

The Publicity Hound

Tips, tricks and tools for free (or really cheap) publicity

Issue 5

November/December 1998

Single copy \$10



Time to Deck the Halls with Sizzling Story Ideas

Instead of spending precious time planning the best way to stuff yourself on Thanksgiving Day, you should be crafting a recipe for the perfect story pitch to serve to your local beat reporter.

While your competitors are crawling over each other at the shopping malls in December, you could be sitting in the quiet of a local radio studio, providing a witty interview that will help you sell, sell, sell more of your products and services.

Smart Publicity Hounds kick into high gear during the holidays – and for good reason. The weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day can be painfully slow at newspapers, magazines and TV and radio stations because newsmakers are doing things other than making news.

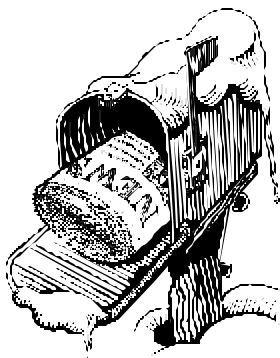
Talk show guests are in short supply. Reporters often find it difficult to track down the people they need to comment on a particular story. And because newspapers sell more ads in December, that means more news pages to fill.

Here are ways your publicity effort can capitalize on the holidays:

- Tie your story idea to Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukah or New Year's.

A company that provides personal shopping services, for example, might offer to do a radio interview on the best ways to keep holiday shopping hassle-free.

- If your company has an unusual Christmas party or tradition, let the media know.
- Write letters to the editor and opinion columns for publication during the weeks immediately before and after Christmas, when submissions usually drop off.
- Call your local newspapers now to see what special sections they have planned during December. Your idea might be a perfect fit. Pitch your idea immediately because these sections are sometimes done weeks in advance. (See Editorial Calendars, Issue 1)
- Stay alert for breaking news stories on which you can provide expert opinion, even if the topic doesn't have to do with the holidays. If a story breaks, call newspapers and TV stations and offer to comment.
- Suggest a story on creative ways your business copes with the holidays.
- Write or call magazine editors, who usually work six months ahead, with story ideas for late spring and early summer.



Please, No Gifts

Puzzled about what to buy the favorite journalist on your holiday list?

Relax. The best gift is no gift. Instead, send a card. Many media outlets have ethics policies prohibiting reporters from accepting items of value. Even those that don't are clamping down on freebies. You'd be surprised how many newspaper staffs cart boxes of candy, tins of

popcorn and other gifts to nearby nursing homes during the holidays.

Holiday greeting cards – to a news staff or an individual reporter or editor – are perfectly acceptable, however. If you aren't sure about what media people can and cannot accept, call and ask. Doesn't it feel great scratching somebody off your list?

Where to Start Your Publicity Effort



“Don't wait to pitch ideas. Call your media contact as early as possible.”

- Joan Stewart
Publisher,
The Publicity Hound

If you finish reading an issue of The Publicity Hound and find yourself frustrated because you don't know where to start, you're in good company.

Subscriber and friend Joe Schlidt of Milwaukee, a business planning consultant with M&I Bank and the owner of Positive Impact, Inc. which provides presentations on marketing and motivation, was lamenting the other day that he discovers so many great tips in this newsletter that “sometimes I don't know what to do first.” Occasionally, people who attend my workshop called “Savvy Media Relations – How to Get Free Print Space and Air Time” make similar comments.

To Joe and others like him, a few suggestions:

- Use a highlighter to note the ideas that best fit your particular needs. If you don't mark it, you might forget it.
- When you see a seasonal story idea to add to your publicity efforts, first call the media outlet where you want the story printed or broadcast. Ask for the name of the reporter who covers your industry, or the assignment editor or your key contact. Add the name and phone number to your “to do” list.
- Don't wait to pitch ideas. Call your media

contact as early as possible. If it's too early, they'll tell you when to call back. Remember that some publications work weeks or months in advance.

- Looking for a list of local media contacts? Larger chambers of commerce often supply that information. Or check the Yellow Pages or search the Internet.
- If you see something you want to buy on the Help for Hounds resource page of this newsletter, file the telephone number in your contact planner or in your daybook. Add the e-mail address to your address book.
- File the newsletter. A three-ring binder works best. From time to time, I refer to back issues where you can find more information about a particular topic.
- If you're still perplexed, I'm available to subscribers by phone, fax or e-mail. (See Page 6.)
- What? You don't subscribe??? Go directly to Page 6 where you'll find a subscription form.
- Finally, a request. If you have a success story about your own publicity effort you would like to share, let me know. Many of the best ideas come from readers and those who attend my workshops, and I'll share them here.

Mingle with the Media

If you're in a business group or service club that's hosting someone from the media as the guest speaker, be sure you attend the event. It can be a great chance to get a few minutes of personal time with a publisher, editor, reporter or news director.

But don't just show up. Try to sit next to the media guest, or at the same table. Make small talk. Exchange business cards. Explain who you are and what you do. Ask if you can make a follow-up phone call to talk about ways they can use you as a resource.

If you're the program planner, think of a clever way your members can let the media person know about the products or services they sell.

(See Issue 2, How to Schmooze with Reporters)

Paws for a Laugh

Seen on actual consumer product packages:

On a bag of JONNY CAT cat litter – “JONNY CAT is the best value for your money. A 20-pound bag of JONNY CAT contains 25% more litter than 16-pound bags and 43% more than 14-pound bags!”

From a kid's Superman costume for Halloween (stitched into the cape's tag) – “Warning: Use of This Device Does Not Enable Wearer To Fly.”

From a Pop-Tart box – “Warning: Pastry Filling May Be Hot When Heated.”

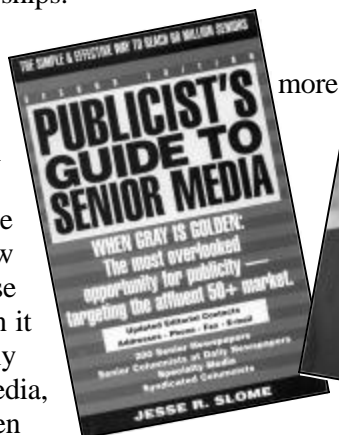
Reprinted from MediaProfessional electronic newsletter.

Targeting the Affluent 55+ Market

By Jesse R. Slome

Don't overlook the incredible opportunity to reach more than 68 million seniors through publicity in the hundreds of senior-oriented newspapers across the country. While most of these publications are offered free of charge, a number have significant circulation and devoted readerships.

Publicity in senior media is often easily achieved than in mainstream print media – particularly because few publicists know about many of these publications. When it comes to effectively targeting senior media, there are five golden rules we've learned in our work with editors at these publications.



more

4. Offer something for free. Seniors love getting something for nothing – and these publications want to keep their readers happy. Offers of free booklets are valued. Include both a toll-free number and a mailing address since many seniors prefer to write, avoiding the risk of having to speak with a salesperson.

5. Educate. Seniors respond well to educationally focused information, in part because they've experienced all forms of marketing and are a bit jaded. Remember that this is the generation that has seen 101 versions of “new and improved” laundry detergent. Avoid

such references in your press material. A pharmaceutical company wanting to promote a particular medication developed a strategy of educating seniors about “medication management.”

1. Throw out your stereotypes of seniors. These are highly active adults. Editors complain about receiving publicity material promoting vacation tours for those with disabilities. Rather, they write for those who want to go walking, hiking or white water rafting.
2. Good publicity photos of seniors are rare. So you'll improve your chances if you send a good photo. Shots depicting silver-haired women in those ubiquitous yellow sweaters or smiling men behind the wheel of a golf cart will rarely make it into print.
3. Keep it brief. Most of these publications are small businesses surviving on ad dollars. They run few longer features but often need small fillers.

Jesse R. Slome is president of PromoWorks, a public relations agency with special expertise in marketing to seniors. The agency recently published the second edition of the “Publicist's Guide To Senior Media” (\$34.95 includes shipping), a comprehensive directory of U.S.-based senior publications. Slome, who has more than 20 years of public relations experience, can be reached at 4165 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 335, Westlake Village, CA 91362. Call 805-379-3910. Fax at 805-379-1029. Visit their Web site at www.promoworksnow.com. Checks only; no

When Gray is Golden

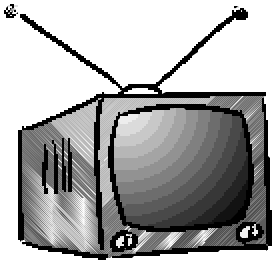
More Great Tips from Jesse:

- Focus on a niche market. Create your own unique advantage.
- Identify niche media, ones overlooked by your advertising.
- Conduct a survey.
- Create an information bureau.
- Create an awards competition.
- Hire a spokesperson.
- Create a tie-in with another organization.
- Sponsor an “undiscovered” sporting event.

TV on a Low Budget

In most cities, it's common for TV to be too expensive for small business advertising.

Here are some suggestions from marketing consultant Kevin Nunley to take the bite out of high-priced television ad rates.



- Local television's shining star is their nightly newscast. Americans consistently rank it as the most important source of news – over and above newspapers, magazines and radio.
- Local TV news is a station's "cash cow." Ad rates are very high and usually out of reach for all but car dealerships and furniture store chains. Instead, look for advertising on shows at different times of the day.
- Ask about ad rates for 10-second commercials. These short ads have almost as much advertising power as a 30-second commercial. But their cost is far, far lower.
- Do you have a service or product that you can trade for TV advertising? TV executives remind me that many like to trade when possible.
- Remember that cable TV is in 60 to 80 percent of homes. Because cable has so many channels available, ad rates are much lower.

Kevin Nunley supplies marketing advice and copywriting. Ask for his free marketing report at DrNunley@aol.com or call 801-253-4536. Or visit his website at <http://www.DrNunley.com>.

Visit Magazine Websites

If you want to be featured in a certain magazine, check to see if it has a website.

Websites are also a good place to find writer's guidelines if you're interested in writing a story for the publication. Save the price of a long distance call by e-mailing the editors with a story idea, or submit a letter to the editor online.

Writer's Digest, the world's largest-circulation magazine for writers, and Writer's Market, the annual "bible" for writers seeking to publish

their work, have combined to create a website at <http://www.writersmarket.com>. You'll find, among other things, a searchable database of more than 1,000 books and magazines, including some that have guidelines for writers.

Journal Adds Section for Older Executives

If you're an expert on a topic that would appeal to executives 55 and older, try pitching your expertise to the Wall Street Journal. The newspaper now has a quarterly section aimed at over-55 execs. Topics include retirement, retirement planning, taxes and financial matters, estate planning, travel, health and fitness. Editor is Glenn Ruffenach, Atlanta Bureau, 303 Peachtree Street N.E. Atlanta, GA, 30308. Call 404-865-4354. Fax 404-865-4389. E-mail at Glenn.Ruffenach@news.wsj.com. He prefers you pitch ideas via fax.

Just for Kids

The town of Sykesville, Maryland provides its younger residents with their own newsletter, "Kids News," a supplement to the official newsletter. Each issue is filled with fun activities, stories, jokes, recipes and even an "Ask the Mayor" column, where kids can write and ask the mayor questions about the town and what it's like being the mayor. If your company, school or non-profit has a newsletter, consider setting aside a special section especially for children of your employees or customers.

Phone Cards

Looking for a clever way to stay in touch with past customers? Consider sending pre-paid phone cards. You can buy 500 10-minute cards for about \$1,000. The price includes your logo printed on the front and a recorded message.

Phone cards create high perceived value in the customer's mind. They're useful and easy to use. For more information, call your favorite specialty advertising firm.

How I Caught USA Today's Attention

Kimberly Stansell is founder of Research Done Write!, a Los Angeles-based consulting and training firm specializing in workshops and seminars for entrepreneurs and working women. Her books include "Bootstrapper's Success Secrets: 151 Tactics for Building Your Business on a Shoestring Budget" (Career Press, \$13.99, 800-CAREER-1), and the upcoming "Witty Workin' Woman™: A Problem-Solving Guide for Professional Women." Kimberly can be reached at 310-568-9861 or KmberlyNLA@hotmail.com.

By Kimberly Stansell

"Publicize or perish." That's my reality (and yours too), if I want my books and newsletters to be a "true" profit center for my business. My media marketing tactics run the gamut from clever press releases, letters to the editor to piggybacking onto holidays and special events. One of my most memorable placements, though, was getting USA Today to help spread my bootstrappin' message.

Scores of people in this country are opting to create jobs and other moneymaking opportunities for themselves using little or no money. I had a collection of statistics and true life stories that I believed would be a useful and interesting story for a newspaper to feature.

Simultaneously, I was helping a corporate client prepare for an upcoming trade show.

Part of the project included coordinating media activities that were taking place during the event. Imagine my delight when I discovered a reporter from USA Today was on the list. After a few coordination conversations, we had developed a rapport. And in our last conversation, I subtly asked him who handled the small-business beat for the newspaper. He gladly pointed me in the right direction.

Armed with my article idea, I called the reporter and was greeted by a gruff personality. Rather than be intimidated, I used my gatekeeper's name and asked if she had a moment to listen to a story idea. She told me I had 30 seconds. I succinctly went into my pitch. She asked me to go on, and we engaged in a 30-minute conversation. She asked me to fax some follow up information and explained that she would get back to me shortly. About four weeks later, she called me again to do a complete interview.

Besides being interviewed, I provided her with statistics, in-house resources and other interview candidates. My efforts resulted in being a part of a full-page feature: "Success of four who picked themselves up by their BOOTSTRAPS." My bootstrappin' quotes were prominently included along with my photo and information about my product line. This placement was the beginning of a working relationship with the reporter until she left the paper recently.

Next go round: Get them to do a follow-up story. I'll be sure to let you know how I fare!

How They Did It



“I called the reporter and was greeted by a gruff personality. Rather than be intimidated, I used my gatekeeper's name and asked her if she had a moment to listen to my story idea.”

- Kimberly Stansell

Tips from Kimberly:

1. Create a timely and useful story idea, which can be substantiated with intriguing statistics, sources and real-life examples.
2. Track down the appropriate reporter for your story. Don't be afraid to turn to contacts inside or outside a media outlet for a referral and ask, "Who covers _____ at USA Today?" (See Who's Who at USA Today?, Issue 1)
3. Practice how you'll verbally pitch the idea. Create a succinct version as well as a more detailed one.
4. Know media protocol. First ask whether the reporter has time to talk, and if not, ask when you may call back.
5. Line up a list of reliable, knowledgeable and lively interview candidates. Make sure you've pre-screened the people so that you don't end up wasting a reporter's time with some duds.

Signature Files Spread the Word

Those identifier lines attached to the end of e-mail messages are one of the quickest, cheapest and most effortless ways of letting people know who you are, what you do and how you can help them. If you're e-mailing to the media, the information is particularly helpful because busy reporters who want to call you don't have to search for a phone book. Your number is right there.

Signature files also save you hours of time because you don't have to write your address, phone and fax numbers and other pertinent information repeatedly. Simply create your signature file, plug in the information you want, and off it goes to every person who receives your e-mail.

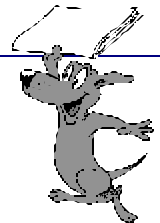
Some tips about signature files:

- Check the e-mail software you are using. There should be an option under Tools for "create signature file."
- Six lines maximum.
- Include your name, company name, address, phone and fax numbers and URL of your website. Take one or two more lines to include a tagline related to your business.
- Your signature file should provide at least one or two strong reasons for people to want to visit your site. Include a special offer or a sentence or two about what they get if they visit.
- When listing website addresses, include http:// in the URL. Most new e-mail programs will automatically create a link so that the address can be accessed from within the e-mail document.
- Always update your signature file.
- If your e-mail software allows it, consider two or more signatures if you have more than one business. Or perhaps you'd like one signature for business and another for your family and friends.

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 The Publicity Hound is published bi-monthly by Joan Stewart, The Summit Group, LLC, 3930 Highway O, Saukville, WI 53080
 Phone: 414-284-7451, E-mail: jstewart@execpc.com
 Direct all correspondence and subscriptions to address above.

Annual subscription: \$49.95 (U.S. only). Price good through December 31, 1998 ©Copyright 1998 The Summit Group, LLC. All rights reserved.
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Help for Hounds

Science Reporters Galore

www.eurekalert.org

If you're pitching story ideas about science, medicine or technology, this site is a gold mine. You'll find hundreds of broadcast outlets, commercial magazines, newspapers and publications from colleges, universities or institutes that might be interested in your story. Valuable links, including the site for the Society of Environmental Journalists. More than 1,600 reporters subscribe to this service. But it's free to you if all you want are valuable media contacts.

Travel Writers' Directory

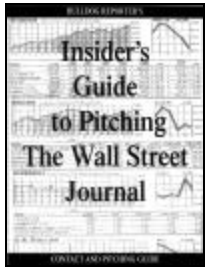
www.satw.org.

Trying to lure travel writers to your business or community? The Society of American Travel Writers' 1998 membership directory includes addresses, faxes and phone numbers for more than 1,000 travel writers in the U.S. and Canada. Available in book (\$95) and diskette form (\$140 for Windows version and \$135 for Macintosh). Get book and diskette for \$225 for Windows version and \$215 for Macintosh, including shipping, by calling SATW's headquarters at 919-787-5181. Ask for Kim or Sarah. Credit cards accepted. Fax: 919-787-4916. Write SATW, Lake Boone Trail, Suite 201, Raleigh, NC 27607.

Insider's Guide to Pitching

The Wall Street Journal

No other media outlet carries as much clout in the business world as The Wall Street Journal. Narrowly pitching your idea is the secret of getting their attention. Bulldog



Reporter, a media placement newsletter for public relations professionals, has bundled more than 40 stories filled with tips on how to get into the WSJ into a 43-page book.

Includes a comprehensive chart of contacts, phone

numbers and some e-mail addresses. Cost is \$99, including shipping. Visa/MC/AmEx accepted. Published by Infocom Group, 5900 Hollis St., Suite R2, Emeryville, CA 94608-

The West Coast PR Newsletter

Call for your free copy of this bi-monthly subscription newsletter (\$79 yr.) that explains the easy ways to make West Coast media contacts. Interviews with journalists/PR pros. Subscribers get a free copy of the 1998 Publicist's Guide to Senior Media. (See "Targeting the Affluent 55+ Market" on Page 3). Call the toll-free hotline at 888-927-7639.

Newsletter Nameplate

Latin American Media Directory

Stay on top of who's who in the rapidly growing segment of the Latin America news media. This book lists Spanish and Portuguese news media in the U.S., Canada and Latin America. More than 5,000 listings.



Includes e-mail addresses.

Soft-cover book is \$87. Buy the book and get the data on a 3.5-inch disk. Directory and disk \$115. International Media Center, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Florida International University,

Academic I-162, North Miami, FL 33181. Call 305-919-5672. Fax at 305-919-5498. Make checks payable to the International

Newsletter editors, designers or contributors can receive three back issues of Newsletter Nameplate free. This great 8-page publication pokes fun at itself while delivering sage advice on how to write, publish and design newsletters. Review the back issues and fill out a form at www.ruddle.com/r-fresub.html, then send a copy of your newsletter to Ruddle Creative in San Jose, CA. (See Web site for address.)

Cool Web Sites



Books, Catalogs, Resources

Freebies

Advice From:



Andrea Kay

Workplace Issues Columnist & Author,

Andrea writes a weekly column that deals with workplace issues: how to get along with a boss or co-workers, how to get a job or figure out what you want to do, balancing work and home, problems managers face, harassment, dual couple businesses, dating co-workers, job-hunting etiquette.

Tips from Andrea:

- I want fresh, current, provocative ideas. Books and articles I refer to cover concrete, meaty, provocative discussions on such subjects as how to speak up at work, specific surveys or proven data about topics like discrimination and harassment, personality tests, entrepreneurial couples, managers and control, associations to help disabled workers, databases helpful to job hunters, ethics in the workplace and workplace trends. I'm not interested in pitches about helping people figure out what they want to be when they grow up.
- Send tips that are unique and useful to job-hunters and people who work.

- If your book has a specific section that deals with my topics and interests, tell me in a note which specifies those pages.
- Pitch ideas by e-mail only at askandrea@fuse.net. Once you are absolutely sure your book fits my criteria (and most do not), send a news release and a book to: PO Box 6834, Cincinnati, OH 45206. Do not call or fax or write lectures about your subject and why I should be interested.

Andrea's Pet Peeves: People who think my job is to promote their book or speaking career. That's their job. People who call and leave me a message saying "How do I get in your column?" If that's your goal, you're missing the point of why someone like me would incorporate something you have to offer, which is to supply my readers with relevant, fresh information they can apply to their lives and careers.

Seasonal Story Ideas

Hospitals, clinics and medical schools can offer the media a list of experts to pass along helpful tips on how to avoid getting colds or flu.

Tie into Election Day on Nov. 3.

The day after Thanksgiving is the busiest retail day of the year. Explain clever ways your store is bracing for the onslaught of customers.



Cooking schools, food manufacturers and weight-loss clinics can pitch ideas to food editors on healthy ways to prepare the Thanksgiving feast. Also provide sources for the traditional day-after-Thanksgiving weight loss story.

Home care providers can offer tips and commentary from their experts during National Home Care Week Nov. 29 to Dec. 5.

If you're a non-profit agency, encourage people to donate holiday gifts they don't want or can't use and take a tax write-off. The media often do after-Christmas stories about ghastly gifts.



December is the month to report on the "Top 10 (fill in the blank) of the Year." Survey your customers or employees. Tabulate the results and send out a news release. A hardware store chain, for example, might report on the 10 top home remodeling projects for do-it-yourselfers.

Accountants and those who prepare tax returns can provide tips for taxpayers, from the best way to keep their records to changes in tax laws that will affect 1998 returns.