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- A simple ad template
- Brochure design template

### **Communication through marketing and media ...and the difference between internal and external communication**

Every person running a business has thought at one time or another, 'If only I could get a story on my business into the local paper, I could attract a lot more customers.'

We are not saying 'forget it, it's out of your league', but another question needs to be asked first. 'Are you already communicating regularly and the best that you can with your existing customers and with your local community?'

What was your answer?

Communication, in its broadest possible meaning, is the way every business on the planet finds its customers.

Some do it very easily, with a minimum of effort and at no real extra cost. A restaurant can do it. Some of the best restaurants in the world don't advertise. And many of those are in suburban back streets or in the middle of an industrial area. These are rare businesses which do things so well and make such an impact on their customers just by doing what they do with exceptional results, that the world beats a path to their door, seemingly without effort.

Their effort is expended in the kitchen, or in the wine service, or the ambience – usually a combination of all three. They communicate internally.

Running a vehicle aftermarket repair shop is not nearly so glamorous. And what kind of service could you possibly render which would make the world beat a path to your door, with a minimum of effort on your part?

Now there's a challenge for you. We claim it can be done. Some of our TaT subscribers are doing it in great style already.

Regardless of how little effort they might put into doing an exceptional job, sooner or later, you can boil down their success to the level of communication they offer. The restaurants mentioned earlier choose to communicate to their public when they have them seated at tables, eating their food. Plonking a plate of excellent food in front of a customer is a form of communication. How the waiter handles a complaint about the cold vegetables is a form of communication.

The bottom line in this whole business of communicating what you do best, is that you must recognise the two basic forms of communication, internal and external.

Few people are expert in both forms of communication. Many indeed are very inexperienced in both forms of communication. Such a person would be the owner of a workshop who doesn't listen to his customers, treats them like morons, never sends them a thank you note or a newsletter about a new service being offered, never advertises, doesn't use business cards, has crappy signage on the front of the building and survives in the belief that if people want their car fixed badly enough, they know where to find him.

So if there are two forms of communication, which one do you worry about first.

Internal communication – every time.

Let's say you open up a new workshop in a quiet suburban area in a small industrial estate. How do you get the message out that you are open for business?

You begin by introducing yourself to every other business in the street and you let them know what you do and how well you can do it. You can guarantee that one of those businesses will take a shine to you and they'll book their vehicle in pretty soon.

Next? You let every household, every business and everyone you meet within a two kilometre radius of your new business know that you have arrived and that you are great at fixing cars. You will achieve this in the form of a simple letterbox drop, notices pinned up on community notice boards, doing cross promotional deals with your local coffee shop – use your imagination.

Once you've done that, and assuming that in the process you have picked up some customers and they are happy with your service and skills, your next job is to keep the communication going with those new customers, so that they feel appreciated. You need to keep reinforcing that you really care that their vehicle is always in good shape and safe to drive. Part of that communication is your little one page newsletter, telling them about the new wheel alignment gadget you've just installed, or letters to every customer offering them a special service at the start of the holidays.

Now what? Have you made sure that all of your passive communication tools are spot on. You have good business cards to hand out? Your building has easy to read signage, with a list of the services you perform? Your invoices tell a complete story of the repairs you have done?

You have a nice, simple brochure listing all your services ready to hand to anyone who walks in the door? You have a good communicator answering your telephone and attending to drive in inquiries? All done? Great?

So you've established yourself as a good, honest business with the skills needed to fix car problems. Suddenly you are noticed by the local newspaper. It won't be the Sydney Morning Herald or The Australian. But it might be the North Shore Blat, a free newspaper full of local news and charity gossip which covers your suburb.

Wow, they are here to do a big story on your business because you've done so well. Very unlikely.

It's typically the advertising salesperson and has he or she got a deal for you. With the hot summer months coming up, they've decided that as a great community service, they should run a big advertising feature (some call it a supplement) in which they will list all the auto repair shops and businesses which have anything to do with installing, selling or fixing car air conditioners. You really can't afford not to be involved.

Easy. Just hand over a few hundred of your hard earned readies and they'll do an ad for you. If you are lucky, they may even offer you some editorial space to go with it. If you are even luckier, they might send a reporter around to interview you and do the story for you. Then again, maybe they won't, because a major wholesaler has taken a few full pages of the feature and in return wants control over all the space not used by the ads to push their own products.

## **Don't fall for it.**

The only person who will make money out of this deal is the owner of the newspaper. Why would you want to be bundled in with all your competitors in a supplement which is going to look so blatantly like an advertising feature that no self respecting person will read it. All it will do is confuse the readers. It's not good to give them too many choices.

And why would you let an advertising rep decide when and how you should spend any available advertising dollars you might have?

Your decision is simple. If you reach a stage in your business where you feel advertising in your local rag, or your favourite footy club magazine will be good PR and earn you more business, sit down and allocate a budget for advertising for the next year, and stick to it.

You decide where you advertise, not an advertising salesperson. If it makes you warm and fuzzy to spend a small amount of money to support your local football club newsletter, you go ahead and do it. But do it as part of a well considered program of advertising for the year and don't advertise waffle. Give them something interesting, something to stimulate their brain cells, something they really could do with. Don't advertise 'Bring your car to us because we are the best.' That says nothing. There's only one way you can prove you are the best, and it won't be by trying to force it down people's throats without some hard evidence.

Local newspapers, and even local radio are good if you have the budget for it.

But you decide when the ads should run, and you decide how much you will spend. And you decide what the message should be. So you need to be clear about what you are offering and what you are trying to sell. These days, auto repair shops cannot afford to advertise like Woolworths – a full page with the specials every Wednesday. Regular advertising is not the answer for smaller businesses with limited budgets. But targeted advertising is encouraged, but only when you have something important to say.

There are opportunities to capitalise on media stories every day of the week, but this only works if you read newspapers or quality magazines. You might read about a new ceramic brake pad, just introduced to Australia, which almost eliminates the brake dust problem on mag wheels. You check it out with your supplier, determine which vehicles are best suited for the new line of pads, and you take out an advertisement in the local rag or on the local radio station letting the world know that you have them, and if you can, list the vehicles which can be fitted with them. Now that's capitalising on a news event. But do it quickly. Do it first.

You can go one step further. You happen to be an expert on fixing air conditioning systems in cars. A new refrigerant hits the market (one is going to do that in a few years time – taking over from R134a). As an expert, you phone the local newspaper and offer them a story on this new refrigerant and the environmental impact this is going to have in this part of the world and alerting them to the traps for the unwary and the elderly who will be talked into an expensive retrofit when it's really not required.

To be quoted as an expert in this field is a big plus and the best publicity you could ever hope for. But make sure you know your stuff, and be ready to handle any questions or come-backs from those who will want to argue about the new refrigerant's credentials. You must learn to do your own research into new technologies, and you do that by belonging to a network, reading quality magazines and newspapers – certainly not by wasting your time watching reality television.

These days, to go into print with a news release, or offer yourself as an authority in any field is something to be considered thoroughly before you open your mouth. If you are not totally prepared, you can be torn to shreds and lose any credibility you might have thought you had.

Going public is not for whimps. You might be able to get away with a bit of free local press, like issuing warnings about brake repair, or giving advice on how often a new vehicle should have its air conditioning serviced, and whether topping up of refrigerant is still legal (it isn't).

In summary, plan your internal communication and your external communication as you would a battle plan for your local football club. Consider the implications of your play. Make sure you follow through. Ask a lot of questions of your own customers about what they read, or where they get their information. But above all, internal communication comes first. External communication could cost you a lot more, both in money and in reputation if you go in half cocked.

And if you ever find that the new committeeman who has joined you on your football club committee is a reporter at the local suburban newspaper, buy him or her a beer and cultivate your relationship. It's one of the joys of running a business to be able to phone a reporter who knows you and respects you, but only when you have something important to say.

## **Extra reading**

### **The benefits and pitfalls of publicity**

Publicity is not all that difficult to get if the story is good enough. Knowing how to market it and where to aim it is the hard part.

This is made harder by the fact that media move around constantly. Today's real estate writer on a provincial daily is tomorrow's movie critic on a paper a thousand kilometres away. You just can't keep up with them.

One remains constantly amazed at the ignorance of many of today's executives when it comes to the role the media play in business.

We spend most of our time educating people on the role of media, so that they can live with their frustrations when nobody turns up for a so-called press conference. We've long since abandoned press conferences as a means of disseminating news, unless we can absolutely guarantee that the story is so crash hot that they can't ignore it.

Here's our conclusion. Stories are everywhere. Any product and any event can be made into a story. However, at the receiving end, in the newsroom, it's very much a matter of chance and whim if your story gets any attention.

It frustrates business owners when they pick up the paper and read story after story of mindless crap, when here they are with a great announcement to make and nobody is interested.

#### **IS NEWS JUST A WHIM?**

Just as people only care about the things they know, journalists (not all of them mind you), generally will react better to something if they know something about it, or can identify with it. It's this simple. If I'm working for Ford and I have something important to say, I will do my research well and find out which journalist drives a Ford before I lodge it with the newsroom. Why? Because all too often, if a story about cars hits the desk of a journo who doesn't drive, he or she may not be interested and won't see the value in the story.

Let's face it, the media are the ultimate censors and all too often the censorship is in the hands of young, untrained reporters with a big ego and every little else between the ears.

So how the hell do you get noticed inside the media. A lot of people do it instinctively. Some people, many of them idiots, manage to get into print with monotonous regularity. But they are merely entertainment value.

And that's another story. Can anyone tell me the difference between news and entertainment these days. It all looks the same to me and that's why there are so many grey areas in the media.

The media, many say, have lost their way to the almighty dollar. What we have to do is seek out the communication method which will provide the best results for the job at hand. Sometimes, the answer has nothing to do with the media. More often than not, it can be done with a clever bit of communication managed by direct approach to customers.

What I am saying is that media is but one of the mechanisms that might be available as part of a company's marketing and PR strategy. It should never be regarded as the means to the end, but a tool which can be very useful if planned well and the story is good enough.

The use of the media as a vehicle for promoting a company's goods and services is universally accepted as essential - although not necessarily the "be all and end all".

It is a wise marketing manager who ensures that media exposure in all its forms is a planned component of the overall communications strategy of the company. In other words, never expect the media to do all your promotional work for you..

## **TERMINOLOGY**

It is important to understand the essential differences between types of media and the avenues available within media for publicity, or exposure.

### **Advertising**

This is space you pay for.

Advertisements in most corporate situations are supplied by the advertiser or their agency direct to the media in digital format. The "finished art" should be produced to a very high standard to ensure that reproduction is very clear. Newsprint does not tolerate fine art subtleties very well.

Most media offer an "in-house" service to prepare advertisements for advertisers.

Except in an emergency, this service is to be avoided. The risks are that advertisements end up looking "generic" and because art departments in many newspapers and magazines are not as efficient and professional as consultancy art studios – mistakes and misinterpretations are often made.

This adds time, money and frustration to the advertising program. If time pressures are such that advertisements can't be checked by the client, there are no second chances once the advertisement has been published, or "gone to air".

A great deal of corporate damage can be done by publication of a wrong phone number or address. When it's published, it's already too late and a great deal more money will need to be spent to recover lost ground.

A company will protect its corporate image or logo to the end. This is why copies of the company logo and its advertising slogans are supplied to distributors and agents. **They must never be altered for any reason.** Never allow enthusiastic newspaper designers to "mess around" with corporate material. It is important that customers, wherever they are in the world, are able to instantly recognise your company logo.

These comments apply equally to radio and television advertising. If you want to stand out in the crowd of commercial pap which pours forth from the electronic media, go to an innovative design studio or writer. Remember that the best talent can often be found in a small consultancy.

## Editorial

Pure editorial (as opposed to Advertorial which will be covered next) is sometimes difficult to define and can be very subjective. Assessments of "news value" for a particular item or event will vary greatly from one news media to another.

For example, a story about a new building method which will speed construction may be ignored by the day to day print media, but make front page news in a building industry magazine.

Remember that the daily news media, press, radio and television, are not particularly interested in corporate news unless the corporation is already in the news through company takeovers, an accident involving a company product, a claim by environmentalists against a company activity or a corporate collapse.

These days, it is more than likely that if the daily media are interested in the affairs of a corporation, the news may indeed be negative, rather than positive.

There are many methods used by corporations to try to avoid these events, but this should be handled by media savvy public relations advisers.

**Having said that, the day to day media need to balance their flow of material by looking at innovation, the bizarre, the unusual, the great idea or sometimes, just a great picture.**

How this is judged is entirely subjective and will sometimes hinge on the whim of a pictorial editor or indeed the reporter who answers the phone.

The general rule for ordinary citizens with interesting angles to their daily work, is to make contact with the newsrooms if they feel they have something to say.

This can more often than not result in a "not interested"...but the secret to success is "persistence, persistence and persistence".

Media thrive on receiving ideas and phone tips from large numbers of people in all walks of life.

Don't be disappointed by knock-backs, but try always to ensure that the information you are giving to the media is accurate (you'll be found out if it is not and the company will then have more trouble than it bargained for) and that it is interesting or unusual.

***In summary, information given to media needs to have a "point".***

This form or exposure (editorial) is totally uncontrollable.

If the media choose to give you publicity, it will be free, but you will have no say in its content or how it is used, if at all. Media are not obliged to show you copies of what they have prepared prior to publication. Most will refuse point blank.

So, in the free world of editorial media, you can play the game, but you take your chances.

Those who strike a good rapport with media can achieve great publicity for their product or company just by being "media wise".

It is not something you can learn - it is more of an instinctive thing.

However, everyone can learn by trying, by taking note of the things the media publish and by being conscious that media can play a significant role in the goodwill of your company if you play it right.

It is disappointing to miss an opportunity for great publicity for your product or service, simply because time ran out or you didn't think of it.

Editorial in magazines or trade media is handled differently.

Remember that they often have long lead-times before publication. Therefore, if you have an interesting story to tell about a new construction which is happening soon, remember that some magazine media will need anything from three to six months to plan to cover the event or publicise the event.

This form of editorial is usually better planned and discussed between client and media.

Some magazines, newsletters or indeed "lower level" newspapers such as the weekly free papers, will often try to capitalise on an event or a piece of news by trying to sell advertising to the company involved in some vague promise that **"if you advertise, there's a good chance your story will run."**

This sometimes works, but professional advice usually is - **"don't fall for it"**.

***In a professional news organisation, there is no relationship between editorial, or the news content of the media, and advertising. They are entirely separate departments.***



In most professional daily media, any suggestion by you that you will consider taking out big advertising if the paper runs a story for you will be met with derision. In many cases, this is a good way to ruin your chances of getting a story published.

By the same token, demanding that a newspaper run your story because you are a big advertiser, is a sure way to be ignored.

As you learn to deal with the media, you will find many grey areas in this regard as you move down through the hierarchy of media.

At the other end of the scale, there are many magazines or trade media today which make no bones about the fact that editorial and advertising go hand in hand. That's fine as long as everyone understands the rules of the game.

It is up to the company then to make a rational decision on using that magazine if indeed it reaches an appropriate readership which is useful to you.

On the electronic side, talk-back radio is a form of free editorial. Many companies have achieved great - and instant - publicity by being able to give some relevant comment on an issue over the phone to the station while a debate is on talk-back radio. This of course takes time and immediate energy, but it's well worth while keeping in mind.

Television is an excellent medium for instant editorial, but keep in mind that television needs pictures - not talking heads.

As strange as it seems, a television news program would rather run a mediocre, but highly visual story, about a house being dropped by helicopter onto a building pad, than the head of a corporation making a major announcement about the availability of a new building material which will save the country millions.

Unless they can see it and film it - they lose interest very quickly.

### **Advertorial**

Advertorial is a blatantly commercial phenomenon popular on television in some countries and used in many newspapers and magazines for many years.

It developed from the notion that "editorial" was more credible, and achieved greater readership than "advertising". Therefore, advertisers began experimenting with their "advertising" to make it look like "editorial" to the casual and untrained observer.

In general terms it means - media information which looks and feels like "news" or "editorial" (despite how corny some of it appears), but is in reality "bought space" or the subject of some kind of media commercial deal.

Many newspapers have commercial pages, separate to the general run of the news pages, where they offer businesses particularly an opportunity to run some "news" or make a company announcement provided they buy space for a minimum size advertisement.

Many magazines run advertorial as a major part of their content.

**These magazines, however, may have diminished value for your business because they lack the credibility which comes from media with strong and independent editorial policies.**

Television advertorial has reached new heights in America and Australia particularly, with whole programs devoted to promotion and sales of everything from saucepans to gym equipment.

They are produced under the guise of legitimate documentary programs, but they are glorified advertisements.

### **Beware the Supplement**

In an effort to boost advertising revenue, most newspapers have perfected the "supplement" approach. It works like this. Summer is about to strike, so the local newspaper believes it has a duty to inform its readers of the avenues available for cooling down their houses and vehicles.

It then prepares a hit list from the Yellow Pages of every company dealing in air conditioning, insulation and fans. These suppliers are approached on the basis that this supplement will be the sole referral document for this summer for the community and "you can't afford not to be in it."

Ego tripping or mob mentality drags many an advertiser into the supplement but usually, the only corporation who makes money from supplements is the newspaper which promotes it.

Supplements LOOK like puff and nonsense. The people can see through it. Usually, the editorial is poorly prepared by contributors or freelance journalists looking for a spare buck. There's little money in it for them, so the research is sparse and the information basic.

Anyone with an internet connection could learn a great deal more about cooling down a home and car by spending a few minutes on line.

Companies these days don't have spare tins of cash just waiting for that great opportunity being presented by the local newspaper or radio station.

The only sensible advertising is planned advertising, to a strict budget. You can waste a lot of money and achieve precious little by falling for one-off directories, supplements and other gimmicks. Draw up a well considered program at the beginning of each year or season and stick with it, measure it and adjust it where necessary.

In other words, you take control of your advertising and marketing — don't let the local newspaper, radio or TV station do it for you.

...and the final word. Using the media is only one small part of a company's presentation of its product or services to the buying public.

Some companies use advertising sparingly, preferring to put all their money and effort into direct marketing by mail, email or newsletters to their customer base.

They follow the principle (which we applaud) that you need to concentrate on building your company loyalty with your existing customers who know who you are and where you are, before you spend money looking for new customers.

The internal culture of the business needs to be perfect. Things like counter presentation, signage, customer service are essentials, long before you consider spending a dime on advertising.

Too many businesses turn only to advertising or advertising agencies for their total marketing. This is not wise. Businesses need a broader strategy than that - and one that is not governed by commissions.

### **How to present media with publicity or a news idea**

As mentioned earlier, judgement of news is very subjective and can vary from reporter to reporter.

There are several ways of getting information to media:-

#### **1**

The pre-prepared handout — emailed or faxed to all media which you feel might be interested. This is called the "shotgun" approach and is useful to ensure that all media in your region are made aware of a specific event or happening. In all handouts, never assume that the reporter on the receiving end knows who you are and what you are about. Even if it's at the end of the story, provide a little background on the company, its size, competitive edges or what they are famous for. It all helps.

If you supply written information to media, ensure that the information contains nothing which might be construed as libelous or defamatory.

For example, don't refer to a competitor's product as shoddy - in fact, it is good advice to remember that you don't have any competitors as far as media is concerned.

#### **2**

The pre-prepared handout targeted particularly to one outlet or one journalist - and usually accompanied by a phone call either prior to or immediately after the dispatch of the written information

### 3

The direct phone call to a targeted journalist or media, accompanied by no written information (although if it's a complex issue, some written information may be sought by the reporter).

### 4

The indirect contact - where the media approach you as a result of something they have picked up elsewhere. In this event, you have to quickly determine if the news they are chasing is likely to be negative or positive - or somewhere in between.

How this is handled depends very much on what the story is and how the company can respond.

In very general terms, if there is an accident concerning your company, and the media make contact DON'T hang up in their ear. As upset as you might be over the event, you must be very open and positive. It is to the benefit of the company's long term credibility that it be seen to be a good corporate citizen - that it admits it may have made a mistake but it is doing everything in its power to rectify the problem. A media will make judgements on the genuineness of the company to address perceived wrongs.

The media will crucify those who pretend to fix things or give lip service to addressing the issues.

*Just go for it!*