



## District 9800 Marketing Tip # 1 – Public Relations

The challenge today facing many organisations such as Rotary is how to undertake cost-effective marketing that will provide a return on investment and grow our brand. Done correctly, public relations is the most logical way to market Rotary and our clubs, and can be scaled to fit our objectives and budgets – regardless of how big or small these may be.

### Defining Public Relations

PR uses publicity in a wide variety of media that does not necessitate payment and is often placed as news or items of public interest. Because PR communications are placed in this manner, they offer a legitimacy that advertising does not. The practice of PR is about developing relationships. The 'public' can refer to a number of target categories for us: potential members; existing members whose interest and sense of engagement we wish to retain; those who have projects to which we could potentially contribute; potential commercial partners; interest groups; media ... the list goes on.

### Selling the Sizzle not the Steak!

Rather than be told by a club that it is undertaking activities worth participating in, it is far more compelling to be informed by an impartial third-party (such as a journalist) of the reasons why our ventures warrant involvement or interest. Even better is if those we have helped share their experiences and stand testimony to the benefits of our club's work. This is PR at its best – not just informing others about our service or qualities, but helping to shape a favourable impression through implied endorsement.

### The importance of knowing the best medium to reach the 'public'

If you are trying to publicise your efforts about helping to resolve poverty issues, you might contact a columnist who has recently themed a number of their articles on the need for solutions to poverty. Alternatively, you might even invite a news or current affairs team to accompany you out on a significant project where there is a story that you know will capture the public's imagination.

### Purposes of editorial contributions

Contributions to editorial should serve a number of purposes:

- raise the profile of your club
- convey your club's messages (i.e. what you're doing, why it's important, why others should get involved)
- make a distinction between contributing through Rotary and other alternatives such as watching the issues helplessly (i.e. why Rotary offers a unique channel for action and how people can make a decision to be a part of it).

### **Working with top-level media relations activities**

If you are embarking on extensive and top-level media relations activities, proper media training is a must. There are lots of tricks of the trade to help avoid pitfalls and get the most out of media opportunities, but if you're just getting started, there are a few basic rules to keep in mind when communicating through print, broadcast or online media.

1. Understand the magazine, radio show, newspaper etc. and its target audience. Ask yourself what would interest its audience and then get a feel for the style of communication.
2. Don't say anything you don't want existing or potential members of the 'public' to hear from you. This includes avoiding off-topic digressions that dilute the strength of your message or lose people's interest. There is no such thing as "off the record".
3. Don't be scared of journalists. Most of the time, they're not out to trick you. Their main objective is to get an informative and unique angle, and for the most part, their motives are honourable.
4. Don't ask to see the copy/story to check before it is printed - you don't have that right. Journalists face tight deadlines and may not have the time to secure your approval. On rare occasions when you are sent the article for checking, it's a bonus, so review to ensure the facts are correct and respond ASAP.
5. Have an opinion! As long as it's conducive to rule two, remember the more newsworthy and interesting your story, the more chance you will receive coverage, and the more likely that the journalist will want to speak to you again for future articles.

### **On a final note**

Contrary to common misconception about PR and its 'spin' function, honesty, integrity and consistency are always the best ingredients in our dealings with the media. Messages must be rooted in truth.

Source: Adapted from Red Agency, 'Friend to Small Business – The Networker Article'