

WHITE PAPER

A REPORT TO THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ABOUT PRODUCT PUBLICITY

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Submitted by:

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Q: WHY SHOULD I USE PRODUCT PUBLICITY?

A: This white paper tells why publicity is one of the most powerful communications tools available for disseminating information about your company, its products and its people.

It explains how a planned program of publicity will advance your company's marketing objectives.

It shows how publicity – in experienced hands – pays off in measurable results.

It includes tips on measuring effectiveness of a publicity program.

It covers ways to get added mileage from published material.

And it talks about economics – and what you should expect to get from your investment.

Q: HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE PRODUCT PUBLICITY?

A: Product publicity is the communications technique that helps promote the sale of your company's products and services by means of the editorial and news sections of the media.

For the most part, we shall deal here with the publicizing of products and services whose primary markets are business and professional organizations.

The target audiences in any case are those people who, as part of their job, directly influence the purchase of products and services.

And the vehicles used to deliver the message, for the most part, are the business, professional and trade publications these people read.

Not that the mass coverage media are ignored. Every buyer and specifier in the business is also a consumer in private life. When the opportunities for gaining exposure in consumer media present themselves, they should obviously and eagerly be capitalized upon. But even there, the goal more often is to reach those segments within the mass audience who have a say in the purchase of what a company has to offer.

Q: WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF PUBLICITY?

A: There are five main advantages:

Believability

This is a unique advantage over other forms of marketing communications. Appearance of the desired message on the editorial pages carries with it the implied third-party endorsement of the editor – whose job is to select only the most useful, credible and interesting information for his/her publication's readers.

Economy

Because of its relatively low cost, publicity can be used to cover a wider range of subjects reaching a broader segment of the marketplace than the usual advertising budget will allow. Said another way, publicity makes it economically feasible to broaden the scope of your message and the coverage of your markets – two points that deserve further comment.

Scope

Publicity makes it practical to promote non-advertised products, while giving an additional boost to those that are advertised. It also provides a vehicle for conveying information about the company and the people behind the products.

Extensive Coverage

There are many worthwhile media beyond those in which a company can afford to advertise. Publicity can be used to gain exposure in these media, reaching various decision makers in all markets that are important today, as well as those that may be important in the future.

Flexibility

The thrust of the publicity program can be shifted as desired, to aid in furthering new marketing objectives and solving new problems. Its coverage can be pinpointed to specific markets, or expanded to embrace all markets, almost at will.

Q: DO YOU PLAN YOUR PUBLICITY EFFORTS OR ARE THEY SIMPLY ADDED TO OTHER COMMUNICATIONS?

A: Product publicity works best when it is planned in terms of your company's marketing objectives and when it is treated as a full-fledged partner of other communications techniques (advertising, direct mail, sales literature, etc.).

The marketing goals will dictate the overall communications program objective. It's then essential to develop the strategy that will best advance these objectives, including a clear definition of the role each communications technique will play.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME PROGRAM OBJECTIVES THAT MAY WELL BE SERVED BY PRODUCT PUBLICITY?

A: Here are a few of the more common communications program objectives that can effectively be reached through publicity alone, or working together with other forms of mass communications.

- Introducing a new product – or a new technology.
- Renewing interest in an already established product line or technology.
- Demonstrating acceptance for a product.
- Clearing up misconceptions about your product or company.
- Educating industry on ways to use a product. Or maintain it.
- Guiding a potential user on the selection, application and specification of a product.
- Establishing a company's competence in a new field.
- Reinforcing recognition of a company's expertise among present customer groups.
- Searching out additional customers in existing markets and potential customers in untapped markets. Once the sights have been set, the public relations professional can determine the particular publicity techniques that will do the job best.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PUBLICITY TOOLS THAT CAN MEET COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES?

A: Feature articles, case history articles, mass releases and special and ongoing activities are the primary publicity tools.

Q: WHAT ARE FEATURE ARTICLES?

A: Perhaps more than any other type of publicity, feature articles in publications read by customers and prospects are especially valuable in establishing a company as the authority in its field and spokesman for its industry. And, because such articles carry the byline of a company official, they help build recognition of the expertise of its people as well. Features can take a number of forms:

State-of-the-Art Articles

This kind of article can be invaluable in explaining an emerging technology or operation or in updating a long-standing technology that the marketplace has taken for granted or possibly forgotten. How the company's products, systems or services play a role in the operation can thus be covered in detail. Such articles could include "Management Services Organizations: Providing Economics of Scale."

"How To" Articles

These tell readers how to select...how to design...how to use...how to operate...or how to maintain (a product). A typical subject might be: "How the Cook-Chill System Helps Kitchens Move to Volume Production." Another might be: "How To Improve Material Handling Efficiency in Process Food Systems." Almost everyone wants to know how they can do their job better. "How to" stories fill this need and make your company's know-how better appreciated in the bargain.

Round-Up Articles

"Skin Care Solutions for Wastewater Treatment Workers." "Types of Industrial Trucks and Where to Use Them." "Methods for Forming and Cutting Gears." As these typical subjects indicate, round-up articles cover what's available within a group of related products or systems. They point out differences, strengths and weaknesses. They can, therefore, be an invaluable tool in guiding specifiers to arrive at the right decision.

The subject matter for feature articles is almost boundless, being limited only by one criterion: Will the editor consider it informative and useful to his readers? Because of the benefits that accrue, they should be the cornerstone of most programs.

Q: WHAT ARE CASE HISTORY ARTICLES?

A: Case histories, in effect, are powerful testimonials from satisfied customers. They report on how well your products perform...how they save time...improve productivity...cut costs...and otherwise benefit users. In doing so, they perk interest among other companies engaged in similar enterprises, many of whom may well come to you as the source for solutions to their particular needs.

Q: WHAT ARE MASS RELEASES?

A: Mass releases can take several forms. The objective, almost invariably, is to disseminate information to the broadest possible audience of value, by means of all appropriate media. For example:

New Product Announcements

For the most part, a new or industrial product is of interest mainly to particular segments of business or industry, and the target media generally are publications serving these markets. The basic goal is to generate inquiries from those within the markets who have a present or potential need for the product, as an important first step in getting the product known, accepted and bought.

New Literature Announcements

Targeted for the new literature columns published in many trade publications, new literature releases can make the availability of worthwhile material known to all markets of importance.

Picture-Caption Stories

Even though a product in itself has little true news value, an imaginative publicist teamed with a creative photographer can come up with material designed to strike the fancy of the magazine, newspaper or TV editor. An eye-catching photo and brief copy are often all it takes to keep a product in the news long after its introduction. Not restricted to products alone, picture captions can also be developed on interesting in-plant operations as another way to keep the company in public view. Stevens Strategic Communications has been very successful in obtaining cover exposure for our clients.

News Releases

Company news stories. Personnel appointments and advancements. Major contract awards. New plant facilities. Significant new manufacturing or testing equipment. These are typical subjects for news releases whose primary intent is to keep the marketplace informed about your company. In addition to their distribution to business magazines, they are sent to local media.

Q: WHERE DO YOU DRAW THE LINE ON WHAT IS CONSIDERED “SPECIAL AND ONGOING PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES”?

A: Truly productive publicity involves much more than just grinding out material.

It includes knowing what press conferences are all about. The skilled publicity professional – when presented with a truly significant new product or technological development – knows how to plan the conference, how to stage it, and what materials, such as press kits, are needed to implement it. They determine who should be invited and how to go about persuading editors to attend.

The experienced public relations professional recognizes the importance of maintaining contacts with key editors as a means of arriving at acceptable story subjects. He is adept at setting up meetings between editors and company officials. Such meetings almost invariably lead to immediate results; they help establish the officials as experts in their industry – spokespersons to whom editors turn when they want authoritative information about the industry.

The skilled public relations professional knows how to tie in publicity with other events. At trade shows, they are sure an ample supply of press kits covering products on display is available. Further, they are skilled at getting editors to the company’s booth, leading to newspaper, radio and TV coverage where appropriate. And they recognize, and capitalize on, the publicity potential of new plant openings, open houses and other special events.

Above all, the skilled public relations professional is inventive – and quick to take advantage of publicity opportunities when they arise.

Q: HOW DO YOU MEASURE PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS?

A: The goal of product publicity, like mass communications techniques, generally is to increase awareness and help to create greater preference for a company’s products and services. How well it does these things can be evaluated in various ways.

By the Numbers

The volume of published (or broadcast) results is an obvious clue to program effectiveness.

If: (a) the program involves multiple mass releases; (b) the number of publications and other media that are potential users of the releases is large; and (c) the releases do, in fact, contain newsworthy information, then a count of known appearances is one valid indication of effectiveness.

If a goal of the program is to make your products and company better known across a range of industries, then another measure of the program’s success will be the kinds of publications that have published some part of their material.

Clippings as provided by a clipping service are useful in indicating the degree of pick-up for each release. Since a clipping service typically will locate about 40 percent of the material published on a company, the clippings you get should only be considered a yardstick of the complete results.

By Quality

The more a publicity program emphasizes imagebuilding, the less the emphasis should be on purely a number count of items published. An in-depth feature article published in a respected journal, for example, should count as a highly significant indication of program success.

By Inquiries

A program based strongly on new product and new literature announcements inevitably will generate inquiries in large quantities. Responses to feature articles, on the other hand, will be fewer in number, but these respondents often will have a much more specific and immediate interest than the casual inquirer.

So, it's important to go beyond numbers of inquiries alone in evaluating how the program is doing.

Analyze the inquiries in terms of program objectives. If a goal is to broaden the market base, do the inquiries reflect that you are getting the desired broadened coverage? If the goal is to reach specifying functions generally inaccessible to your sales force, do the inquiries reflect that this is being accomplished?

If yours is an established product line distributed through a strong marketing organization, chances are you will not get inquiries in quantity (though the ones you will get will often be high quality). The same holds true if you make expensive capital equipment for a limited, well-defined market. Here, the customers and prospects will expect your sales people to keep them informed through regular sales calls.

Correlating Quotations and Publicity

It is sometimes possible to draw a correlation between publicity results and quotations written (or orders taken). For example, you may have a new product introduction or you may have a new product that is being promoted to a new market. A study of quotations written or orders received after the publicity program has been underway may suggest the role played by publicity.

Q: WHAT CAN YOU DO TO GET FULL VALUE FROM YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM? HOW DO YOU MERCHANDISE IT?

A: A product publicity program, by its nature, is geared to aid in the total selling process. So it is essential to keep the sales organization fully informed of developments. And it is only good promotional practice to call attention to significant program results.

In doing so, you will be capitalizing on one of the plus values of publicity: the variety of ways it can be merchandised to extend its effectiveness far beyond the actual appearances in print. Some ideas include:

Before It Appears

- Alert the sales organization when an article will be appearing, giving the issue date and details about the content. Certainly, no salesperson likes to be surprised by a customer referring to published material they know nothing about.
- Send copies of the new product or other mass releases to the sales organization at the same time they are distributed to the media. These will inform them of what's forthcoming – and the material can be of direct help especially if sales literature is not yet available.
- Send copies of releases on significant new products to your customers and prospects along with a note highlighting their importance. It may be the entering wedge to get sales rolling.

When It Appears

- As soon as the article appears in print, supply the sales organization with copies of the magazine. Suggest ways in which the article can be used – for example, as a door opener and focal point of a sales call.
- Make a personalized mailing of the publication to those customers and prospects where major orders are pending – and where content of the article may help swing the balance in your favor.

As It Appears

- Reprints of articles don't cost much and they can serve as valuable additions to your sales literature. Case history story reprints, for instance, can be used to supplement your straight product literature. An article on your facilities can serve instead of a brochure. An article on maintenance can become a part of your service manual.
- As your fund of articles grows, look into the possibility of grouping those on a common subject into a booklet based on a theme. Example: "How the Design Engineer, Production Manager and Purchasing Agent Look Upon (Product) ... As Reported in Leading Industrial Publications."

- With a new product, group publicity clippings into a montage and reproduce it as a broadside. Mail it to your sales organization – particularly if it is a non-captive one – to demonstrate the importance and sales potential of the product.
- Encourage your sales force to mail reprints to their customers and prospects.
- For your own part, consider the merits of a major direct mail program built around article reprints. Or there may be certain markets where the article is particularly vital. Target a mailing to such groups to search out prospects with a definite need. Reprints are also valuable in keeping your various “publics” informed. Post them on employee bulletin boards. Mail them to suppliers, shareholders and opinion makers in plant communities, the financial community, and others. You’ll find them a definite help in keeping your best foot forward.

Q: WHY USE A PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR?

A: Use of outside counsel can make a big difference in the success of your product publicity program, for a number of reasons:

Depth of Experience

The Stevens Strategic Communications staff, for example, includes public relations generalists skilled in broad planning...specialists in technical/industrial publicity...and others who are completely versed in commercial and consumer publicity. Some came to us from industry, others from business and technical magazines and still others from the newspaper profession. They know all the publicity techniques available – and how to put them into the form acceptable to the editor.

Objective Approach

Professional public relations professionals can evaluate the possible material more objectively to determine what, in fact, is worth publishing – and they can put it into a form acceptable to the editor.

No Conflicting Responsibilities

Unless the company is large enough to justify a publicity staff, those assigned to publicity also carry other, often overriding responsibilities. Publicity, of necessity, takes second or third place. With outside publicity counsel, you have assurance that the proper effort is being made. The outside firm knows it has to deliver – or it won’t keep the client.

Knowing Editors’ Needs

Professional counsel knows what editors are looking for, and how to deal with them in arriving at stories they will publish. Stevens Strategic Communications produces a large volume of publicity for a range of clients selling to a diversity of markets. We have excellent working relationships with the editors of publications serving most markets. And we can get programs off and running with a minimum of lead time.

Q: SO WHAT DOES A TYPICAL PRODUCT PUBLICITY PROGRAM COST?

A: Publicity is the most economical mass communications technique because: (a) Unlike advertising, there is no expenditure for publication space or air time; and (b) unlike direct mail, there is no large cost for developing and producing the mailing materials required.

The cost of a publicity program is predetermined by the amount of work required to achieve the stated objectives. This generally takes the form of a working fee billed over the program periods to compensate for the time of the agency account handling and writing personnel. There is also a provision for photography, artwork, reproducing releases and related production and out-of-pocket expenses.

The budget therefore is predictable – and controllable. You keep your own overhead costs lean. You have a group of specialists at your disposal. You know what your expenditure will be. And you have the flexibility to act quickly should conditions require a change in the budget.

A PRODUCT PUBLICITY CHECKLIST

Here are typical services skilled public relations counsel can provide.

1. Publicity Program Planning

2. Feature Articles (state-of-the-art, how-to, round-up stories)

- a. Working with editors to develop story possibilities.
- b. Researching, interviewing, writing.
- c. Obtaining the necessary clearances.
- d. Placing the stories with appropriate publications.

3. Case History Articles

- a. Field trips to get information and photos.
- b. Article writing and obtaining clearance.
- c. Placing articles with editors. Adapting stories for various media.

4. Personal Interviews

Arranging meetings for company officials and editors for in-depth discussions of predetermined subjects.

5. Mass Releases

- a. New product releases.
- b. New literature releases.
- c. Company news: personnel appointments and advancements, new facilities, new equipment, etc.
- d. Picture-caption stories.
- e. Media list development.

6. Special Events

- a. Press conference planning and implementation.
- b. Publicity tie-in with trade shows and conventions.
- c. Publicizing such other events as new plant or office openings.

IN CONCLUSION...

At Stevens Strategic Communications, Inc., we have a very special feeling about product publicity.

Perhaps it's because we established our firm on a solid foundation of product publicity over two decades ago.

Or perhaps it's simply because we've always been so successful with it.

Whatever the case, we feel right in our element with product publicity – as a communications tool working alone, or in partnership with other types of marketing communications efforts.

We'd like to review the subject with you, in depth and in person.

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