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## Old-School PR Can Raise Business Profile Without Stretching Its Budget

*By Sandy Nelson, Team Member, Finance New Mexico project*

Small businesses that lack the bloated advertising budgets of their larger competitors can raise their profile with some old-school public relations techniques. Before launching a PR campaign, however, they should understand that PR is different from advertising.

When a business advertises, it pays to place its message on a highly visible medium — a newspaper, magazine, Internet website or billboard — or it pays for airtime on radio or television. It has complete control over the message, as long as the content doesn't violate industry standards.



By contrast, the public relations approach aims to generate positive news coverage about the business by presenting newsworthy material to a media outlet in hopes an editor will reprint the press release as written or assign a reporter to write an original piece. The media outlet can reject the news release or shape it in a direction that's vastly different than the business intended, but that's the risk a business takes to get its name in the paper at no cost.

**Find a newsworthy angle.** The press release must have a news peg — a legitimate reason for coverage. It can't be a blatant attempt to get free advertising, because editors will see through this and might dismiss anything else the business sends in the future.

Evaluating newsworthiness can be subjective, but some story elements never get old.

Say the business wins recognition in its industry for an important achievement. A press release that announces this might not stop the presses, but it could earn the company a mention on the business pages.

A news release might draw attention to other activities at the business, such as an open house or community forum. An act of philanthropy might warrant coverage, but the business should emphasize the cause rather than its own generosity to avoid an appearance of grandstanding. For example, a retail business that donates 100 winter coats to homeless veterans will earn community goodwill, especially if the press release comes from the organization that's distributing the coats rather than the business.

Businesses should be especially alert to industry-related news and take advantage of opportunities to weigh in on topical concerns, whether in the form of a press release or guest

editorial. Cultivating contacts in local media increases the chances that reporters will call the business if they need an expert source.

**No room for errors.** Businesses can keep costs down by doing their own PR, as long as the end product looks professional.

A press release filled with grammatical errors and sloppy writing undermines a business's credibility and its efforts to generate media attention. If the business employs capable writers, it might not need to hire a professional to review press releases. But the business's leaders should be realistic about their strengths and weaknesses in this area and get help if it's needed.

**When redundancy is good.** Any campaign that targets local media should work in sync with the business's social media platforms. Even if the press doesn't pick up the story, the business can post it on Facebook and its official website, where Internet searchers will find it.

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