizeYourPublicity.com or call (623) 572-8201.

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