can attract new customers and increase your net profit by getting your firm’s name and message out to the public through positive public relations. Successful PR usually leaves the public with a positive feeling about your firm or your products. And it’s not uncommon for positive feelings to be translated into more customer traffic, more sales and more profits.

Dozens—even hundreds—of creative, low-cost public relations opportunities are available to you right now, and they are not limited to press releases, photo opportunities and the occasional special event. To get you thinking about the ways creative public relations can enhance your marketing efforts, this article offers 25 such opportunities.

Awards

Ponder for a moment the names of firms that have made significant contributions to your field or your community. Have you ever thought about bestowing annual awards on these firms? Awards can be given for professional accomplishments, support of important community Causes building upkeep and any number of other reasons. The public can learn about awards through the media and through the plaques and trophies that award recipients may display in their lobbies.

Booklets

In our information-conscious world, customers are often delighted to receive “how-to” or instructional booklets on new products, problems they face or other topics of popular concern. Publish you own booklets—or purchase stock material and imprint it with your name and address, and make them available to your customers and prospects.

Bouncebacks

A “bounceback” is simply a repeat-business incentive. You might, for instance, place “bounceback coupons” on shopping bags that are distributed to people as they leave your place of business; the bag coupons entice customers to come back. Bounceback coupons, special offers or announcements of customer educational programs can be produced on the back of receipts, enclosed with invoices and statements or given to people as they leave your retail outlets.

Bulletin Boards

The community bulletin board phenomenon is sweeping the nation. These popular bulletin boards, or sometimes they may be kiosks, are located in banks, shopping malls, grocery stores, laundromats, libraries and numerous other locations in just about every community. Many of these bulletin boards can be accessed at no charge; others require a modest advertising fee. Either way, you can use community bulletin boards to promote everything from customer events to special product offers.

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**Bumper Stickers**

If you have a group of loyal fans, ask them to place bumper stickers bearing your firm's name on the backs of their vehicles. The publicity value of these stickers can be enormous. To add a twist to conventional bumper stickers, enclose a coupon for a popular attraction or restaurant on the back of the bumper sticker. After it’s torn off, the sticker-backing paper can be redeemed.

**Buttons**

The promotional opportunities associated with lapel buttons are as varied as your imagination. You can offer personalized buttons bearing your firm name and your customers' first names. You can offer prizes to button-wearers selected at random by a roving reporter. Or you can offer cash discounts to button-wearers who come into your place of business.

**Charitable Tie-Ins**

Not-for-profit organizations throughout the nation are searching for new fund-raising ideas—and are usually eager to form revenue-producing partnerships with commercial firms. If you’re trying to introduce a new product or service in the marketplace, you might publicly note that a portion of the proceeds will benefit a favorite charity. Or you might office a charity a large number of retail coupons at no charge. The charity can sell the coupons at face value and you can end up with more customers.

**Clubs**

Want to encourage repeat business? Start a “service-of-the-month” club, offering your customers a new product or service each month at modest cost. Mail order merchants, fruit vendors and publishers have used this concept! with great success in the past. With a bit of planning, it can be applied to almost any service, such as a discounted drywall job or a reduced-fee exterior application.

**Consultation**

By offering advice or consultation to the public at no charge, you'll establish yourself as an authority in your field—and you'll identify a ready-made pool of prospective customers. You might set aside a day of the month or a time each week when you'll be available to answer questions, or, take the time to go visit a potential customer's home to provide a free consultation.

**Contests**

To increase visibility in the community, invite local students to write essays on some topic of contemporary concern. Ask homeowners or clients to suggest the name of a new product. Another option is to invite senior adults to submit art for a mall contest. Remember, of course, to develop your contest around your own product line and you'll build identification of your name and specialty throughout the marketplace. The winner could receive anything from discounted services to a company-sponsored dinner for two at a popular local restaurant.

**Cross Promotions**

Make a list of non-competing firms that serve the kind of customers you serve. Ask the owners of these firms if they'd be willing to distribute traffic-building coupons for you in their outlets, if you do the same for them. You'll fertilize each other's customer pool in this manner, without diminishing each other's profits.

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Demonstrations

People love to watch live exhibits! If you're interested in promoting a new technique, tool or process, stage a public demonstration. Invite the public at no charge and offer liberal opportunities for questions and one-to-one practice. If your community or your market stages public gatherings of people—like fairs or trade shows—all the better; these are perfect opportunities for demonstrations. The union-sponsored drywall competitions are excellent examples.

Endorsements

No, you need not run a huge multinational conglomerate to enlist the help of a spokesperson or use a celebrity endorsement. Consider asking a local disk jockey or entertainer to serve as your spokesperson. Or ask a not-so-famous amateur with a distinctive voice or face to represent you at public gatherings. Or create a spokesperson through your own fictional cartoon character!

Letters to The Editor

Don’t overlook the promotional value of the “letters to the editor” column in your daily or weekly newspaper. Letters written on topics of current interest as well as longer “op-ed” and commentary pieces, are easy to place in newspapers and can make a wide impact on public opinion.

Media Events

If you'd like to attract the attention of the mass media, don't hesitate to stage a made-for-the-media event: a tasting contest, a celebrity visit, a sporting event, an unusual photo opportunity or any other novel activity with strong visual appeal.

Public Service Announcements

Radio and television make “public service” time available to charitable groups and causes. While you may not be directly eligible for this public service time, you can assist charitable organizations in developing their own PSAs, add charitable "tag lines" on your own advertising or even run cause-oriented advertising that associates your firm’s name with a compelling public issue.

School Programs

If you’re marketing to young people—or their families—don't hesitate to make educational materials and opportunities available to teachers and entire classrooms. Filmstrips, printed materials, samples, demonstrations, talks, tours and field trips—all bearing your name—can help cultivate large numbers of prospective customers at one time.

Seasonal Activities

Gear your promotional activities to one or more holidays to attract public attention. Offer calendars, notepads, imprinted cards or novelties to your customers who, in turn, can give them to family and friends on these occasions. But don't limit yourself to conventional holidays like Thanksgiving or Christmas; focus on ethnic holidays and family days (like Mother’s Day, Father’s Day or Grandparents’ Day).

Speakers Bureaus

Word of mouth can be a powerful promotional force. Consider setting up a simple speakers bureau—comprised of yourself and perhaps one or two trusted associates—who can offer informal talks at civic business and social clubs in your area. Even the smallest of communities can boast of a dozen or more civic organizations; large communities may have hundreds of these organizations, many of them hosting weekly talks for their members.

Specialized Media

Your community, region or profession is probably served by specialized media—in-house company publications, church newsletters, club bulletins. Make a list of these media and when you prepare press releases, send copies to them.

Sponsorships

Sporting events, charitable events
tournaments, spelling bees, fairs and a variety of other public events all need sponsors—to help defray expenses, to underwrite printed programs and to offer prizes. You may be able to bring your name to patrons of a major upcoming community event by offering a modest underwriting fee or by offering in-kind services or goods.

**Stuffers**

Don’t ignore the promotional value of routine mail you send to customers or to the public. Enclose promotional stuffers in everything you send out. You may be surprised at the response. To make your stuffers irresistible, enclose discount offers and coupons.

**Talk Shows**

Make a list of the radio and television talk shows in your area; chances are you can pinpoint at least a dozen. Then prepare a list of three or four interesting business-related topics on which you can speak—and offer you services to each of the talk-show hosts.

**Telephone Campaigns**

Want to get the word out on a new product to a large group of customers—quickly? Want to test public reaction to a new promotion? Conduct a mini telephone campaign, using telemarketing to impart brief messages to your target group. While telemarketing is frequently used to sell products by phone, it is used much less frequently to impart information—so your message is apt to be noticed. You can hire telemarketing firms to conduct such a campaign for you, or you can develop your own “home grown” campaign at modest cost.

**Tests**

Advertising experts know that ads creating “reader involvement” can be especially effective. To draw attention to your firm or your product line, develop a simple “customer quiz”; a brief set of true-false statements or a series of multiple choice questions. Prepare a rating guide—which will draw attention to your product lines—and make the test available on your retail countertops and in other public locations.

Use these 25 techniques as starting points for your own successful promotions. Only your imagination limits the breadth and depth of the promotions you can develop—and the impact your name can make on the public.

**About the Author**

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