



Healthcare Marketing

Getting 'ink' as an expert media resource

A critical news story about your industry niche breaks, and in the middle of the article is a comment from your top competitor. Why did the reporter call them, and not you? You're reading the latest trend story on industry developments, and once again the reporter has gone to Joe Schmoe for his opinion. Why don't those guys ever call me, you think, I know three times what Joe does about this subject.

How can you become recognized by the media as an "expert resource" - and why would you want this role? Whenever you are quoted in a news or feature article, you bask in the halo effect of something called "implied editorial credibility." As news readers, we automatically make the assumption that someone quoted in print must know something - otherwise, why are they being consulted? (After digesting the content of the comment, we may disagree - but that is another story).

If you are serious about a media relations program, making the commitment to become an expert media resource can exponentially increase the amount of the exposure you obtain.

Many executives think of PR primarily in terms of news releases about their organization or company and its products and services. News releases contribute to only one type of reporting that is covered primarily in the "trade" press - those media that cover a specific industry, the local media in the community where the company is located, and if it is a big enough story, in the regional or national business media. However, by far the greatest amount of news and feature reporting covers major stories and big picture trends and analysis. It's about players that are so big they effect everybody, or it's the "here's what's happening in the world and what you can do about it" variety.

Think about it - do you want to pick up a newspaper or magazine and read a re-hash of some other company's press release? Not likely. Our time is limited and we need information that's meaningful and important, right now.

Besides, most of us see today's news releases on our electronic "news pages." Print media, especially, recognizes that they need to add considerable value to their coverage to compete with the instantaneous electronic news to which we have become accustomed. To do this, they are becoming more analytical, more original, and more hard-hitting in their editorial content - in the process creating more opportunities to provide cogent opinions from experts like you.

In summary, the "why's" of becoming an expert are: credibility, visibility, and increased exposure. Now, how does one get into the contact files of reporters and editors as an expert resource?

1. **Offer credibility.** How does one get credibility? There are many sources. It could be due to your years of experience in an industry, the position you hold

within an organization or company, or as a "survivor" of a major crisis or business challenge. Other sources of credibility include: a position with a trade or professional association, authorship of a book, white paper, or series of articles, or frequent public speaking engagements.

2. **Communicate a "big picture" perspective.** An expert resource must be able to communicate a perspective that is valuable to the story. What looks easy in a television sound bite, for example, is most often the product of considerable analysis, writing and re-writing, and rehearsal. This communication ability starts with an understanding of the situation and the issues - in short, having a vision and a business strategy that prepares you to comment on the big picture. Not, "we have a product that helps with that problem," but "This is a major problem for our industry for three reasons, which are And what needs to be done is" Or: "When this happens, valuable resources are wasted that should be used to provide needed healthcare. What needs to be done to prevent this from happening again is"

Rarely will the "expert resource" interview be an opportunity for you to give your company or your product's pitch. The marketing impact will be in the your identification as an expert, and your name, title, and company that will appear in the attribution.

Occasionally, the story may be about the misfortunes of a competitor. If you are consulted for comment on such a story, do your best to resist the temptation to gloat in the form of a detailed analysis of what they did wrong and how you are doing it right. Take the high road - look at the market and industry forces that are at work, what the needs of consumers are that must be met, and point out what all companies in that space need to do to be successful and to meet these consumer or market needs. Readers will get the point without finger pointing.

3. **Be available and be prepared.** This is much easier than it sounds. Reporters often have tight deadlines, needing comments within a few hours. When a reporter is looking for a second or third source for a story with a tight deadline, he or she may need to send out queries to several prospects and do the interview with the first one that responds. Even if your schedule is horrendous, a request to "do the interview next week," will likely result in a lost opportunity. The logistics rarely allow for fitting these opportunities neatly into your schedule.

Even though immediate response is the name of the media game, you should never go into any interview unprepared. Always take the time to write down the three main points you want to make and keep it in front of you during the interview. This way, you will not forget and will have an aid to come back to if the interview goes in directions away from your message. Also, if you are not fully up to speed on the situation being written about, do your homework first - check the Internet for the latest news release. In some cases, the reporter may have advance information that is not yet available, and he or she may need to brief you on what they know so that you can comment.

4. **Discreetly promote your availability as an expert.** How can you communicate your availability and your expertise? To ensure that you are not

in a position of having to blow your own horn, entrust your PR agency or PR manager with this responsibility. They can list you in online media resource databases, for example, put out releases on your speaking engagements, and notify media of your availability and credibility when a major story is breaking. They - and you - should watch for emerging issues in the media - for example, the explosion in available generic drugs, the use of hand-held devices by physicians, the national awareness and concern about medical errors - that are relevant to your company's mission. Then, they can help you analyze and formulate what you can add to stories on these topics.

Your company's website is another means by which your qualifications can be presented. Most reporters, when researching a topic, hit the Internet first. Your website should be current, meaty in content, and easy to navigate. You can raise your profile by seeking opportunities to write articles for trade publications, to speak to industry associations, to contribute to books, and to serve in official positions with your professional associations.

When all is said and done, the most important factor that can help you achieve the status of "expert resource" is having a pertinent, original perspective. Style helps, but it is no substitute for content. Making the extra effort to be a substantive and accessible resource to the media will be worthwhile when you see your name and quote in the story - instead of your competitor.

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