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The Spin Doctor's Medicine Book

By Ron Smith

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About the Spin Doctor's Medicine Book

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About the Author

Ron Smith is the Managing Director of Corporate Media Communications Pty Ltd

Ron Smith worked for thirty years as a Spin Doctor at a senior level for government agencies, corporations, community groups and small businesses to create community and business media awareness programs.

In the early seventies and eighties, Ron Smith became a green voice in the environmentally sensitive and very beautiful Dandenong Ranges, east of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. He also campaigned on other community issues, such as child accident prevention, expertly using the media to get his message across.

He recently released the popular [PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition](#) computer program.

Author’s Comment

The Spin Doctor’s Medicine Book is about giving small companies and community groups the power to get their message out to the broader community.

It is also dedicated to the tens of thousands of spin doctors throughout the world who are not only promoting products and services, but also work hard to provide vital information by spreading the word on the latest in medical research or education to lead us all to a better world.

The Internet has seen the world of the spin doctor change dramatically as information is available world wide to and from millions of personal computers.

The fact that this eBook is being written and published in a digital format, to be distributed and sold to hundreds of thousands of people, is a clear indication of just how the communication world has changed.

No longer is a press release just for the media: it has become a vital marketing tool - providing instant links to information, sound and video.

Recently, we released the [PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition](#), aimed at giving small and home businesses powerful tools to promote themselves and their products.

We used one press release, “[Now Anyone Can Write a Press Release](#)” to send out our message across the Web and even developed the

original press release into a Special Report, “How to Use a Press Release to Sell On Line Products.”

The power of PR (Public Relations) does not just rely on press releases. It is the combination of the many small things that you do with your customers. It is about relationships and doing the right thing for everyone.

To your Success

Ron Smith

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The Spin Doctor Quizzed

These two special audio interviews with Jason Cameron, one of Australia’s top media specialists, explore two of the most difficult areas for people wanting to develop their PR.

Getting the story right and contacting the media are two of the most difficult areas for people that want to generate valuable publicity.



Ron Smith



Jason Cameron

These audio interviews complement the information in this eBook, and we suggest that you listen to them as a starting point for developing your PR strategies.

1. [Contact: How to contact the press: the right time and approach.](#)
2. [The Story: Getting your lines right so it stacks up.](#)

Your Business Audit

Have you ever opened the local paper to see your competitor has been quoted and then wondered why it was not your company that got the opportunity to occupy that valuable editorial space?

The reality is that you have probably not thought about how you can obtain media coverage and what opportunities exist.

The starting point is to take a look at your business, the products and services and what might be newsworthy.

Local papers support local businesses and are always on the lookout for a local company’s innovation, community involvement or staff achievement.

The following is a list of ideas to start with. It is in not exhaustive but gives you a starting point.

1] It is a good idea to start a ‘media’ book or file to which you add information and ideas for your future use. This is also a good place to record the names, telephone, fax and email contacts you develop with the media.

Also, collect cuttings about your competitors. This is a good way to keep an unobtrusive eye on what they are doing.

The major type of story that any local paper is looking for is the local angle; the achievements and concerns of local people, community groups or companies and how some current event influences the local community.

Some of the themes which you need to consider for a media event:

- Introduction of a new service or product and its advantages
- The celebration of an anniversary of the company and its achievements
- The sponsorship of a local community group/school etc.
- A new apprentice starting work or the completion of their training
- An informed comment about a hot issue in your industry and its effect at a local level
- Announcement of your expansion of operations, or the opening of a new building
- Human interest story about your staff; their years of service or special achievements
- Partnerships with other local businesses
- Comments on community issues linked to your business operations
- The announcement of the appointment of key personnel

Make sure that you write down the list and set some time-lines for action.

Take Action and Assemble Material

Using our prompt page, write down the top five stories that you want to get out about your business with the most important points that you want to mention. Print out this page and then fill it out.

Story List Titles

1]

Important points:

2]

Important points:

3]

Important points:

4]

Important points:

5]

Important points:

Checking out the Competitors

Spin Doctors check out competitors all the time to help develop better competitive news strategies. They read their brochures, look at their adverts and check the local paper and other media to see if they have appeared there.

Checking out your target media

Read the media you are targeting from the front page to the back page. Look at the sections where your story may fit and file the specialist journalists' names.

Talking to your Staff

Like the professional spin doctors, make sure that you talk to your staff about story ideas and involve them in the project. If the firm gains more positive media coverage, it is able to offer more employment and better conditions for all staff. It is important that all employees are proud of their firm’s achievements, of which they are an integral part.

Story Details

* Print this out and put it in your folder

Spin Doctors carefully assess each story idea. Fill out the details with at least three to five points about why your story is important to the readers, listeners or viewers of the media outlets that you are going to approach.

Then, fill out the Reality Checklist on why the readers will be interested. If it does not pass that test, scrap the idea and work on a better one.

Story Title

.....
.....

Reality Check:

Will the story interest the local paper?

.....

If published, will it help you to gain customers?

.....

Is the story a good fit with your marketing plan?

.....

What do your staff and friends say about this idea?

.....

Have you got a good picture to go with the story?

.....

Does the story fit a follow-up on issues already raised in the local paper?

.....
.....

Timing

Does your story fit in a special week; Asthma Week, World Environment Day etc.?

The Spin Doctor’s Secret Medicine for Healthy Press Releases

Developing your media release is the most important part of the program. That will be the deciding factor of whether your story is picked up.

To assess your story’s media value, think about your main message and why it is relevant for publication to a wider audience. It is important to be realistic in this assessment so that you don't waste your energy and resources on a 'dead story'.

That press release is the most important document that you create as it becomes your front door to the world.

In our experience, producing a powerful press release is the biggest hurdle facing business people. That led to the development of the [PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition](#) which automatically sets out your press releases in the particular way that editors like to see them.

Anyone can just fill in the boxes with their information and automatically produce professionally styled releases that are ready to be uploaded onto the Web or printed for faxing to the media.

Your media release should be limited to one page and be around 250 words: Cut the waffle and get straight to the point.

In the busy world of communication, the press release has remained one of the most valuable tools for promotion and marketing.

The main thing about the press release format is that it is all valuable information, takes just a few seconds to read and has more credibility than most advertisements because it is published as a news item.

Once written, you can maximize the value of those two hundred and fifty words because that press release can be used in many ways over and over again.

1. Issue your press release to local and major media
2. Distribute it to online reviewers of products
3. Post it on your website and alert all the contacts in your database about its content
4. Send it to your family and friends and ask them to pass it on
5. Submit to the search engines as new web content
6. Use it to announce, or pre-promote, a new product
7. Print it out and display it on your reception desk

The value to online product sellers is that the electronic press release can include many valuable marketing links that direct people to your site to find out more about your product or service.

Every year, our own company generates independently-assessed media coverage valued at around four million dollars. The vast majority is generated by the humble electronic press release.

One major problem for many small businesses is the issue of writing press releases, working out a way of creating stories about their business and making contact with the press.

The Starting Point

The **starting point** is to look closely at every aspect of the product you are going to promote. Make a list of its advantages, and highlight those points that you believe will be of most interest to your audience.

The **second step** is to work out an eye catching headline that will attract people and make them want to read right through your press release.

The **third step** is to carefully consider where you want to direct your reader with your links and what action you want them to take.

And, don’t forget to include your contact details. Double check them before sending it out.

The Top Five Mistakes That could Kill Your Press Release.

1. Failure to include information which will benefit readers
2. A dead headline which will see your press release head to the bin instantly
3. Failure to include proper contact details – it is basic but it happens
4. Too long - keep it under 250 words
5. Spelling and grammatical errors

Branding Your Press Release

The press release is your front door to the online world. To build your credibility, it is important that you keep a constant branding standard. Everyone must know who the release comes from.

If you have a website header picture for your product, make sure that you use it and put a link immediately under it that takes people directly to your home page.

By branding your press release with a header that is unique to your product, you ensure recognition every time someone reads your release and your brand gets coverage.

You can see how this works when you read [our press release](#) that we used to announce the release of our PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition.

The development of the [PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition](#) software was born from the problem we saw year after year confronting small businesses that had neither the money to hire expensive PR companies or large amounts of time to spend on doing their own PR.

The software was developed to be a hands-on training course which provided easy but professional formatting of releases and letters to editors. We also included a lot of insider information of how to generate PR from our own experience.

When creating the press release to announce the product, we had to come up with a title which would both catch attention and explain the product.

“Now Anyone Can Write a Press Release” was our chosen headline because it suggested overcoming a major problem for most small businesses and would compel people to read so that they found out this was achievable.

The press release goes on to explain the benefits to the target audience; empowering small business with a simple, low-cost tool to promote their business and products.

This is also sure to interest editors who are all keen to receive well prepared stories about novel ideas that save time and money for their readers. A good press release is easy for the journalist to convert into an interesting news story.

You will notice in this release that we have four points that readers can click on and be taken to the PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition website for more information.

Also note that we have placed our contact email and website addresses at the top, right up front in the press release, if the Editor quickly wants to check out the details of the site or contact us for quick answers to any questions they have.

Affiliates’ Use of the Press Release

We designed this press release to be used by the affiliates who sell our products and gain a 50% commission. They only have to change the link to our site, by inserting their own special link that we gave them. Then they just send it out to the people in their customer database or post it as an article on their website. We put the press release as a marketing tool on our site for [our affiliates](#) and I also include a copy on the next page for your information.

Example of a Successful Press Release.



Media Release

immediate use

Media Contact: Ron Smith Tel: 613 98185700

Email: ron@pressreleasepro.com.au

Web <http://www.pressreleasepro.com.au>

Now Anyone Can Write a Press Release

Forget the waffle, go straight to the headline and an informative two hundred to three hundred word media release is the message from an Australian based media and Internet communication company which has released an automated press release program for small business.

Managing Director of medialaunch.com.au Pty Ltd, Ron Smith said, "PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition is designed to provide anyone with the ability to write a press release to promote their business, within a few minutes."

[PressRelease-O-matic](http://pressreleasepro.com.au) is designed to get people focused on what we call the ten second rule.

“If the Editor or the program producer cannot grab the importance of a press release within ten seconds it is usually dead in the waste paper basket or on the delete button.”

Mr Smith said, “The pre-formatted software meant people just filled in the allotted spaces with their information and with the click of the mouse their release is formatted into a simple easy to read document ready for printing or emailing.”

[PressRelease-O-matic](#) automatically turns the press release into an html format ready for posting directly on the Internet and provides an added pre-formatted letter to introduce the press release to the editor or producer.

[PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition](#) provides small business, which is cornerstone of the economy, with an inexpensive and time saving way of generating valuable publicity for their products and services. We have also included information on how to source stories, press release writing techniques and sixty six PR tips to promote and market their small business.”

Mr. Smith said that the company had already commenced to develop a number of products that would complement [PressRelease-O-matic Small Business Edition](#) for specific sectors of the market including one for school teachers to be released soon.

Ends

Appointing Your Media Spokesperson

Managing media inquiries is as important as managing a customer inquiry; it needs to be processed carefully so that you receive a positive result.

It is important that you agree on the one person in your organization that is to speak to the media. All inquiries should be directed to that person, so that a consistent message is given to the press about any issues which arise from your publicity.

All staff, or members, of the organization should be alerted to your firm policy of media comment and how they can contact the selected spokesperson.

Failure to do this can lead to confusion and conflicting comment in the press.

It is always good to have one person that becomes the face of the organization. Then, appearance consolidates the positive impression.

Requirements for the Spokesperson

The spokesperson should be someone who is either the head of the organization or a capable representative that is fully briefed and understands the issues.

The spokesperson should be fully aware of all details of the media release and keep a copy on hand, together with any background material.

Every spokesperson needs to spend some time practicing questions and answers before any interview and make notes on the most important points that they wish to get across.

Being Available for Comment

The spokesperson should be available for comment and respond quickly to the media. Like everyone else, the media are often working to tight deadlines. Immediate response is the best possible action. Response should always be within an hour of the request.

Contacting the Media

By now, you have established stories about your organization, appointed a spokesperson and written your first press release.

The next step - contacting the media - is vital.

You should listen to our audio interview on this topic if you have not already done so.

The Five Key Points about Contacting the Media:

1. Prepare for your phone call by reviewing the release so that you can explain your story in just a couple of minutes
2. Introduce yourself clearly. Make your call polite, short and to the point
3. Ask the journalist how they like to receive information; email, fax or letter? Write down their details.
4. Make sure that you contact the press when they are not on deadline. Do not contact the daily paper late in the afternoon when they are working furiously on the next day’s edition.
5. Always be polite. Do not get pushy or offended if the journalist does not accept your story.

We have included some special forms that you can print out and use for your contact with the media and when you are preparing for an interview.

We suggest that you print these out and keep them in your media file to refer to and use each time you start a new media PR program.

The Spin Doctor’s Checklist

The media release is the best way for you to present information to journalists and editors that may consider your story for publication.

Journalists get thousands of releases every day. A well prepared and targeted 'news' release is the key for you to successfully gain valuable publicity.

Here is the spin doctor’s checklist.

Why are You Issuing the Press Release?

- To make potential new customers aware of your business
- Promote your products, services or company
- Reinforce your existing image in the public arena
- Promote an issue that positions you as an credible commentator

Who is Your Target Audience?

Who are you trying to inform? Which newspapers, magazines, etc. would they read?

List the media and 'programs' that you consider the most important.

Establish your contact list with the journalists who provide content for the programs that you want your information to be included in.

Provide information that is relevant to the media program.

Media Contact Lists Forms

Develop your own lists of media contacts by printing off the forms on the next page and filling them in for your Working File. Remember that journalists move between publications, so these forms will need regular updating.

Name _____

Organization _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Mobile _____ Email _____

Deadline Day _____ Publication _____

Photographer _____

Mobile _____

- - - - -

Name _____

Organization _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Mobile _____ Email _____

Deadline Day _____ Publication _____

Photographer _____

Notes

Notes

Mobile _____

Name _____

Organization _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Mobile _____ Email _____

Deadline Day _____ Publication _____

Notes

The Spin Doctor's Interview Reminder and Organizer

This organizer is to assist you prepare for your interview and also provides a record for you to file so that you can follow up. Make sure that you read the publication, or listen (or view) the program to get an idea of their style.

Journalist

Organization

Telephone _____

Mobile _____

Email _____

Deadline Day _____ Publication

Photographer

-

Mobile _____

Date _____

Time

Location of Interview

Media Alert

Attention Chief Of Staff

Event **Time/Date**

...../.....

Address

.....

Map Reference

.....

Media Enquiries:

Name **Position**

Telephone **Mobile**

.....

Website

.....

.....

Media Alert

Attention Chief Of Staff

Event **Time/Date**

...../.....

Address

.....

Map Reference

.....

Media Enquiries:

Name **Position**

Telephone **Mobile**

.....

Website

MEDIA RELEASE

Title:

Date

Media Enquiries:

Name

Telephone Mobile

.....

Website

.....

.....

MEDIA RELEASE

Title:

Date

Media Enquiries:

Name

Telephone Mobile

.....

Website

The Spin Doctor’s Organizer

Save time, money and keep track of your Media Strategies

One of the most common problems facing all small businesses is wasting time looking for things. That time is completely unproductive and costly.

The ‘**Very Important Document Folder**’ is a valuable working tool.

Take a ring binder and divide it into several sections:

- **My Story Ideas:** Collect and keep filing your story ideas to keep new press opportunities
- **Articles for Research:** Print out articles and news releases with hot topics
- **List of Websites for Research:** List the websites where you can gain industry news and ideas
- **Emails:** Print out and keep good emails for reference
- **E Newsletters for information:** Ideal to print out to make your releases topical with up to date facts.
- **Media Releases:** Keep a file of your media releases issued plus coverage generated for ready reference. Follow this strategy and you will have your information at your fingertips for ready reference and be able to quickly assess opportunities to save time and money.

Remember that you can do this electronically by setting up a special folder on your computer.

The Spin Doctor’s Insider PR Tips

1. Choose a name that is easy for people to say and remember which clearly tells people what the business is about

Make sure it works as a website address and can be used on business cards, signage, your letterhead, and in advertisements.

Keep it simple and short.

Test it out on family and friends before your final decision, because it will be difficult and costly to change after ordering your original choice.

Check that the same name is available to you for your Internet domain name before finalizing your business name.

2. Get a diary and plan out a twelve month series of promotions which will provide you with a full calendar of events and actions.

Make sure that you include direct mail, press releases, newspaper advertisements, customer competitions, sponsorships and a special section for you to fill with new ideas.

This promotion diary is the perfect place to maintain a list of contacts that can be involved in the promotion of your new business.

Review your progress and deadlines every week.

3. Choose a color scheme and print style for your business which flows through all areas - including business cards, signage, website, counter displays, vehicles and your business premises.

Your consistent color scheme and print style will provide your business with a professional edge and make it easier for people to recognize.

4. Hold a special function to launch your new business and reveal your products and services.

If possible, hold it at the business itself. Invite the family and friends of yourself and your staff, suppliers, bank manager, local counsellor, Member of Parliament and, most importantly, established and prospective customers.

Keep the event simple, hold it at a convenient time and use it to launch your website by giving everyone your new business card with your contact information and web address.

Send out the invites and then follow up on the telephone three days before the event to maximize participation.

5. Issue a press release about your small business to the local media and invite the press to your business to report on your products and services.

Make sure that you prepare your information so it will interest their readers. This will attract more positive media attention than just talking about yourself. Informed comment on industry trends and helpful information are always welcome; if you are a plumber, you could blend water saving tips into your release.

6. Choose a local community event to sponsor that will create publicity about your business and increase customer loyalty.

Donate a prize for a school, or local charity, raffle and launch the raffle at your business. Promote the raffle and sponsorship on your front counter, website and in your front window.

After the raffle is over, thank people who took part in a letter to local paper and praise the work of the local charity. Arrange the hand-over of the major prize with the school or local charity as a press event.

Display the letter of thanks from the charity or school on your counter, notice board or have any particularly nice ones framed and put them on a wall.

This will introduce you to new customers in a good light, and you will be helping a local charity.

7. Write letters to the local paper on local issues to support improving community facilities or local community groups, such as schools, sporting clubs and charities.

If you are establishing a new business in a shopping strip or a local country town, a well thought out letter to the paper, with a positive approach and an interesting angle, will attract a strong readership. Make sure that you sign off with your business name and address.

A letter to the editor can often lead to a media article or start a debate. If someone replies to your letter, write a follow up letter and keep the story going. Letters should be short and to the point, around 150 words maximum. Display your letter on the counter as a conversation piece with customers.

8. Team up with other local businesses that can complement your business, especially if they are in the same location. If their customers have similar needs to yours, it makes sense to cross-promote and share costs.

You could share the cost and buy a bigger ad in the local paper, create a shared flyer for local neighborhood distribution, cross-promote each other's services with gift certificates; e.g. a hairdresser recommends a coffee shop which recommends the hairdresser.

Visit neighboring non-competing stores before you open your new business and introduce yourself. Leave your card and invite them to the launch of your new business.

9. Get the name and location of your business out and about with magnetic car door signs. They are great when you are travelling or parking around your local area.

Make sure that you promote your product visually with a tag line which will get people calling. Include your website address in big letters. Launch your mobile sign on your car or company vehicle with a “Spot where the vehicle is and win a special prize” promotion for customers.

A great way to collect customer information is to give a small discount for everyone that enters or is present in your premises when you announce the winner. Make sure they include an email address and have a box for them to agree for you to offer them further helpful information and discounts (give permission for you to email them.)

10. Brainstorm ideas with staff, family, friends and suppliers on how to promote and grow the business at least once week at a set time.

Write all the ideas down. Bounce them off your customers to gauge what they think. If you use an idea, reward the person who thought about it and added value.

Brainstorm with other local business owners at a regular coffee session, sharing ideas and creating more profitable partnerships.

The secret of brainstorming success is to keep track of the ideas. Then, focus on each idea, one at a time, expand it and put it into action.

The starting point is to write it down.

- 11.** Never throw away an idea from your brainstorming sessions. Keep them in a folder and let them mature or get added to
- 12.** You will be surprised when you go back through old ideas and realize just how good they can be as both thought starters and to see your progress

Never throw away other people's good ideas as they are valuable pointers for starting discussions with your staff and suppliers about improving your business.

The message is that, whenever and wherever you see a good idea, write it down and store it for the future.

12. Make a special time each week to do your marketing tasks, so that your business will not stall from lack of promotion.

Use that time to review your position that week. Allocate some of the time to take action; book an advertisement, design a flyer, phone new contacts or meet new people.

Remember to check out your competitors to see what they are doing that may be successfully adapted for your business.

Review the look of your premises. Is it still looking as fresh and is it creating a pleasant selling environment?

13. Build rapid credibility with a display of your V.I.P. documents. Start with your business registration certificate. Make sure it is in a quality, impressive-looking frame.

Letters from satisfied customers, acknowledgements from community groups regarding sponsorship assistance, awards and press clippings should all be neatly framed and displayed in areas where customers see them.

A free-standing plastic display of such information on a store counter is worth its weight in gold. It confirms your professionalism and community involvement.

14. Make sure that your website sells! Avoid complicated designs.

View your website as just one long sales letter which is focused on telling visitors how they will benefit from your products.

Avoid links to other sites, or anything that will divert your customers from the sales pitch.

Do not fall into the trap of trying to include everything on your site. The aim is to get people to phone you or visit your business.

Make the name of your business and your contact numbers clear and easy to see. Print out and display your main web page and contact details in a frame that your customers will see on your premises.

15. Advertising and promotion are about BENEFITS FOR THE CUSTOMER - not about promoting yourself.

Make sure that the copy for your flyers and adverts is clearly based on promoting BENEFITS and this stands out in every headline and image.

Use plenty of white space. Don't clutter up the advert or flyer with too much print

Offer something unique that your competitors can't.

Make your message simple and easy to understand, with an immediate call to action and a time-sensitive offer.

If you are having difficulty in writing adverts or flyers and your message is not pulling sales, get some professional help before it is too late for you.

16. Use an introductory offer to jumpstart your small business by offering an 'Opening Week Special' with a combination of goods or services.

Some people talk about 10% or 20% off but a better strategy is to offer a service upgrade such as a free delivery, or an added accessory and not to devalue your products or services with heavy discounting.

If you are selling lounge suites, you might throw in some free, color-coordinated cushions or you might give buyers of your swimming pool cleaner a free pool-maintenance check.

People are not just looking for money discounts today. They want quality and time-saving service.

17. Research where your advertising might get the best results. Talk to people with similar businesses to find out where they spend their advertising dollar and what sort of results they have.

Never advertise without having a tracking mechanism, such as a special offer or a coupon which people bring to your business to receive their special offer. Record your advertising results as part of your marketing calendar, so that you know what really works.

Follow a consistent plan in your advertising. It is better to have a smaller regular advertisement than a larger one that is irregular. you will also get a contract price for a regular booking.

Blow up your advertisement from the newspaper and display it on your premises or turn it into a flyer - always include your web address.

18. Talk to your customers as they will recommend you to others if they feel happy and rewarded by friendly service. Your best advertisement is their word of mouth

Make sure that your staff are trained to be friendly and smile; always on the look out to have a quick chat whilst they are serving.

Reassure your customers that they are welcome, so that always they leave feeling appreciated and they will return.

A counter display with copies of your latest press release can be the starting point for a chat.

By talking to your customers, you may receive valuable information on what they may like to see you provide in new products or services.

Their questions and problems are your opportunities.

19. Create promotions and marketing around special times in the year and add a few of your own: Easter; Christmas; New Year and the end of the financial year are major target dates.

World Environment Day, International Water Day and many local ‘Weeks’ provide promotion opportunities that you can link to businesses promotions.

World Environment Day provides you with an opportunity to promote environmental aspects of your business with a press release, special notice on your counter or even by sponsoring of the planting of some trees at local schools.

20. Use Google.com to check out how popular your website is and how many hits you are getting.

Check out your competitors’ websites for information on pricing, presentation and strategies.

As a research tool, subscribe to ‘Google Alert’ so that you get information alerts in your email about topics that you can use in the promotion of your new business.

The trick is to set a time limit of, say, fifteen minutes at a time as you can soon get caught up exploring the Net.

Don’t linger, just cut and paste the relevant information into your promotions file.

21. Create a strategy for building a data base of customers whom you can regularly contact about every three to four weeks via an email newsletter. Make a printed copy available, which you can give out to customers from the counter or enclose in letters.

The email newsletter is the most effective tactic. It provides the opportunity for low-cost communication with hundreds or thousands of customers. ‘Constant Contact’ is easy and simple to use. It even allows you to track your customers’ interests and concerns without any need for a website. You can have a free sixty day trial of [Constant Contact](#) with up to 100 customers, so that you can learn about the system and see if it suits your small business.

You and the Local Newspaper

Running a small business for the past thirty years, we experienced the ups and downs of a roller coaster in small business. That period saw the greatest changes in technology in living history.

One thing that remained constant in that time is the format of the local paper;

Almost every newspaper had great local pictures on pages one, three and five of local people. They were occasionally bumped off page one by a big headline about the local council, or some politician during election time.

There is, of course, the local business promotion and ads about where you should go when you want a reliable local tradesperson or safe, economical products.

This is the same all over the world from the neighborhoods in New York to the remote towns of Ireland or the smallest country villages in Dorset.

As it has done for so long, the local paper plays a major role within the community today, in both an economic and social sense. It provides a focus for community and business activities.

The local paper has its editorial agenda and fights fiercely for its area, local people and local businesses.

It is the very lifeblood of the local area.

The following are issues that are constantly raised by many people in business about their local paper and some of the issues which

need to be understood to maximize your media coverage. The three major areas are:

- 1. I can't get my story in the local paper**
- 2. How do I make news out of my business?**
- 3. How do I connect with the media?**

'I Can't Get My Story in the Local Paper'

This is a common complaint from many small business people; local councils and even less experienced PR consultants who, from time to time, get frustrated because their story did not make it into print or on to other media.

Newspapers, like all other news outlets, have limited space. Your story needs to beat the myriad of information and, finally, catch the eye of the news editor and journalist. It needs to convince them that it will strongly interest their readers.

So, if your story has not appeared, start to ask yourself why and how can you do better next time?

Look at the basis of the story. Is it interesting to anyone but you? Have you presented the information correctly and in a way that promotes the most interesting angles?

Start from the basic premise that it is your job to present the information in an interesting manner and provide the journalist with all of the most relevant pieces of information.

This does not mean that you have to have your press release professionally written. It does mean that you must clearly think through the information that you prepare, the visual elements that are available and the significance of your release to the local paper and its readers.

Sometimes it is in the Presentation and Timing

A 'My Drain Is Blocked' call to the local editor is unlikely to elicit much enthusiasm from them. But, a comment that "The Blocked Drain is putting ten houses under threat of flooding and could lead to thousands of dollars damage" is perhaps a bit more interesting.

Of course, if it is raining heavily and water is lapping around people's doorways, there is the opportunity for a great picture which always helps.

Timing is crucial. For some unknown reason, many people think that the local paper can immediately respond to any demand and have reporters and photographers at your place instantly. Like all small businesses, they have to plan their production within their existing resources and always have tightly constraining deadlines.

If you are planning to provide a story, then make sure that you contact the paper and get your timing right to provide the best chance possible for your story.

I often tell journalists of coming events well in advance, to provide time for them to organize their schedule, but with an understanding about embargoing the comment until closer to the event.

How Do I Make News out of My Business?

Many people overlook the news in their businesses. In some cases, the advertising representatives assist by suggesting write-ups which result in valuable editorial coverage in local papers.

One problem is that media communication is not in the planning schedule of most businesses. Small business people do not recognize that it can be a valuable component in marketing the company and its activities.

Our advice is that there should be an assessment each month to see if you have anything which is newsworthy; a success story; a milestone for an employee; an apprentice winning an award; an emerging trend in the businesses or industry; opening of a new service or a local community sponsorship.

Some written information on a fax to the paper that briefly outlines the story in about two hundred words as bullet points is a good start.

Keep an eye on your local paper - look for stories that you can tie in a follow-up with a positive mention of your business. This is an important strategy for small businesses. Journalists do not have crystal balls or enough time to always look for or follow up leads from stories.

Letters to the editor should not be overlooked as a way of communicating, especially if the issue is local, or you wish to comment on the paper's coverage of an issue or just put a point of view.

How to Contact Your Local Paper

The press, like any other profession, has its own standards of professionalism and its charter to report news. In local papers, local news is paramount and this is a major advantage for a local business.

Like any other business or community activity, the best programs start with communication.

Find out About Your Local Paper.

- Read it from front to back
- Study how it is laid out
- Look at the type of stories being run most often
- Check out the separate areas such as the editorial, letters to the Editor and special sections such as an arts column
- Look at the by-lines of the journalists
- Make a list of the contact numbers
- Check the advertising areas and look at what other local businesses do.

Some Golden Rules

If you issue a press release, or make a comment, it is your comment - not the journalists. Always think before you speak and carefully pre-plan your comments and think through the ramifications of all your comments.

A lesson that I learned one Sunday morning about thirty years ago is that "I was misquoted" is a sign of lack of planning and discipline.

I was a greenie in the Dandenongs and Yarra Valley in the east of Melbourne and got a phone call on a Friday afternoon from one of the Sunday papers. They asked for a quotable comment on the local Council's plan to build a casino and airport runway at Warburton, alongside the Yarra River so that they could fly in "High Roller" gamblers.

Of course, I was outraged and told the journalist in colorful language what I thought of the proposal. Then, I promptly forgot about the interview until 6.00am on Sunday morning when the local publicly owned broadcaster, A.B.C. News, rang to ask for further comment.

What I had thought would translate into a page ten comment with little general interest, had become a big, bold page three headline, "Councillors are a Bunch of Wankers, Says Greenie". I was sure that I had called them whackers, but the headline was there.

Outrage, nasty telephone calls and legal mumblings ran on for a week or two, but I was buoyed by my bush lawyers' advice from a now-prominent senior council, who said they would not dare take

you to court because they would have to prove that they weren't a bunch of wankers!

If you give any information, make sure it is accurate and correct. Don't waste everyone's time and your credibility by giving false information. Once it is printed, someone is sure to let the paper know that your comment is incorrect and you will have damaged your reputation for all time!

On the Record and Off the Record comments.

This sometimes causes great confusion. If you are going to speak to a journalist and something is off the record, make sure that you point this out at the beginning and not at the end of your interview.

Also, you should be clear in your mind why you are telling the journalist the story, what the point of the story is and how the 'off the record' comment fits into the story.

Always be polite. It is a common courtesy and should be followed, even if you are complaining. Our emotions sometimes get the better of all of us but, if you have a complaint about how you may have been portrayed or quoted, don't immediately jump on the phone.

Think about what has happened and at least work out a position to take. Then you must be polite and talk about it rationally.

Don't try to arrange the photographer's picture.

Photographers from local papers are a patient lot. They have a heavy timetable and are often running between jobs. On many

occasions, They have to employ great diplomacy ad work around 'experts' who want to help them arrange their photos.

The best approach is to provide the photographer with the elements and let them arrange the photograph, as they are well aware of the type of photo which will best demonstrate the story.

It is a good idea to have some good suggestions ready if asked, but that is all that they should be. The simple, blunt message is, "Never invade a photographer's workspace."

My final comment is to take life, and what appears in the news, with a bit of humor. Be prepared, on occasions, to have a bit of a laugh about human frailty which influences us all.

To your success

Ron Smith

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