

# Using Publicity to Increase Your Sales



By Don Cooper, The Sales Heretic™

You may not have a fancy storefront. You may not have an eight-foot sign outside your office. And if you're like most businesspeople, you don't have an unlimited advertising budget. So how can you alert potential customers to your business without breaking the bank?

Consistent use of publicity should be an integral part of your overall marketing plan. Publicity allows you to reach tremendous numbers of people—often, very targeted people—for virtually no cost while at the same time giving you credibility you can't buy in an advertisement.

Bear in mind that advertising is very different from publicity. In advertising, you are *paying* someone to mass distribute a *sales-oriented* message. Publicity is usually *free* and focuses on a *community-oriented* message. Through publicity, you are working to increase your name recognition and create awareness of your business, product or service. Use the following strategies to kick your publicity machine into high gear and generate more sales.

## Press Releases

The media needs you. An editor's job is to fill space. A radio or TV producer's job is to fill airtime. Both are looking for entertaining stories or useful information that will make people want to watch, listen or read what they produce. That's where you come in. You can create a press release about anything as long as it's of potential interest to that media outlet's audience.

In other words: Is it a story?

Expanding your business? That's a story. Hired a new employee? That's a story. Tips on taking care of your lawn and garden? That's a story. Strategies for raising healthy children? You guessed it, that's a story.

So what's your story? What information do you have that would be of interest to total strangers? What makes you or your business interesting? What have you done recently that people should know about? What tips can you share that could

improve people's lives?

Whatever the answer, *that's* your press release. Write it down following the guidelines below and send it out to every media outlet that might possibly be interested in your story.

You can even generate multiple press releases for a single story. For example, you could set up a scholarship in the name of your business at your local high school or community college—even if it's only \$50 or \$100. Send a press release announcing the creation of the scholarship. Later, send another one announcing the event at which the scholarship will be awarded. Finally, send a third announcing the recipient. A photo (or video) of you with a deserving student is positive publicity you can't buy.

Another way to leverage a press release is to offer something free of charge. For instance, if you're a CPA and the IRS has just issued new rulings on tax laws affecting small businesses or personal tax returns, you might produce a tax tip booklet. Once it's developed, write a press release with a headline like "Free Booklet Explains Latest Tax Changes" and send it to your local newspapers, radio stations and local TV news shows. Offer the booklet free when people call you or visit your web site. And, of course, offer yourself for interviews regarding the changes.

A word of warning: Make sure you're prepared for an avalanche of requests for what you are offering. If you only anticipate 100 requests and you get 1000 instead, the media will receive 900 complaints that the offer wasn't fulfilled, and you'll never be asked back! Create far more than you think you'll need. You can always give away the extras at other events.

Here are some other press release ideas:

- Laid-off employee competes with former employer
- Local community has surprisingly high number of home-based businesses
- Business celebrates first, fifth, tenth, etc. anniversary
- Local business wins major contract
- Strategies for other small businesses
- Warning signs to watch for
- Ten tips for the perfect vacation, paint job, wedding, auction, etc.
- Stay-at-home parent raises kids and profits

- Local business mentors tomorrow's business leaders
- How to protect yourself from scams and rip-offs
- Company greening its business
- Fundraising event to support local charity

## Press Release Guidelines

Keep in mind that journalists are flooded by hundreds of press releases daily. Since they don't have time to read and evaluate each one carefully, they scan quickly and make snap judgments. To maximize the chances of your press release being read and used, follow these media-friendly guidelines:

- Be brief (one page is preferred) but get the most important or intriguing facts in. If reporters want more information, they'll contact you.
- Write a good headline. As you read newspapers and magazines, notice the headlines they use and try to write your headline in the same style. Similarly, as you watch the news on TV or listen to the radio, pay attention to the teasers they use to promote upcoming stories. That's their version of a headline and you want to write yours accordingly.
- Include the who, what, where and when in the first paragraph. This may be all that gets printed.
- Use stories and anecdotes. The media loves to tell stories because stories engage audiences.
- Use simple, declarative sentences and avoid technical language or industry jargon. A sixth-grader should be able to read it easily.
- Write in the third person. Act as if you are the writer or interviewer, using *he* or *she* instead of *I*, *me* or *our*.
- Put the words "For Immediate Release" at the top of the page.
- Include your complete contact information.
- Include a photo of yourself, your staff, your product or your business.
- At the end of the press release, type the word "End."
- Print your press release on your business stationery, double-spaced with one-inch margins all around.
- Learn whether each specific newspaper, radio station or other outlet prefers to have information sent to them via postal mail, fax or e-mail. If e-mail, find out if they prefer it with or without attachments.

## Annual Events

One way to make your press release relevant and timely on a consistent basis is to link it to recurring seasonal events. Besides the big traditional holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Fourth of July, etc.), think about other holiday occasions both religious (Passover, Ramadan, Ash Wednesday) and secular (Arbor Day, Chinese New Year, Administrative Professional's Week). You can find information on these and other annual occasions at your bookstore or library in books such as *Chase's Calendar of Events* or online at sites like [CelebrateToday.com](http://CelebrateToday.com) and [gone-ta-pott.com](http://gone-ta-pott.com).

Here are just a few of the days, weeks and months that have been designated for some cause or issue. (I swear I'm not making *any* of these up.)

- National Bike to Work Day
- Organize Your Home Day
- International Hot & Spicy Food Day
- National Hobby Month
- Customer Service Day
- National Emergency Preparedness Week
- Rid the World of Fad Diet and Gimmicks Day
- Clean Up Your Computer Month
- Better Business Communication Day
- Fun at Work Day
- Sports Eye Safety Month
- Clashing Clothes Day
- Personal Self-Defense Month
- Bubble Wrap Appreciation Day
- Dump Your Significant Jerk Day
- National Shampoo Week
- Carnation Day
- Professional Speakers Day
- Crime Stoppers Month
- Eight-Track Tape Day

- National Shut-In Visitation Day
- Hot Air Balloon Week
- National Garden Month
- Laugh and Grow Rich Day
- Be Kind to Spiders Week
- International Tuba Day
- Root Canal Appreciation Day
- National Sign Up for Camp Month
- Send an Electronic Greeting Card Day
- Take Your Dog to Work Day
- National Pistachio Day
- American Heart Month
- Handshake Day
- Workaholics Day
- National Baby Week
- Correct Posture Month
- Internet Day
- National Lipstick Day
- National Caffeine Addiction Awareness Month
- International Talk Like a Pirate Day
- Stick Out Your Tongue Day
- Homes for Birds Week
- Leadership Success Day
- Wear a Plunger on Your Head Day
- National Weddings Month
- Canada-U.S. Goodwill Week
- Random Acts of Kindness Day

And how appropriate is it that Publicity Stunt Week occurs the first week of April?  
Just in time for April Fool's Day!

You can even create your own holiday to raise awareness of issues related to your business. Laura Stack, a productivity expert and the author of *Find More Time* and *The Exhaustion Cure*, designated June 2<sup>nd</sup> as National Leave the Office Earlier Day to help promote her books and services.

Sports and politics offer a variety of annual events as well, from training camps and All-Star games to primaries and election day. Also, consider such recurring themes as back-to-school, tax time and hurricane season. And don't forget Small Business Week in May and Home-Based Business Week in October!

## Articles

Virtually every trade association and business group has a newsletter, magazine, or journal. And they are all in need of articles of value to their members. Such articles must be informational, not promotional in nature. They should be of general interest or targeted to the specific needs of the readers.

As a general rule, you won't get paid for these types of articles, but that isn't the point. Your compensation is getting your name and contact information in front of people in a way that positions you as an expert.

Think about what expertise you can share with the publication's readers. You don't have to be exceptionally creative. Just write straightforwardly. Here are some title ideas to get you started:

- Nine Tips for . . .
- Five Ways to . . .
- Seven Myths About . . .
- How to . . .
- What to Do When . . .

In determining where to send your articles, start with the organizations to which you belong. Contact the editors of their publications and ask about needs, schedules and editorial guidelines. Write according to their guidelines and if possible, have an editor edit your work before submitting it.

When you submit your article, include your contact information for the authorship credit, known as a "byline." If they will also print your picture, that's ideal, but even just getting your name, company name and web address in print will give you valuable exposure and credibility. Once your article is published, be sure to get

reprints to include in your promotional materials.

Another place your article can go, which is often overlooked by business people, is your web site. Posting articles helps you in two ways.

First, people are looking for helpful content on the web. The more you have, the more positively they'll think of your web site, and by extension, you.

Second, search engines value content in their ranking algorithms. Which means the more articles you post on your site, the higher your search engine rankings will be.

## **Awards**

Winning an award can dramatically increase people's desire to do business with you because of the credibility and prestige an award conveys. Even merely being nominated for an award can have a powerful influence on people's spending behavior. Notice how attendance typically increases for a movie once it has been nominated for an Academy Award.

Many governments, media outlets and business organizations give out annual awards in a variety of categories. Nominate yourself for any and every award for which you are eligible, or have someone else nominate you, then send out a press release announcing the nomination. If you become a finalist or a winner, send out additional press releases.

With this strategy, you can get multiple exposures from a single effort, not even counting the publicity you may get from the sponsoring organization. You also receive the side benefit of being portrayed in an inherently positive light.

Naturally, any time you win an award, you want to include that information in all your marketing materials. Put the information front and center on your web site and insert it into your e-mail signature. If you have a blog (discussed below) post the details.

When Completed Systems—a Fairfax, Virginia, technology company—was named “IT Business of the Year” by their local Chamber of Commerce, they created stickers to tout the accolade. They attached the stickers to all their marketing materials, instantly updating them and giving the company greater credibility. Another great example is a basket maker in Albany, New York, who placed a basket in the county fair and won a blue ribbon. All his marketing materials now include the phrase “blue ribbon baskets.”

## Opinion Pieces

Write op-ed (short for “opposite editorial”) pieces or send letters to the editor on issues that relate to small business, home-based business, your industry or your community. Consider issues such as taxes, child care, transportation and government regulation.

Appearing in the editorial section automatically increases your credibility and positions you as someone who cares about your community, not just making money. Use a combination of facts (with sources) and emotional stories to best make your case. Don’t try to actively promote your business, just stick to the issue at hand.

Although you have a greater chance of getting published in smaller magazines and newspapers because there’s less competition for precious op-ed space, you’ll get greater exposure and credibility in larger publications, so direct your efforts at both types.

## Video

More and more, television news outlets are scouring web sites like YouTube.com and blip.tv for interesting and entertaining videos they can put on the air. CNN has created entire shows around web videos.

Can you demonstrate your product, service or people in a way that would engage viewers? For less than \$200, you can buy a video camera that will enable you to post high-quality videos directly to the web. You don’t need a studio, fancy equipment or an editing booth. Nobody’s looking for polished, professionally-produced pieces, so relax.

Steve Spangler, president of Steve Spangler Science, a teaching aid supply company, has become famous as the inventor of the “Mentos soda geyser.” His videos of erupting soda fountains became an Internet sensation in 2005. They’ve since been viewed by millions of people around the world and have generated massive amounts of publicity for him.

## Blogs

For the unfamiliar, a blog (short for “web log”) is like an online diary or journal. Many people use a blog in just that way, to record their thoughts and feelings and share them with the world. Many businesses and professionals, however, use a blog for publicity purposes.



In a sense, a blog is your own media outlet. It enables you to publish whatever you want, whenever you want. You can post written pieces, photos, audio segments and video clips. You can contribute to your blog daily, weekly, monthly or simply whenever the mood strikes you.

A blog can also improve your search engine ranking. Blog postings, like articles, are considered content by search engine “spiders” that constantly monitor web sites. And two of the factors search engines use in determining their rankings is the amount of content and the frequency with which it’s updated. So the more regularly you update your blog, the better your search engine rankings.

What kinds of content could you post on your blog? Almost anything really, as long as your potential readers would consider it valuable. Here are a few suggestions:

- Articles
- Tips
- Strategies
- Announcements
- Recommendations
- Alerts
- Specials
- Reviews
- Essays
- Project updates
- Industry news
- Community news
- Invitations
- Warnings
- Humor
- Photos
- Recaps
- Radio interviews
- Television appearances

You can add a blog to your company web site or create a stand-alone blog. A blog can even serve as your entire web site if you don't already have one. Here are some sites where you can create and host your blog free of charge:

- [blogger.com](http://blogger.com)
- [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com)
- [livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com)
- [weebly.com](http://weebly.com)
- [TheBlogs.net](http://TheBlogs.net)
- [BlogText.org](http://BlogText.org)

Check out these sites, choose one and get writing. Once your blog is up and running, you'll want to promote it, just as you do your web site. Add your blog address to all your other marketing pieces, including your web site and e-mail signature.

## **Social Media**

If you're not familiar with the term "social media," you need to be, because it's the next wave in web-based marketing and publicity. It's the evolution of networking from the physical world to the online world.

Social media sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, Plaxo and Twitter allow you to create detailed company or professional profiles. These profiles can dramatically expand your online presence, giving you more opportunity to connect with customers, prospects and the media. In fact, because these web sites were specifically developed to foster community, they make it easy for you create such connections.

On most social media sites, you can join or create groups, send out announcements, participate in discussions, ask and answer questions, post invitations and ask for referrals. Depending on the site, you may also be able to post photos, audio and video. In some cases you can even create fan clubs for your customers to join. (How cool is that? You don't have to be a rock star to have a fan club!)

If you haven't already, start by checking out the above-listed sites. Get to know the differences between the sites and how each one can benefit you. Read their online tutorials or user guides and begin building your profile. If you want, you can create one profile for your business and a separate one for you personally. Then start

asking people to connect with you. And, like your blog, be sure to update your profile regularly.

## Final Publicity Thoughts

Each time you send out a press release, keep a copy of it, as well as the list of contacts to which you sent it. Be sure to include your press releases—even if they were never published—in your marketing kit and post them on your web site. The fact that you've sent out press releases automatically boosts your credibility.

And keep the publicity generator running! Don't plan one publicity campaign and expect to ride that wave forever. You may not even get noticed the first time. Perseverance is the key to getting publicity. Make a publicity calendar and plan something every quarter, or more often if you can manage it. One of the beautiful things about blogs and social media sites is that you can contribute to them with very little time and effort, enabling you to do it frequently.

You don't need a big budget to get the word out about your business. Nor do you need a marketing degree or massive amounts of writing talent. You just need to invest some time, energy and creativity to employ these publicity tactics. And before long, your business's tremendous success will be your biggest story.



*Don Cooper—The Sales Heretic™—is an internationally-acclaimed sales expert who helps salespeople, business owners and professionals dramatically increase their sales. He delivers custom seminars and keynote speeches for corporations, associations, chambers of commerce and other business organizations.*

*His most popular programs include:*

- **The Future of Selling:** How to be a sales leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- **Never Sell Ice to Eskimos:** A practical program for powerful prospecting
- **The Physics of Closing:** How to make the hardest part of the sale easy
- **When Bad Things Happen to Good Customers:** How to transform customers from enraged to ecstatic

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