

# TIPS AND TACTICS FOR PITCHING LIKE A PR PRO

by Jerry Gelsomino, FISP

Successful companies live and thrive on the ability to get the word out about their capabilities. Many fixture manufacturers, however, don't have a formal marketing program in place. Instead, they let their reputations work for them, relying on word-of-mouth or personal testimonials to sell their products and services.

This is all good, but manufacturers also need to be proactive about getting company news into the marketplace, either through advertising or public relations. According to Eric Yaverbaum in *Public Relations Kit for Dummies*, "Several characteristics separate public relations from advertising, but one fundamental difference is this: Advertising is paid; Public Relations is free." And if you subscribe to the principles of guerrilla marketing, where the goal is to get the most exposure for the least amount of money spent, public relations can be a valuable tool.

## DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Recent conversations with Jim McMahon, principal of Zebra Communications, an industrial and high-tech PR firm, revealed that much of successful public relations lies in developing a cadre of editorial contacts and nurturing those relationships continually. This entails more than sending out a succession of e-mail news releases. You have to take it a step further by calling editors regularly and meeting them face-to-face during trade shows. In some cases, a special visit to a publication's headquarters may be appropriate.

McMahon proposes asking editors to review and suggest improvements for news releases in the draft stage. Editors may be able to offer advice about putting your information together in a way that it's more likely to be published. "If you treat an editor with respect—after all, it is their book and they control when and where an article is placed—one can get much further in the PR placement game," he says. Also, if you give editors a unique angle or revolutionary thought—a newsworthy story—on a subject that their audience will want to read about, you have provided a valuable asset.

## AVOIDING PR PITFALLS

What are the biggest mistakes you should avoid? According to McMahon, they are

- not attempting any public relations at all
- placing PR only in publications you advertise in
- concentrating only on company personnel updates
- believing that small companies can't compete for PR space with bigger companies

"Editors are interested in placing the best stories to win readership, not just pleasing the advertising manager," says McMahon. "A good story often wins out over one that serves the sales department."

As far as distributing your news releases, McMahon suggests targeting industry publications as well as those that fall slightly outside the industry. For fixture manufacturers and suppliers, that could include niche publications that focus on specific areas of retail that your company may

serve, such as college bookstores, museum stores, baby stores, or computer and high-tech stores. Also, if appropriate, don't forget about publications that report on service industries that purchase fixtures.

## PUTTING PEN TO PAPER

Successful projects can make interesting case studies. These experiences shouldn't be locked in the principal's memory bank only as anecdotes to be pulled out in conversation. Instead, document and use them to support your company's marketing message. Select someone from your company who can interview key individuals about recently completed projects that can be used to promote the company's strengths and capabilities.

When structuring the release, McMahon says start with the client's problem and then describe how the solution your company provided is benefiting the customer as well as the industry. Also include quotes from personnel at your own company "to show how your company handles critical industry issues," he says.

"Be sure to include many photographs," McMahon adds. Pictures, developmental drawings, or project logs can be used to capture the visual history of a project's progress. The images may make the difference in whether a publication decides to publish it.

And remember, writing that first release is only the beginning. Often, you'll need to make regular attempts to get the story picked up. "To get one good feature story published a year may require three to four months of shopping it around," McMahon notes.

That can be time well spent. Keep in mind your target audience and your company's marketing objective, and effective public relations can help you get your marketing message out to a wider audience. ■

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## PR Picks

You'll find shelves of books about public relations at your local bookstore and hundreds through online booksellers. Here are a few helpful titles to check out.

### 2006 Industrial Print PR & Competitive Strategy

by Zebra Communications

E-mail jim.mcmahon@zebracom.net for information on ordering.

### Public Relations Kit for Dummies

by Eric Yaverbaum (For Dummies, 2001)

### Writing Effective News Releases: How to Get Free Publicity for Yourself, Your Business, or Your Organization

by Catharine V. McIntyre (Piccadilly Books, 1992)

### Guerilla Publicity: Hundreds of Sure-Fire Tactics to Get Maximum Sales for Minimum Dollars

by Jay Conrad Levinson (Adams Media Corp., 2002)

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*NASFM Magazine* is the official publication of NASFM, the retail environments association. Published six times a year, it is the only magazine aimed at decision makers in the retail environments industry, which includes store fixture suppliers, retail design firms, suppliers of visual merchandising products, and suppliers of materials and equipment. *NASFM Magazine* features insightful coverage of industry-specific issues and events on topics including manufacturing and materials, management, marketing and sales, technology, finance, and human resources.

*NASFM Magazine* is free to NASFM members. Subscriptions are available to suppliers of store fixtures and other products and services for retail environments, contract design firms, and suppliers of materials, services, and equipment. For subscription rates, see <http://www.nasfm.org>.

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