



## Healthcare Marketing

### Resolved for this New Year: Get more and better PR

Have you ever opened up the newspaper or a trade publication to read yet another story about your competition and thought, "Why isn't the media interviewing US instead?"

While there are no rules to follow to make sure you are included in every story in print, on air or online that you think you should be in, there are many ways to improve the quality and quantity of media coverage that you and your company receive. At this time of year, millions of people are making resolutions to change their lives - why not make some promises to yourself that will make this your best year for public relations?

**Resolution # 1:** I will set quantifiable goals for the media coverage I want to receive this year. What major stories are coming up that could potentially get national play? Which will be of interest in the trade press? What media do I want to be in? How much coverage is realistic and how often? What are my top five media to reach each of my target audiences?

**Resolution # 2:** I will recognize that to achieve these results will take an investment of my time, as well as resources. The saying that "Be careful what you wish for because you might get it" is certainly true of attaining your goals in PR. Media relations is time-intensive. Topics must be researched, interviews planned and rehearsed, media contacted and cultivated. Even with a fully staffed PR department, the senior executives must dedicate some time to the media relations function. Often this time is not planned - interview requests come during budgeting season or just before that big client meeting. Somehow, flexibility and focus must be dedicated to take advantage of these media opportunities.

**Resolution # 3:** I will recognize that the media covers news, not companies. Companies are reported about when they make news and when their activities influence others. I'll change my thinking from "me-me-me-we-we-we" to "who else is impacted, how, and how much" when thinking about the potential of company news.

**Resolution # 4:** If we don't have a crisis communication plan, we will have one by January 31, 2001.

**Resolution # 5:** I will do interviews keeping in mind that this is a conduit to speak to the readers/listeners. The interview is not a test to see if every question can be answered correctly. It's an opportunity to announce news, communicate a perspective and voice an opinion.

**Resolution # 6:** I will rehearse key questions until I have stricken "jargon" expressions from my comments and replaced them with understandable English. When rehearsing for an interview, give comments the cocktail test: If you were at a cocktail party and used this expression, would people know what you meant? And

no, this is not about "dumbing it down." It's about communicating - about not placing roadblocks or barriers to communication with very busy people whom you want to hear what you are saying.

**Resolution # 7:** I will analyze our public pronouncements from the perspective of the person scrolling through his/her Internet newspaper or reading the newspaper on the train to work. In addition to being timely and accurate, news should be INTERESTING. What is it about your "story" that will grab the reader - make them understand the importance and the excitement you feel. Sometimes you have to go two or three levels beyond the first answer to find the real "hook" of the story.

**Resolution # 8:** I will not let PR materials sit on my desk for weeks before I have time to look at them. One sure way to kill the impact of a press release is to sit on the information. It is not uncommon for releases to be in a review process for months, especially if two companies are making a joint announcement or if one company is announcing a deal with another and they need their client's approval on the release. Requiring multiple approvals is a fact of life, and this process must be factored into the timeline for producing the release. However, too often a key person is unable to find the time to look at the material. The entire process is stalled waiting for that person's feedback. Unfortunately, the stalled release can lose its impetus and never see the light of day. OR, the competition takes advantage of your tortoise-like pace to beat you to the presses. If you truly don't have time, delegate this task to an appropriate alternative review.

**Resolution # 9:** I will be open to interviews about topics that are not necessarily about my company or my products. Too often, media relations becomes synonymous with "product publicity," overlooking the fact the media covers news, not companies. The people who are most often interviewed in the press are those who have something timely, interesting and pertinent to say about the topics that impact their industry. For example, a company offering health insurance plans can express an opinion about the hot new trend of defined contributions - an employer giving their employees a lump sum to shop for their own health benefits. A technology company developing software for medical applications must deal with the issue of the confidentiality of medical data. Companies providing pharmacy, staffing or patient care services must address the need to reduce errors in care delivery. Positioning your firm or story on a key and topical issue will get considerably more attention than just being available to talk about the company's products.

**Resolution #10:** I will not give any interviews without having defined my three key points (in simple English) and will keep them in writing in front of me while I do the interview. Many a PR professional has been driven to despair after setting up a critical interview only to have the interview candidate distracted, lost in minutiae instead of painting the big picture, undecipherable because of the overuse of industry jargon or just plain dull. The result is that the interview information may be used sparingly or not at all, or it may be misunderstood and, unintentionally, misrepresented.

Go ahead, come up with your own resolutions to make 2001 truly a "headline" year for your organization.

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