

# Maximizing media attention at tradeshow: A TradeShow Teacher plan of action

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Hello again, ECN readers!

It's great to be back for our monthly lesson, "summer school" edition! This month's topic is one all readers can benefit from: how to attract media attention at tradeshow. As you'll see, it's easier than you may think, and the rewards of adding a public relations strategy to any tradeshow planning - whether you're an exhibitor or attendee - are bountiful

With luck, you're taking time to enjoy the summer. But those of you reading this column are smart businesspeople for not allowing seasonal fun to overshadow the importance of staying current with the latest industry happenings - not to mention absorbing your monthly lesson from this column! You can always read outside, so enjoy the beautiful weather and don't miss any of the important news ECN covers every month! Now let's get started on this month's focus:

## Important basics of media coverage

In case you're wondering what the big deal is about getting media coverage, let's cover some basics. Positive media coverage is extremely valuable. To put this into perspective, the impact of positive media coverage - informative news and feature articles concerning your company and its products or services - is much higher than paid advertising in the same publication. And compared to advertising rates, such media coverage is quite literally valuable.

Compared to ads, articles carry greater weight because your product or company is thereby validated by unbiased third

parties (writers and editors), whom readers of the publication have come to trust for information. On the other hand, readers know information in advertisements and "advertorials" is biased, since such material was written by those seeking to sell something.

But while significant reader perception differences exist between media coverage and advertising, I'm not suggesting that you stop advertising and only focus on public relations. For one thing, it's simple to run an ad three months in a row, but pretty much impossible to get a similar article published three times in a row in the same publication.

No doubt about it, advertising is an important marketing tool, since repetition of a pre-determined, planned message is important and can usually be achieved only through ads.

Just don't place ads and stop there! Your best bet when implementing an ad campaign is to simultaneously set up strategic public relations activities designed to attract the media - activities that will spur favorable articles and feature stories. With this two-pronged approach, you'll enhance and complement money spent on advertising, leading to better results and more leads for your sales team.

Tradeshows: ideal opportunities for meeting media contacts

In general, trying to attract a very busy media person who has many deadlines to meet on an average daily basis is difficult. You can send pitch letters all day in hopes of arranging an in-person interview with no luck. But when announcing to targeted media contacts that you will be at a certain trade show they are attending, your odds for arranging a meeting increase dramatically. Notice, I said targeted media contacts. That means, you need to find the contact covering your particular type of company or product and the publications have to be relevant to your business. Just getting media coverage in any miscellaneous publication will not reach the key prospects who would be interested in buying your product.

### Finding out which media reps will attend

When exhibiting, always obtain access to the attending media list, which is typically provided as a spreadsheet containing media rep names, titles, and publications plus contact information. The list is maintained and provided by the show, but keep in mind that it tends to change significantly over time. You should obtain the list as early as possible, but also arrange to receive any updates, since you'll want to learn of anyone added to the list later on.

You'll probably need to contact the show directly to obtain the media list. Note that it's extremely rare to find it at the show site! Typically, a PR contact for the show can send it.

However, if you're an attendee rather than an exhibitor, the show probably won't provide you with the media list. There's away around this obstacle, though - simply have an exhibitor you know request it and send you a copy!

## Pitching media for show-site interviews and special events

If you hope to arrange show-site interviews with journalists, or to have media reps cover your special event, start your preparations and introductions a month or so before the show. Remember: Media schedules fill up fast!

Do some homework first. Pinpoint an appropriate media contact to pitch at each publication you're targeting by examining articles in the current issue and checking what's on the editorial calendar. Next, alert all such contacts to any new or improved products you're featuring, or to the innovative approach your company is taking this year. Suggest topics or departments such coverage might fit and suggest any other article ideas you may have.

One surefire way to attract attention in a pitch is to volunteer yourself (or a fellow staff member or hired consultant) as an expert source for articles, listing areas of expertise and a few story ideas. Such details go a long way in showing that you are either already a reader of the publication, or that you took the time to learn about the type of coverage likely to be of interest to them and how you can help with it. If you take nothing else from this lesson, remember that tradeshow/convention/special events industry media contacts are always in need of additional expert sources to provide information for articles. This is a convenient route to favorable, free publicity for yourself and your company, so be sure to make the most of this opportunity!

If your product or service, however worthy, has already been on the market for quite a while, your pitch for a meeting or show-site interview won't hold much weight. In that case, you're better off just looking for media badges on the showfloor and at networking events. If your product or service is truly interesting, you'll have an easier time attracting media reps to learn more about it in person than you will through an advance pitch.

But if your company has done special market research for the show; has new, interesting case studies to share; or has significant impending news to announce, use such a story angle to set up meetings.

What to have available for media at a tradeshow:

One of the most important items to have available is a press kit - either a traditional kit in a folder or a kit on CD. The kit should contain two or three of your company's latest press releases, plus a spokesperson bio, company brochure, product data sheets or other product information sheets, and, most importantly, a business card for your company's media contact. Be sure to place an adequate number of media kits in the show's press room. The number you need to bring will depend on the size of the show and how many media reps have registered to attend. (Just remember it's better to bring too many than too few!) Keep extra press kits in your booth for journalists who stop by, and make sure everyone on your staff knows where to find them.

My "Top 5" tips for good media coverage:

- Have a company spokesperson: Select at least one dedicated company spokesperson (or several if your company is large enough).

- Create a list of speaking points: Compile important speaking points and key benefit messages for spokespeople to incorporate into communications and messaging.

- Arrange media training for staff: Everyone concerned, especially your official spokespeople, should know how to field

tough questions under any and all circumstances. Although new developments or sudden bad news can present problems to any company at any time, verbalized reactions - plus or minus - greatly impact public perception of such events. Don't let your company get bad press unnecessarily - be prepared!

- Create a media interaction plan for booth staff: Have a clearly defined process for how booth staff members are to deal with media contacts. A press kit should be readily available for booth distribution, and staffers should be instructed to ask not only for business cards but for cellphone numbers and local numbers as well. It's vitally important that a company spokesperson be able to reach interested journalists quickly and easily!

- Prepare a script: If you want all booth staffers to be able to speak with the media, prepare a list of permitted topics, along with speaking points and key benefit messages for them to refer to. Implement role-playing exercises both pre-show and at the booth before the show opens. If your company has a PR professional, that person should oversee this exercise and provide feedback and suggestions. Otherwise, have a marketing manager participate and direct these role-playing activities.

Well class, that's it for this month's lesson. As you've learned, making media contacts at tradeshow can be pretty easy, and the resulting media coverage can showcase and draw attention to your company. Acquiring such contacts does require some planning (like everything else related to tradeshow), but it's more than worth the effort!

Enjoy the rest of the summer and I'll see you in September.

Linda Musgrove, the TradeShow Teacher, helps companies improve tradeshow results through customized educational tradeshow marketing programs for both individuals and entire departments. She is also the author of a tradeshow training manual, "Trade Show Training for Increased Return on Investment," and is currently writing "The Complete Idiots Guide to Trade Shows." Visit [www.tsteacher.com](http://www.tsteacher.com) to register for her free "Trade Show Tactics Newsletter." Or call (888) 547-7410 for a free consultation.