

5 Free Things You Can Do to Jump Start Your PR Today

by Jennifer Kalita

Your service is top-notch. Your product almost sells itself. Making sure people know all that, however, is the hard part. Who knew that *running* your business would be the easy part?

Growing your business is what keeps you hopping. Entrepreneurs don't just wait for business to come our way; we go out and claim it. We network. We volunteer. We educate. We understand that it's our responsibility to make sure prospects get the message, loud and clear.

Putting the word out is the first step in a solid PR effort. But which words (and in what order) will yield more business? Start with "hello."

The practice of public relations is all about building relationships – with media, prospects and clients – so creating ongoing communication with these groups in a non-sales capacity is the first step to a productive PR endeavor.

If, like most entrepreneurs, you didn't start out with an extra few thousand dollars each month to pay a PR firm to initiate these relationships and create this ongoing communication for you, it's time to empower yourself to create and sustain your own respectable PR effort.

Here are five free things you can do to get started today, and rake in profits tomorrow:

1. **PR staff meeting: party of one.** Make and keep a standing appointment with yourself to launch and sustain a solid PR effort. Maybe you book two hours every Sunday with yourself, grab a glass of iced tea, and go and sit on your deck to strategize. Or, perhaps it's 7-7:30 am each morning at your desk. Creating this commitment on your planner will force you to carve out space to develop PR opportunities.

During this block of time, start educating yourself about entrepreneurial PR. Read articles like this one. Listen to teleseminars. Pick up books at the library. Sign up for free ezines that deliver opportunities right to your desktop.

Once you've got a handle on what entrepreneurial PR is all about, use this time slot to create a PR action plan. Then, use the time to execute. Ultimately, you can use the time to read about yourself in your favorite magazine, or rewind that *Oprah* segment for which you were interviewed.

Cost: Free

2. **Make your signature count.** How do you most often reach out to prospects, clients, volunteer associations, and your Aunt Sue? Via email. Email is the most often used, yet most often misused PR tool in most businesses...because many people don't realize it can, in fact, play a powerful PR role. By creating an automatic email signature (which should include your name, title, company, and contact information to accompany each outgoing email), you achieve a couple of key PR objectives with every email you send.

First, your reader knows who you are, what your role/area of expertise is, and how to get in touch with you. Second, your company information, along with a link to your web site (where readers can find out how to hire you or buy from you) is repeatedly in front of them.

And don't stop with the basics. Add a catchy tag line, which will remind them what need your business serves. Or, get really creative and put a 1-2 line announcement at

the bottom of the signature about a new book, product, seminar or service offering you've just announced.

The best part is that an email signature makes for easy forwarding to a prospect you might not have seen coming. A friend of Aunt Sue's perhaps?

Cost: Free

3. **Start spreadin' the news.** Start your PR effort in your own backyard, before attempting any large-scale, national PR. It will give you good experience in how to effectively disseminate your message. It will also enable you to start a dialogue with reporters on a smaller scale, so that when you work up to national news desks and show producers, your media skills will be sharper.

Start achieving coverage today by sending out a press release to local media about something happening within your company. Announce a new hire, expansion, web site launch or award for inclusion in local business news briefs. Avoid sales copy, and keep it newsworthy. Advertisements don't get printed for free, but news releases do.

Cost: Free

4. **Put your web site to work.** Many web sites, while well-intentioned initially, end up being expansive advertisements that simply provide product, service and contact information...but there's no content to be found to help the prospect decide why to buy *from you* instead of the competition.

Step it up from "how to buy" to "why to buy." Take a comprehensive look at your site and ask yourself if it's all about you. Promoting your strengths is of course necessary, but have you also remembered to answer your prospect's inherent question: "What's in it for me?"

For example, don't just say you're a certified coach. Say you're a certified coach whose valuable training and education enabled you to create solutions to common challenges among your target demographic. Instead of just listing the benefits of your experience, product or service, expand and capitalize on them by showing your target market your understanding of and investment in meeting their needs.

Remember that your web site is a powerful PR tool, so use it to inform as well as sell. Create a free ezine. Post a few white papers or articles to demonstrate your expertise. Provide some case studies to illustrate how your product or service made a difference.

Cost: Free

5. **Get out of the office.** People do business with people they like, and meeting someone face to face is the first step in creating new relationships that will lead to new business.

As much as you may loathe networking, visibility is critical to differentiating yourself in the marketplace. And creative minds have come up with some really creative and even enjoyable ways to network. Get out into the local business community and the national trade community. Be seen. Get heard.

Write an article. Speak at a networking meeting. Host a teleseminar. Volunteer your talents for the next business event in your area to connect with like-minded business

owners. Create visibility around who you are and what you do, and you will simultaneously create new possibilities for your business.

Cost: Free

Creating PR buzz is all about reaching out to prospects and media in a non-sales capacity. By relating to the public with helpful information and good will, you have a unique opportunity to distinguish yourself and your business.

Educate your prospects about why your product or service matters. Explain what is newsworthy about it. Differentiate yourself within the marketplace and even your own industry by spending time developing the “hook” that will grab your prospects and hold them fast.

The end game is, of course, sales...but PR is the play. Now go hit the field.

Jennifer Kalita has been a communications and business consultant, writer, speaker and strategist for more than a decade. She empowers entrepreneurs to live a life In Business and In Balance™, and has educated thousands of entrepreneurs in all facets of business launch, development, and promotion. She is the founder and CEO of The Kalita Group (www.thekalitagroup.com) and Strategic Women (www.strategicwomen.com); Boomer Buzz PR columnist at Second50Years.com; and author of numerous books and business development programs.