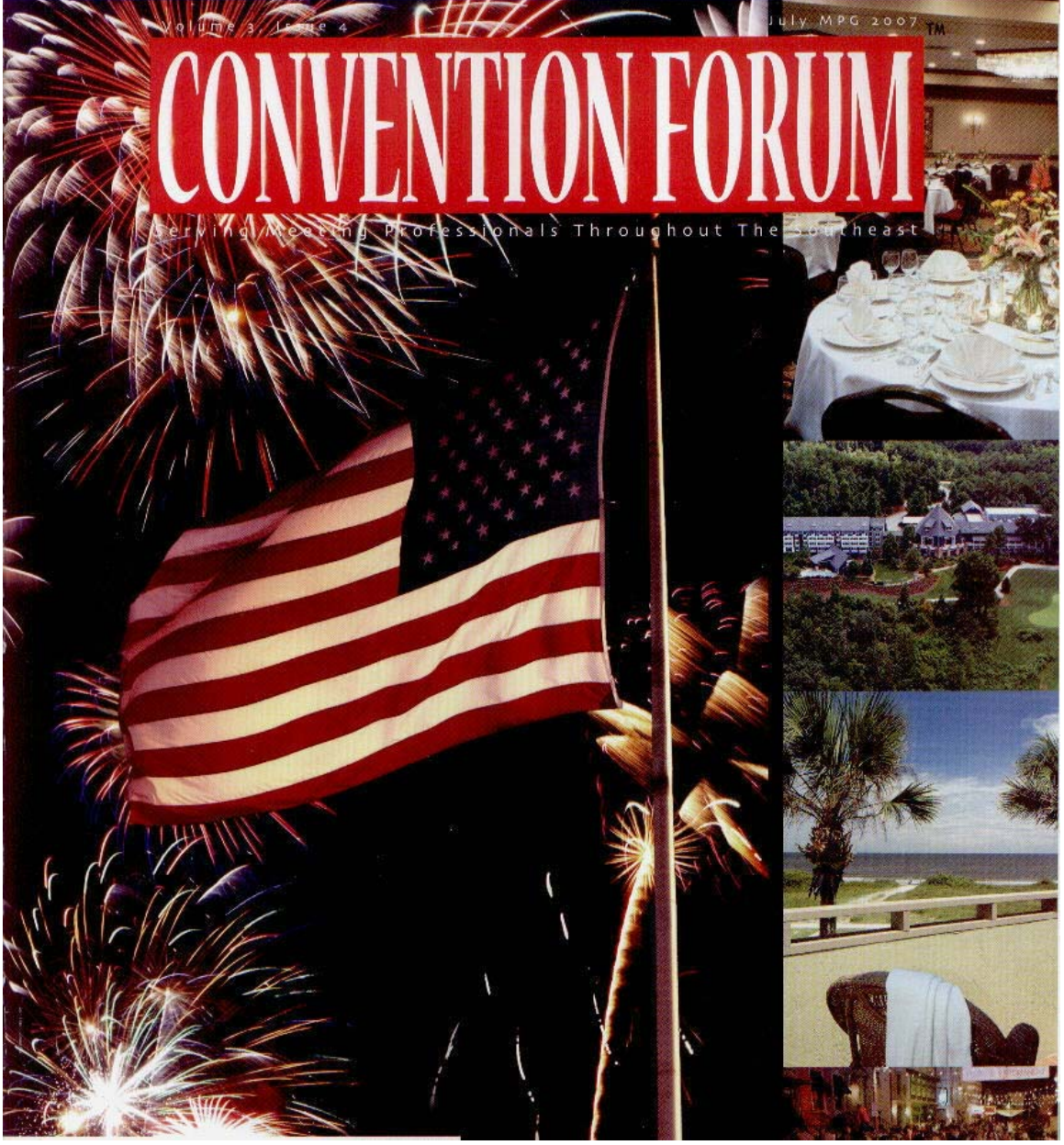


2007 BI-ANNUAL MEETING PLANNERS GUIDE

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How to Maximize Your Publicity™

by Julia-Isabel Davenport



If you're in business, you know you need to distinguish yourself from your competition if you want to have a steady stream of clients walking through your door. With so many marketing options available, it's easy to overlook an extremely effective (and free!) marketing tool—public relations.

Public relations is the marketing function that creates publicity and goodwill within the community. PR is simply educating the media about your business, which, when done effectively, increases your credibility and visibility so you can attract new clients.

To sustain your business and to attract new clients, you need to regularly communicate why people should use your products or services. People do business with people they know and trust. PR can demonstrate your value to the community and build your reputation for competency in your field. Planning for the future must include getting the word out about all of the good things your business does. You should seek opportunities to build your credibility, promote a professional image and gain visibility in as many ways as you can. Often we become shortsighted when working on current emergencies, losing sight of the fact we are in business for the long term and neglecting the things we need to do to create and sustain our momentum.

Publicity helps build credibility and visibility. An article published about a business increases the importance of that business in the eyes of the reader. Best of all, publicity is a community service provided by news media free of charge.

What Is Newsworthy About Your Business?

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 media release and then delivering it to the appropriate media contacts in time for their publication deadlines.

There are 11 newsworthy angles that most businesses can benefit from. They are:

- Launching new products or services
- Offering a solution to a current hot topic
- Staff promotions or expanding your staff
- Community outreach
- A grand opening, moving or closing
- Celebrating your business anniversary
- Receiving a new contract or customer
- Reaching a milestone, such as the 10,000th customer served
- Holding a seminar or conference
- Serving in leadership capacities for non-profits
- Giving or receiving an award

Be sure to write a media release whenever you add to your staff. Include a head shot photo to accompany the release. This type of release is considered an "evergreen" story—since it is not tied to a specific date, it might take several weeks for publications to print it—but the publicity will still be valuable to you.

Community outreach is fundamental to a good public relations campaign. While requiring some planning, it does the most effective job of creating goodwill. Community outreach activities can include holding

a drive to collect food, clothing, blankets or toys for a community charity; sponsoring a walk to raise funds for a charity; donating a portion of proceeds to a charity; or even giving away services or products in celebration of a unique date. Be sure to allow enough time in planning the event that you can meet publication 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, and it creates 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. Using a photo for the follow-up story adds a powerful visual.

Awards are a wonderful way to let the community share in your successes, whether you are giving or receiving an award. Awards can be given to celebrate employee of the year, vendor of the year, employee volunteer of the year, etc. Including a photo of the award presentation is another plus for you. 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! Even if you don't win, it is beneficial to apply for awards simply to get your information in front of another set of eyes to raise awareness of your business.

Writing the Release

When writing the media release the idea is to concisely communicate the who, what, when, where, why and how much (if applicable) on one page. Be sure to include a captivating headline. By providing the highlights, the goal is to capture the editor's interest; if the publication has space, an editor might do a feature story with an in-depth interview. Use active, present tense verbs rather than future tense, e.g., "She *is* running for office" rather than "She *will be* running for office."

Usually editors will use exactly what you send them or extract a portion. Use your best grammar and avoid industry jargon or undefined abbreviations.

A release usually has three paragraphs. The first paragraph summarizes the release. The second paragraph is your quote relating to the subject of the release. The third is the closing paragraph that identifies your uniqueness. It should always include the contact information you want published, whether a website, email or phone number.

Format the release with a one-inch border and at least 1.5 line spacing. Should it extend to two pages, use "(--more--)" at the bottom of the first page to indicate there is a second page. The symbol "###" indicates the end of the release.

Creating a Media List

Once you have determined what is newsworthy about your business and have written the media release, you should decide to whom it is logical to send. If you are having an event to give back to the community, send the release to the community editor. If you are announcing your business anniversary, send it to the business editor. The key is to send your release to as many reporters and editors that may be interested, even those who work at the same publication.

The media list is your tool for distributing your media releases. Who is your target market? Identify the publications they read and make them your primary outlet for your releases. Identify the correct contact persons and their preferred methods of contact. Usually email is the most efficient method to send media releases. Refer to the *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* for an extensive listing of every media contact in the world. When creating your list be sure to only select publications that will be interested in some angle of your story.

Add new contacts as you see new publications, establish new angles or hear of per-

sonnel changes. It is helpful when compiling the list to identify if the publication is daily, weekly or monthly and the corresponding deadlines. A release sent after a deadline is a release wasted.

One contact you must have on your list is *Convention Forum*™ magazine. Send your releases to editor@conventionforum.com. Be sure to attach your photo with at least 300 dpi resolution.

Planning Your Publicity

Planning your publicity is fundamental to creating continuous exposure with the media year-round. After all, you want to educate them about your business, so even-

tually you will become a resource for them. You should create a new release every month about a different topic. This shows you are still in business and productive. You do not want to resend the same release to the media. Give them something new about your business. For example, I host Business Strategy Lunches™, a monthly lunch on various topics. Each month I send a release about the current topic of the month. That way the release is different and it stands out.

Planning your publicity also helps you meet publication deadlines. You will know what you have planned and be able to work backward from each deadline to send the releases on time. Some publications work three months ahead.

The *2007 Publicity Planner* is a great tool featuring unique dates for community outreach. Sometimes you can't control when you have a new hire or someone earns his or her CMP, but by using the *2007 Publicity Planner* you can create publicity opportunities. Each month has a listing of fun dates—who doesn't like National Ice Cream Day? Additional business or health-related dates are listed as well. With this tool you can plan what you will do throughout the year to keep your business in front of the media's eyes and in front of your potential clients' eyes.

In summary, to help you distinguish your business from your competition, add public relations to your marketing efforts. Identify what is newsworthy about your business and create a publicity plan. Begin writing and distributing releases to your media list. Be persistent—set a goal of one new release per month. Enjoy your increased visibility and name recognition.

Julia-Isabel Davenport, MBA, owner of Maximize Your Publicity™ LLC, uses creative approaches to get positive publicity in the media and has helped small businesses and associations tell their stories for over 12 years. As a speaker she equips audiences from around the world with basic building blocks of publicity success. She is the author of How to Maximize Your Publicity, a book filled with 18 sample releases for 11 newsworthy angles. She is also the publisher of the 2007 Publicity Planner™ and creator of the Community Megastar Award™ recognizing micro-businesses across the country for their community involvement. Maximize Your Publicity™ LLC specializes in equipping businesses and associations with the skills they need to effectively tell their stories to the media. Visit MaximizeYourPublicity.com or call 623/572-8201 for more information.

Convention Forum™ Offers Many PR Opportunities

Convention Forum™ magazine is a fabulous place to share your new hire news in the "Faces and Places" column. It is a great opportunity to get free national exposure!

Did you launch a new product or service? That is absolutely newsworthy! Send a photo with a release to *Convention Forum*™ as well as your local media. People can't buy what they don't know about. Build your visibility by educating your consumers about your business by using publicity.

Did someone receive their CMP? Send his or her photo and a release to *Convention Forum*™ as well as your local media. Recognize individuals on their achievements, and let others celebrate their success.

Convention Forum™ provides another opportunity for exposure in its "Travel Tips for Moms and Dads" column. What a great opportunity to share your experiences about traveling and children with other readers. Make sure to list your business in your article.

Directors inducted into your local associations make great news. It builds awareness of the association in the local media and should attract new members. *Convention Forum*™ wants to share this information with its readers as well.

Send your releases to editor@conventionforum.com. Be sure to attach your photo with at least 300 dpi resolution.