

HOW TO LEVERAGE MEDIA COVERAGE AT YOUR NEXT TRADE SHOW

By Karen Friedman

When it comes to promoting, selling, or creating awareness of your product or service, there's practically no such thing as receiving TOO much publicity! So, if you happen to land some coveted floor space at a well attended industry trade show, media opportunity might be yours for the taking. The question of course is---how do you attract that sought after coverage and how do you make it work to your advantage?

For starters, don't be fooled by thinking attracting coverage and receiving coverage is equal. Attracting coverage at many trade shows is actually the easy part, especially if the venue, like the Philadelphia Flower Show is a hometown favorite that appeals to thousands of people. But just because reporters are floating about, doesn't mean they'll float your way.

Generally, most reporters, especially broadcast reporters, who cover trade shows, have little, if any direction. Assignment editors looking for time and space to fill, typically point reporters in the direction of the venue with seemingly explicit instructions such as "See what you can come up with" or "Maybe you can find something new and interesting." Depending on the time of year, reporters are frequently charged to tie their reports into a holiday or season. For example, if a trade show sports jewelry, the reporter might be assigned a story on what types of jewels people are buying each other this holiday season. If the floor features the latest in high-tech gadgets, reporters will be looking for the newest or most unique item that their readers haven't read about before.

Edward Segal, PR guru and noted author of *How To Get Your Fifteen Minutes of Fame and More*, says while trade shows are some of the best opportunities for leveraging coverage, there is so much competition that it's increasingly difficult to stand out. He advises people to: "stop chest thumping and start realizing that reporters don't care about you...they only care about how your product or service helps their audience."

But, there are ways to generate the ink you think your company, product or spokesperson deserves.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL SHOW TIME

Organizers plan in advance and so should you. If you have a cool gadget, interactive media display, or plan to announce a new product, let organizers

know in advance. When a reporter pops in and is looking for something visual or innovative, they might point the person in your direction.

REPORTERS ARE NOT EASILY IMPRESSED

Reformatted brochures or slick annual reports do not tell your story in a reporter friendly format. However, your press kit does not need to arrive with brimming balloons and overflowing beach balls that get batted around the newsroom and will not land you coverage. Your kit should tell your story, provide key information and include your booth number, media contacts and phone numbers.

THINK BENEFITS

Not every trade show is a media magnet. For example, new fillings on display at the dental convention might interest an industry publication, but not generate much interest among mainstream media. Yet, if the latest in dental needles was completely pain free or a new brand of toothpaste really could wipe out cavities forever, your pitch will likely score more attention.

VICTORY WITH VISUALS

Reporters need visuals. Put photographs, displays or posters up at your booth so they can see what you're talking about. If you're handing out photos, make sure they are high resolution and available in various formats and can be accessed on your company website for reprint. Include short captions and photographer credits. If a reporter is attracted to your booth, visuals increase attention and provide a backdrop for interviews.

Too often however, public relations efforts focus very heavily on capturing media attention and fail to spend critical time understanding how to benefit from their fifteen minutes of fame. As a reporter, I've walked away from many a trade show staffer who talked about his company and could not simply explain how his product would benefit or improve the lives of my viewers.

For example, do you know what "multiple, heterogeneous operating system versatility" is? I didn't think so. I didn't know either. But not too long ago I worked with an executive who literally described his company's product in those exact words. That may work for an engineering magazine, but drowning reporters in jargon is a publicity death sentence. If the executive said:
" Because we can securely handle thousands of data transactions on a single server, our customers benefit from incredible computing power, more efficiency,

reduced costs and can spend more time concentrating on their business”, he’d have a better chance of generating interest.

By failing to recognize the importance of training staffers and spokespeople, organizations risk losing an opportunity to leverage coverage. A good spokesperson understands how quickly and effectively to position his product or company. A bad spokesperson can sabotage a multi-million dollar public relations campaign in a matter of seconds.

MEDIA TRAINING

If your staffers aren’t media trained, keep them away from the trade show. They need to know what reporters want, dos and don’ts of interviewing and how to develop a short attention grabbing description that they can share with almost any audience. Don’t refer the reporter to a PR person back at the office. If they walk away, chances are, they’re gone for good.

FOLLOW UP

Don’t assume the reporter will call you to follow up. Give them a couple of days and then call to find out if they need additional information, pictures or interviews. Reporters hate to admit this, but the easier you make their job, the happier they are.

Finally, ask the right questions. Take a moment to find out who you’re talking to, what they cover and what would interest their readers or listeners. Then, try to become one of those readers and visualize what you would want to read about if you were them. When you learn to speak from an audience’s perspective, you will build credibility and position yourself as someone who gets it. By doing that, you are positioning yourself as a resource, building relationships and opening opportunities for the reporter to call you in the future. That’s what leveraging is all about.

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