



NO BUDGET FOR PR? DO IT YOURSELF WITH THE HELP OF TECHNOLOGY!

Not so long ago, small businesses and non-profit organizations across the board were faced with a tough question: do we need a Web site? We know the answer to that as the majority of small businesses and non-profits offer effective sites that not only provide information but can sell products, accept online donations, and raise awareness.

The new question facing them now is: Do we need to hire a PR agency?

Unfortunately, though many small businesses and organizations would like to retain a PR firm, the cost just doesn't fit into the budget. Well, that doesn't have to be the case. Small businesses and non-profits can manage their own media relations with the help of a few tools of the trade.

Online Press Kits: Everything a business or organization's press kit contains can be published and distributed on the Internet with online press kits. Now, an online press kit is not a Web site. Don't be confused by the term "online." Though an online press kit can be displayed online and present information like a Web site, it is really a virtual folder or briefcase that allows an organization to upload and store press materials on the Internet.

Once in an online press kit folder, these documents and images can be distributed as links – not attachments to e-mails. Most e-mails with attachments never reach their designated recipient in the media due to firewalls and anti-virus protection services. With an online press kit, documents are added as links within the message.

An online press kit can be linked directly to a Web site so that when the media visits in search of news and background information, they'll know exactly where to go. Changes and edits can be made instantly, preventing outdated or incorrect information from being distributed. Plus, some online press kit services are so simple to use and manage; an organization won't need to hire an "IT guy," another budget-friendly feature.

Online press kit services vary greatly in terms of price and features. Take some time to research your options and identify your needs before committing to one service over another. Some services include features you probably will never use (but pay for), while others may not provide enough services, such as training or support.

Web-based Media Lead Services – One of the greatest benefits of the Internet is the ability to rapidly obtain information. What used to require a hard copy media guide or CD is now available from a number of providers online. An organization can reach virtually hundreds of thousands of media contacts with one click by listing spokespeople as experts, offering timely quotes on current events, or responding to the hundreds of media leads that come in daily from journalists on deadline. There are many providers out there that vary in cost and quality. It is worth the time and effort to do some research on which service is best for your budget and your needs. Some services are even free. Services that are used by the most media professionals will likely cost more than ones with lower membership.

Web-based Media Databases – Your business or organization has hot news and you want to let every daily newspaper in the country know about it. First, you must visit each paper's Web site individually, record their contact information, compile a list and then blast that news out there. However, by the time you did that, your news would be at least a month old. Ouch.

Media databases to the rescue. There are many services available online that provide up-to-date media lists from every medium and market you can imagine. Most require a membership or subscription fee, but it is well worth the money if the alternative is to compile a list manually. Services of this type include BurrellesLuce Media Contacts program (www.BurrellesLuce.com), Bacon's (www.Bacons.com), and Contacts on Tap (www.ContactsOnTap.Com).

Press Release Distribution Services – Got a press release that the world needs to see? You could compile the list as we mentioned above (the hard way), or use a media database – but you could also leave it to the experts and submit your release to a distribution service, or "wire." There are many services available at various costs. One service is PR Web (www.PRWeb.com) which not only can run your release for free (limited distribution), but allows you to specify Internet search terms, making the release easily accessible to Web users.

The media savvy and expertise of media relations professionals is worth the money, but when the money just isn't there, small businesses and non-profit organizations can tap the talent they have within and combine it with technology designed to make communication easier.

If you need some help developing your press documents, take a look at the press kits of other businesses or organizations in your area. There are also many Internet resources available that can provide tips to writing your own press releases and news announcements.

Managing media relations in-house is not impossible and can be a fantastic way to reach the media as a small business or organization grows.