

## How to Get Your Name in the Paper Without Advertising

As a marketing professional, one of the most common misconceptions that we run across in our business is that marketing is nothing more than advertising, and that advertising is the only way to get your name in the paper.

The good news is that marketing isn't (just) advertising. Oh, sure, advertising can be a tactic used in some marketing plans, but it certainly isn't necessary or even cost effective for many small businesses. And the better news is that you can get your business name in the paper without spending a dime on advertising. We call that cost-effective marketing tactic "public relations."

What exactly do we mean by public relations?

Some define it as media relations (working with the media to place stories). Some define it as public speaking. Some define it as article writing. In reality, it's all those things and more. For the sake of simplicity, if you own a small business, you may only have the budget to do one or two of the things that can be defined as public relations.

For example, if you're launching a new business, or introducing a new product or service, consider working with a public relations expert who can help you draft a news announcement and "pitch" it to the media who are most interested in what you do. The PR expert should have writing skills as well as the ability to make a story appealing to the media, plus the tenacity to follow up and make sure your story is heard.

So how is it different than advertising?

Advertising is purchasing space in a particular medium (newspaper, magazine, radio or television, for example) to present a prepared message about your product or service. That's called "paid media."

Public relations is when information about you and/or your business is presented as content (information) in a particular medium. Usually this takes the form of a story written about you by a staff writer, or an article you write for a magazine or newspaper. We call that "earned media." And for many businesses, earned media is far more cost effective than paid media.

One advantage of earned media is that articles present free information of interest to the reader, as opposed to your ad, which is implying trying to sell something. People use the media to be entertained or informed, not to be sold, which is why people can remember the articles they read, but often can't recall which ads were in the magazine they just read.

Right about now you might be thinking to yourself, "Hey, this sounds great. But will earned media make the phone ring like a newspaper ad?"

That depends on your business. If your business is the kind that people only need in an emergency (like a tow truck or an appliance repair service), or on a very infrequent basis (like a caterer or a wedding photographer), then advertising might serve you well as one of your key marketing tactics.

If your business doesn't fall into those categories, then public relations might make the phone ring far more often than advertising. (Of course, even if your business does fall into those two categories, a solid public relations campaign can still help boost your sales!) How? Keep in mind that while a newspaper ad is recycled at the end of the day, an article placed in the media has three lives: before it appears, the day it appears and after it appears.

Even though many people may read your article, if you expect it to create a response by its mere appearance without any pre- or post-follow-up, you may be disappointed. Some readers may be inspired to visit your web site or contact you directly, but that is by no means the only way to assess the value. You need to help leverage the power of the story by telling your clients, prospects and colleagues about the upcoming article before it is printed, and then send them a copy of the article with a personal note after it appears. The article will also be a great addition to your marketing materials; prospects will be impressed when you prove your business's stature in the community with the story. Of course, no public relations professional can guarantee that the story will make the phone ring. But a story or article can introduce you to many prospective clients, educate readers about your products or services, drive traffic to your web site, and provide the credibility only a story or article published by a third party can create. It's the third party credibility that all forms of advertising lack, and the distinct advantage of public relations as a marketing tactic.