

Promotions, Publicity and Public Relations Tips to Grow Your Business eBook

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About Johanna

Welcome to my eBook covering *Promotions, Publicity and Public Relations Tips to Grow Your Business*. This eBook is based on a presentation I gave at the Central Coast and Hunter Business Expos (The Brew) in August and September 2008.

My name is Johanna Baker-Dowdell and I own Strawberry Communications, based at Wamberal. I help businesses tell their story through writing and public relations.

I have more than 13 years experience as a journalist and nine in marketing and public relations, both in Australia and in the UK.

I started Strawberry Communications after realising I could use my skills to build a business and started freelance writing from home in late 2005. This grew into a writing and public relations business after the birth of my son.

How do I get started?

Some of you will already be in business and want to know how to use public relations to grow, others may not have started yet and want to know what to do to get the message out when they do launch.

Whatever your situation promoting your business can be a bit of a Catch-22. You need to get the word out that you have set up shop, but have no money to do it. Or you may have the money, but no time, because more than anything, promoting a business involves time. And this is where the catch comes in - you need customers to create the money you need to promote the business, but to get customers you need to tell them you exist! So how do you get around this?

There are many promotional techniques you can use to build your business profile. Some will just cost your time and others may involve a small outlay, but the results are worth your effort and money. I am going to talk to you about some of the low-cost or even no-cost techniques today, such as competitions, writing articles, public speaking at events like The Brew, networking and positioning yourself as an expert.

But before you do any sort of promotion for your business, you need to work out your strategy by answering the following questions:

- What do you want to achieve? For instance, are you promoting your business to build your brand, attract customers, or tell potential clients you are there?
- Who is your target market? It might be small business owners, teenage boys or men aged 25-40 years.

- What is the best promotional method for your business? For example, brochures, website, direct mail or networking.
- What are you going to say? Will your promotion include a special offer, opening specials, or your business tagline?
- And finally, what makes you special? Work out your business USP (Unique Selling Proposition) that makes you stand out from your competitors, such as “We are a networking group for business mums” or “We only sell Fairtrade products”.

Once you’ve thought about these questions, it’s time to move on to getting some positive PR for your business.

Let's start with you as an expert

We are all expert at something. Whether it's your profession or hobby, there is something you do that you get a buzz from and you know more about it than others. Use this knowledge in your chosen subject to position yourself as an expert. You can do this by writing for an industry magazine, website or newsletter, or publishing a blog or e-book. You can start your own blog for free at www.blogger.com or www.wordpress.org

If you're not strong on the written word you can get a freelance writer to do it for you, or you might prefer to talk about your subject at industry events and information sessions like you're at right now. Soon you will be seen as the expert and the person to talk to whenever someone wants to know more.

Use the media

Think about your local media. The Central Coast has two major newspapers – the Central Coast Express Advocate and The Sun, as well as three radio stations – 2GO, Star FM and Sea FM and NBN TV, but there are also websites, magazines and newsletters that specialise in local businesses. They will want to know about your business's grand opening, new product line or service. Local media always like local stories so promote that angle prominently.

Once you've got a handle on the local media, expand your media list to include industry magazines for your chosen subject, appropriate sections in metro newspapers and radio and TV stations that cover your industry and send a press release when something important happens.

It's good to remember though, that while editorial content in the media carries a lot of credibility with the public, you are not paying for the media space or time and, so, have no say over what is included or when. Once you have given the media the information they have the choice on how it is used.

After sending your press release to the media, upload it to free PR websites like www.24-7pressrelease.com or www.inewswire.com, to increase your Internet search ranking and get your message out to a wider audience.

Give something away for details

By this I mean entice customers and clients with the promise of a free product or discount, in return for their contact information to add to your database.

The freebie could be your monthly newsletter or an e-book you have written on your topic of interest. Use this opportunity to get their information by asking them to supply their name, email address and phone number so you can add them to your list and market to them in the future (with their permission of course!). Before long you will have a healthy list of customers.

This tactic can also work by teaming up with other complementary businesses that share your company's customer base. You can set up a strategic alliance to cross-promote and gain referrals for each other and build customer lists for both businesses. This alliance can also help through competitions where you give away something from one or both of the partners to build your list.

If you are in similar, but non-competing businesses, like party hire and catering for instance, this alliance can also be used to create special packages for customers and share advertising by booking one ad for both of you. This way your customers get all they need in one place and you halve your marketing costs.

Use the Internet

The Internet is the ultimate free promotion tool because it's a low-cost way of building relationships with potential and existing customers.

List your business on Google Maps, free industry websites and business directories like www.hotfrog.com.au and www.aussieweb.com.au. Make sure your listing contains all the key words and phrases potential customers are likely to type in to search engines so you come up on the first few pages. For instance, if you are a florist you need to include floral bouquets in your listing, or if you build cabinets list kitchens, cupboards and bathrooms.

Businesses now see social networking websites, such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn, as additional platforms for promotion. These sites are a great way to introduce your business to customers and start building an ongoing relationship with them. You can use these sites to communicate with your customers and clients regularly and the message costs nothing but your time and Internet access – and it's instant.

Old, but good, promotional methods

These techniques are some of the most important to your business, but are easily forgotten when people get caught up in running a business.

Make use of your industry association membership and attend events, seminars and conferences to gain knowledge, but also to network. On the subject of networking, join networking groups in your area. There are several on the Central Coast including chambers of commerce, Central Coast Business Swap and Business Women Connect. All you need is your business card and a willingness to talk about your business.

Word of mouth is an often forgotten promotional method, but the most valuable. Most of my work comes through referrals and I know many other business owners who operate the same way. If someone is happy with your product or service ask them to tell their friends.

Keep in regular contact with your existing customers through an email newsletter, letter or fax. Email newsletters are more cost effective than direct mail because the newsletter goes to existing, past and prospective customers. This way you are promoting directly to your target market and it is a great way to tell them what is going on in your business to keep you at the top of their minds.

Everything I have talked about today is inexpensive, but most of the time all you will need is a good email program and Internet connection, some business cards and your time.

Thank you for your interest. I hope I have inspired you to go back to your business and start promoting.

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