

10 Tips For Increasing Your Media Exposure

Whether you are trying to make a sale, garner more referrals or attract patients, recognition is important in the health care industry. Think about it, if you need to choose a health care product, service or facility yourself, would you simply look in the phone book and select an unknown company? Or would you choose a familiar corporation, one you are aware of and know has a positive image?

One very effective way to improve name recognition is to increase your company's media exposure. When an organization is in the news for a positive reason, it helps build recognition and credibility. Media exposure helps to educate the public on the strengths of your company and its products or services. As people hear and see your name in the news, they will begin to respond to the image you have cultivated through the media, as reliable, tuned into community needs or as experts in the health care industry.

The benefits and rewards from this kind of exposure can be substantial. Increasing visibility and credibility can easily lead to increased referrals and a stronger

patient or customer base. Where to start? We suggest you try these 10 sure-fire ways to improve media exposure in your local or



regional market:

1. Start with the proper media list. First, identify key media outlets where your company should be included. Consider TV, radio, community newspapers or trade publications that can help you reach other health care professionals or consumers with information on your products or services.

Research the name and title of the current contact person at each of the media outlets to ensure you are contacting the proper person for placement. Editors change frequently in the print media, so you will need to keep up-to-date on the editor or reporter to contact. Generally, for newspapers and other publications, that will be the health editor. In the realm of TV, it may be a health reporter, or an assignment reporter for coverage of an event. To be interviewed on a radio or TV news show about a specific topic or event, you will need to get in touch with the news producer for the particular news segment you are targeting, as many stations have morning, noon and evening news shows with different producers for each one.

2. Develop relationships with media contacts. Nurturing relationships with the media increases your prospects for obtaining media coverage. Getting to know local reporters, editors and producers can offer substantial benefits. Call your media contacts with good story ideas. Promote yourself or other executives as a resource for the media and the community on health care issues. Send press releases when you have important news and follow-up with the

press releases you send out.

When you make your pitch for an article or other coverage, keep it short and concise—and always follow through to provide the article or information you promised.

3. Train your executives for media exposure. For the media and its readers or viewers, your company spokesperson is the company. How the spokesperson acts and looks or what he or she says, or doesn't say, reflects on the company as a whole. Company executives all should be potential spokespeople, ready to field questions from the media. It is critical that anyone who is the voice of the company takes every interview seriously. It also is essential that every spokesperson knows all the facts—about the company, its products or services, competitors and the industry.

You may want to coach these executives with your own training program or manual to ensure that they focus on the correct messages and have the ability to represent the company well in front of the media. Or you can partner with an outside resource, such as an experienced public relations firm, that can train your people to prepare for interviews and speak effectively.

4. Develop a list of topics. Give serious thought to the topics that will interest your intended readers and viewers. List any relevant topics where your company executives have significant knowledge and experience that they can convey through an article or interview. For a consumer publication, you could consider topics such as senior fitness programs, new home health techniques or solutions for rising health care costs. In a trade publi-

cation, industry trends, health care technology or unique procedures could be addressed.

5. Review editorial calendars. Obtain editorial calendars from the publications you are interested in and review the topics they will be covering. This will allow you to match your company's interests and strengths, as well as your executives' abilities and knowledge, to the publication's focus. Then, contact the editor to secure placement for a feature article that fits their editorial plan.

6. Create strong, interesting feature articles and interview talking points. Once you secure print placement, you will need to begin the work of planning and writing a knowledgeable, focused and interesting feature article that positions you and the company as experts. Avoid a sales and marketing approach. Your article should be timely, targeted to the intended audience, and filled with valuable information for the reader. The goal is to capture their attention and provide something useful, so they will look to you as a resource for information and connect your company name with industry expertise.

If you have secured a radio or television interview, develop interesting talking points for the interview. Write down a list of anticipated questions and review your answers prior to the interview. Forward the questions that you are prepared to answer to the radio or TV producer so he or she knows what you are prepared to discuss.

7. Compose eye-catching press releases. Be sure every press release has a purpose.

Each press release should be newsworthy or have a human interest focus. Start by identifying everything about your company, products and services that the public would find interesting or valuable. Besides relying on your own topics, you may want to review health care calendars for additional relevant topics you could address in a release. If you provide information that is topical and interesting to readers, such as announcing a special event, new services offered, a new home health treatment or technique, company growth, expansion plans, acquisition plans or mergers, the media will try to use that information.

When writing the press release, use the inverted pyramid style, where the most important information is listed at the top. This is the way news articles are structured and your editors will appreciate getting the information in a form that is easy for them to use. Keep the most important information—who, what, when, where, why and how—up front and then provide supporting details throughout the release. Keep it factual, concise and to the point, without a sales pitch tone to it.

8. Plan a media tour. Media tours provide opportunities for interviews that can bring your company into the news. When there is a hot topic or issue to discuss, call your media contacts and schedule a meeting on the topic or event. If you are attending a trade show, obtain a list of media attendees and call those who will be at the show to schedule interviews while you are there. It is a proactive way to get your company's

name in front of your target audience in a positive light.

9. Host or sponsor a special event. Find out what is important to members of a community, and then develop or sponsor an event such as a 5K Run/Walk or a home health or senior related event. Be sure it is an event that will be attended by your target audience. Sponsorship of an event that promotes wellness and independence, for example, will associate your company name with concern for the community and proactive leadership in the industry. Developing and hosting an event, especially one that has a clearly defined purpose, such as an activity that gives all proceeds to the community senior center or to families who can't afford home health care, not only helps the community, but is a very effective way to gain exposure in the media.

Whatever your event, be sure to prepare and send appropriate press releases to your media contacts.

10. Hire an expert. Many companies do not have the time or resources needed to effectively follow all of these suggestions. In those cases, it can be beneficial to hire a public relations firm that specializes in this area. A third party resource often can be more objective in planning and creating the kind of media exposure that is needed. Generally, these firms are quite reasonably priced.

A public relations consultant should be considered when in-house public relations has been ineffective, or you simply don't have the time to perform the tasks involved. Even if you have

an in-house marketing-public relations person on staff, utilizing an outside firm to handle some of the tasks necessary for effective media exposure will allow that employee to focus on other tasks such as community-related events or family concerns.

If you choose to work with an outside consultant, look for a company with in-depth knowledge of the health care industry, and be sure you have a clear understanding of factors such as fee structure and references. The right partner can save your company time and money.

Whether you create your own plan for increasing media exposure or seek the assistance of a third-party expert, creating positive media exposure is crucial when raising your company's credibility. Knowing how to utilize media relationships, along with effective press releases, special events and feature article placement, are critical tools in successfully managing and leveraging the results.

*Michelle Love-Johnson is vice president of Seroka & Associates Inc., Wis., and director of public relations. She has more than 15 years experience in marketing, public relations, advertising and business development with a variety of national clients. **Brent Campbell**, senior account executive at Seroka Healthcare Marketing, has more than 15 years of health care experience in a variety of capacities including several senior positions within the assisted living industry. Contact Seroka at (262) 523-3740, (262) 523-3760 or visit www.seroka.com.*