

NO COST MARKETING IDEAS

There's an old saying, "If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door." That's just not true anymore. There are plenty of wonderful mousetraps out there that no one will ever buy because nobody knows they exist.

You don't have to mount some expensive marketing campaign to get the word out. The truth is there are plenty of ways to market that mousetrap even if the only thing in your pocket is lint.

1. Free Publicity

A reporter shares secrets to getting covered on the news.

Do you have a great idea for a story, but no clue how to get it in the news? Are you tired of pitching press releases the news media simply ignore?

After 20 years of beating the street as a TV reporter, I have a scoop for you: The media need good stories. But most stories are pitched so poorly, they are lost in the blizzard of faxes that blanket every newsroom. So, here are five secrets to increase your chances of getting covered that even some PR pros don't know.

Be unusual

The old adage about "man bites dog" still holds true. The news doesn't cover what's normal. We cover the abnormal. So as you are shaping your story, think of some type of twist.

PR whiz Carolyn Alvey knew this when trying to raise money for a charity several years ago. Instead of holding a garage sale, she sent out a press release announcing a celebrity garage sale. Items like Bob Hope's old golf clubs and Roger Staubach's long-neglected neckties were for sale. By making an ordinary garage sale extraordinary, the media was instantly sold on the story.

Be visual

Reporters tell stories with pictures. If the pictures aren't there, chances are the reporters won't be either.

Even the most non-visual story can be made visual if you're creative. A dog biscuit business? Boring. A dog birthday party complete with doggie guests and party hats? Now you're barking up the right tree.

That's what Michelle Lamont did to boost her dog biscuit bakery. She began baking huge

dog biscuit birthday cakes and inviting the media to cover the parties. She's had reporters hounding her for stories ever since.

Choose the right reporter

Perhaps the most common mistake even some PR pros make is trying to sell a good story to the wrong person. Most reporters have a specialty, like real estate or business.

So, seek out the reporter who will have the most to benefit from your story. Start studying the news. Before you call a TV station or try to pitch the paper, become familiar with a reporter's work. Don't try to sell a financial story to a reporter who covers entertainment.

Write like a reporter

If I were going to send a press release to a reporter, I'd write the kind of headline that a newspaper would run. And I'd make the rest of the release so conversational that a TV anchor could read it right on the air.

Why is this so important? A major-market newsroom gets hundreds of press releases every day. Often the decision on whether to cover your story is made in a matter of seconds. Many times that well-crafted sentence in the third paragraph of your press release is never read.

Wait for a slow news day

The holidays are the slowest news times of the year. When government offices are closed, so are most of our sources. Take advantage of it.

In fact, take out your calendar and begin circling government holidays. If the government isn't making news, we reporters are scrambling to find something to cover. Pitch even an average story on a day when reporters are starving for news, and you're much more likely to get coverage.

There you go. Now you're armed with knowledge that even some well-paid public relations professionals don't practice. If your idea is unique, visual, and pitched to the right person when the supply of news is running thin, you're in!

2. Public Speaking

Every service club and Chamber of Commerce on the planet needs speakers. In fact, most Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs need 52 speakers a year. It's an audition for dozens of new customers and yet many clubs struggle to find a speaker each week.

Even if you don't think you're a gifted speaker, most people will do just fine if they're talking about something they're passionate about. Come up with a 15-minute talk about "Giving Great Customer Service" or "How to Make a Home Sell Faster" and tell your story. Talk about what you do to make sure the "Sold" sign goes up in a matter of weeks

rather than months or what you do to thrill your customers so much that they end up becoming your biggest word-of-mouth marketers.

Jeff Crilley is an Emmy Award-winning reporter and author of *Free Publicity—A TV Reporter Shares the Secrets of Getting Covered on the News*. Visit JeffCrilley.com for more information.

3. Email Newsletters

If you aren't collecting email addresses and keeping in touch with your customers, you're leaving money on the table. No longer do you have to lick stamps to send out a newsletter. These online newsletters known as "ezines" cost nothing to send. But be careful not to become just another piece of spam.

Send your customers a weekly or monthly email with a valuable tip that will make their life easier. Don't create a long boring newsletter. People won't read it. A brief business tip or life lesson is all you need. It's just a nice way of keeping in touch so that if someone happens to need a new mousetrap or knows of someone else who does; your mousetraps are top of mind. And if your information is valuable, your old customers will help you find new ones by forwarding your email. Many people have created email lists of tens of thousands of names reaching more readers than many newspapers.

Those are just three simple ways you can jumpstart your marketing efforts without spending a dime. Just try one idea. What do you have to lose other than perhaps your anonymity? And if you're marketing that mousetrap effectively, you'll find a long line of customers beating a path to your door ready to take the bait.