

# What to do, and avoid, to get your news in print

*Editor's note: This is the second of a three-part series on marketing your business.*

"Did you get my fax?"  
"I need publicity. Would you write about my company?"  
"The Herald just wrote about my business. Why hasn't the Sun-Sentinel?"

Small businesses — and even some public relations firms — seem to have no idea how to effectively approach the media.

Good public relations practices can be a boost to your business. Poor public relations can do more harm than good.

Make a direct pitch to a reporter "only if you have something that's very, very unique. If not, send them a press release," advises Debbie Mason, owner of Mason Strategic Communications in Fort Lauderdale.

Mason said if you reach the appropriate journalist on the

phone, ask, "Is now a good time to talk?" If so, be concise. Or leave a focused message on the reporter's phone mail: "If they're interested, they'll call you back," she said.

"The most aggravating thing for them are the people who call 19 times," Mason said.

Hear! Hear!

I'm often asked by businesses how they can get an article about their company in the newspaper. To get right to the heart of why some company news ends up in the paper and others in the trash can, I asked the Sun-Sentinel's business news staff for input.

Here's what bugs them most about the daily calls and mail they get from companies or public relations professionals:

- Calling late in the day when reporters are on deadline.

- Delivering a long pitch on the phone before sending information.

- Leaving out important details or even contacts in a press release.

- Issuing a breaking news release and naming a contact person who is not available for comment that day.

- Constantly calling to verify who received a fax or to ask when a story will run.

- Calling every editor and reporter at random.

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- Disappearing when there is bad news involving the company.

- Pitching a story with no local angle. "They don't read the publications they target," one reporter said.

How to be more effective in getting your news in the paper:

- Find the reporter who covers your industry and try to build a professional relationship.

- Make sure the chief executive is available in good times and in bad. Even if he doesn't want to comment, call back promptly to say so.

"There are going to be some things that come up that are not going to be positive. When you have an established relationship with a reporter, you can present your side and it is heard," said Nancy Schubert, president of the Public Relations Society of America's Gulfstream chapter.

- Provide the facts simply, concisely and completely.

- Write a press release to fit the publication's format. If you have a new business product, for example, write a paragraph about it and send it to the attention of the person who compiles that listing.

- Forget about the fancy pitch or attention-grabbing goodies (we give them to charity). Just give us the facts in simple, clear form.

- Be available to answer questions at a moment's notice — especially on a day when there is breaking news that involved your company or industry.

But don't feel pressured to answer immediately if you don't know the facts. Schubert said less media-savvy business people sometimes give wrong information because they get nervous and answer off the cuff.

"It's OK to say, 'I'll find out and get back to you,'" she said.

- Recognize that in a competitive media market like South Florida that you can't offer every news medium the same story at the same time. Exclusivity counts.

- Don't be impatient. Sometimes reporters (and especially columnists) hang on to releases and use the information when appropriate.

*Business Strategies appears on Fridays. If you have comments on or ideas for the column, call Marcia H. Pounds at 561-243-6650 or e-mail her at (marciabiz@aol.com). For information about starting a business, go to the Sun-Sentinel Digital Edition (www.sun-sentinel.com/money/smallbiz) or key word DEMONEY on America Online.*