

## Marketing Messages

## MARY CHARLESON

*Creating media buzz about business can pay dividends*

If you want your company and its message to be heard above today's advertising roar, you need to get people to talk about your stuff.

Generating positive word of mouth can be one of the most effective marketing tools you have at your disposal. Because word of mouth and generating media coverage come via a third party, it's seen as authentic. It also tends to get remembered. Plus it's free. What could be better?

Although it's the least expensive form of advertising, it's also the most time-consuming. And because you can't buy it, you have little control over the accuracy of what is said or written.

To get publicity, you must have the imagination to produce news monthly and publicize it. You must have influential media contacts to offer news to, and you need to nurture these contacts and keep them current. You must also have the persistence to follow things through to get the news coverage you're looking for.

So how do you make news? How do you create buzz?

Here are some ideas:

- announce something new about your business;
- explain something unique or unusual about your business;
- announce an upcoming event;
- connect your offering to what's in the news;
- give survey results;
- leverage a holiday or special event;
- connect your business to a trend;
- make a controversial claim (and be able to back it up!);
- make a humorous announcement; and
- stage an event.

You'll need to put together a press kit for the media.

It should include:

- your one-page release;
- a short note about why you're sending the press kit; and
- a photo with caption.

Make your press kit an attractive folder.

Include a one-sheet brief about

harnessed the power of capturing media and creating buzz is Executive Search Dating. Billing itself as the "Dating Headhunters," the company offers services that are aimed at busy professionals.

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While matching agents interview clients to create a profile, the "Cupid Strike Force" patrols events throughout the city searching for the perfect match. Thorough screening and all dating arrangements as well as follow-up and refinement of matches make for an appealing package for busy attractive professional singles.

After having limited success with traditional paid advertising, company founder and president Paddi Rice, embarked on a campaign to create word of mouth and buzz about his company's services.

In one stunt, ESD placed valuables such as Rolex watches and luxury car keys in bear traps at strategic places in Vancouver's financial district.

Signs exclaiming "Leave the hunting to us" were placed close by. The guerilla campaign, the brainchild of Rethink, landed them coverage in *Metro* and *Marketing Magazine*.

By using its Cupid Strike Force to interview people about dating in Vancouver, ESD has generated its own research, which has helped it get coverage from CBC, News 1130 and the 94.5 FM The Beat, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Business in Vancouver*, *Global TV* and A Channel. The Beat featured a promotion called "Shred your X," in which it set up a paper shredder on Robson Street. Listeners were invited to shred photos and letters in exchange for a first date with Executive Search Dating.

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Include a one-sheet brief about your company and background.

Attach a business card and contact information.

And remember, if you're sending a press release by e-mail, put the release within the body of the e-mail, not as an attachment. Unsolicited attachments are less likely to be opened and often suspected of containing viruses. Make your subject heading catchy and avoid words or phrases used in spam, which may cause your message to be filtered out.

If you're fortunate enough to be interviewed, you need to be prepared.

Practise. Better yet, get coaching.

Know what makes you/your business different.

Practise communicating your message.

Identify three main points, and always bring questions back to these points.

One local business that has

Rice says there are two important aspects to media:

- getting it regularly to maintain a profile with the public; and
- ensuring people see the media.

The company actively promotes all coverage received on their website.

Paddi also recognized the benefits of professional media coaching, which he received from **Optimedia**. He interviews well.

Harnessing a buzz is hard work. But getting people to talk about your stuff is worth it. And as the media universe gets increasingly cluttered, it's an authentic way to cut through and be heard. ◀

*Mary Charleson is president of Charleson Communications, a company specializing in market research, strategy and advertising development. She writes monthly and can be reached at [mary@charleson.ca](mailto:mary@charleson.ca).*