

Get your (public relations) show on the road

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While promoting Ringling Brothers Circus, publicist Lee Solters gave this classic definition of publicity: “When the circus comes to town and you paint a sign about it, that’s advertising. Put the sign on the back of the elephant and march through town, that’s promotion. If the elephant walks through the mayor’s flowerbed, that’s publicity. And if you get the mayor to comment about it, that’s public relations.”

While food industry press coverage isn’t the circus we observe in mass media, trade editors get a freakish amount of press releases and story pitches everyday. It is important to know what they consider to be legitimate news and what they might dismiss as a hoax to ensure the success of your public relations efforts.

For example, you should resist the urge to send out a press release announcing you’ve changed the color of your company logo from magenta to mango. Who cares? Better defined: How does that benefit the reader? Trade editors use this benchmark question to sift through the mounds of press releases, case studies and feature stories that land in their inbox every day so they’re left with newsworthy content.

Whether or not you have a public relations professional on staff or you work with a public relations firm, you should ask this question to determine if you should announce your news to the industry as a whole or save it for the company picnic.

Editors have years of experience covering the food industry or hold degrees in relevant fields. Most have both. They are journalists and food scientists rolled into one. They know grandstanding when they read it. Unless your news of the day will be worthwhile to their readers, you won’t get any ink. And you risk damaging your credibility, hurting your chances that they’ll consider any future news you send them.

Once you’ve determined your announcement is legit, you’re ready to write a press release. Keep the reader in mind at all times and lead with benefits, not features, in your product description. Avoid editorializing with words such as “best” and punctuation such as exclamation marks; save those for your ads and sales materials. Thumb through the trade publications you have on your desk to get a feel for the appropriate writing style.

You also might consider hiring a public relations firm. According to Len Saffir, a PR industry veteran and author of the best-selling book *Power Public Relations*, the basic progression is to do in-house PR "until a company becomes either big enough or smart enough to seek expert help." Public relations practitioners can readily assess your story's newsworthiness and write a press release in the unbiased, journalistic style the magazines expect. They have established relationships and credibility with trade editors, increasing your chances of seeing your news in print. And they can take the burden of writing, distribution and follow up off your plate so you aren't juggling more than your core business.

When you're ready to throw your hat in the public relations ring, contact Adfinity Marketing Group. We'll make sure your company news is heard, loud and clear.

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