

What You Need to Know About Publicity

By Joe Lancellotti

Introduction

Doctor, you have probably already learned a lot about marketing your practice, including the need to generate publicity. You want to reach your target audience; those in your area who for *any reason* are seeking a dentist at any given time – those new to the area, those seeking a new dentist, those with a history of dental fear, those former patients who are able to be reactivated, and so on. As you look ahead to your future, you recognize the need to maintain a continued presence in the eye of your target audience as time goes by.

You might consider placing an advertisement in the local daily and weekly newspapers that serve your community. However, advertising is costly and does not always provide a return; readers may or may not look at your ad.

Publicity is free. Furthermore, most people buy the newspaper to read the articles. If you can receive coverage through press releases or articles, even small ones, on a regular basis, you will be perceived by readers within the publication's area of circulation to be newsworthy; a local professional of note.

You may be able to gain time on local television or radio programs or news shows. Using publicity outlets is one of the least expensive, most credible ways to reach prospective clients.

You may not think of yourself as a PR person, or ever have intended to be, but the success of today's dental practice demands it. In that spirit, please read on, as we will try to answer all of your questions and show you how to initiate your own PR program at far less expense than you may have imagined.

THE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The task of public relations is accomplished by providing factual, useful and newsworthy information to available media sources (newspapers, magazines, television and radio) for dissemination to their readers, viewers or listeners. The material must be pertinent to the media and relevant to its audience. **A solid public relations effort is an inexpensive yet invaluable method to grow any professional practice.**

PR is so valuable because it is:

- Effective
- Inexpensive
- Provides instant credibility

Done right, **PR is usually more effective than thousands of dollars in advertising expenditures.** Publicity can be targeted directly to the demographic and geographic audiences you select.

Readers trust the news stories they read and perceive these articles as more credible than advertising. Reporters and editors prepare your story in its final, printed form whereas advertisements are published without undergoing editorial scrutiny.

The cost of publicity is far less than that of advertising because, among other reasons, you don't pay for the publication's space or broadcaster's expensive airtime.

Most readers regard newsworthy information published by the media as an endorsement. A mention in the newspaper can generate greater acceptance of your services than any type of advertising.

PUBLICITY CAN WORK FOR YOU

Publicity can bring your services and expertise to the attention of local residents at far lower cost than advertising. It doesn't carry the baggage of advertising as being unprofessional and conveys your message in a seemingly unbiased third party manner. It creates a lasting awareness of your services. It also counters the stereotype of the "typical health care professional" and allows you to be seen as a caring individual.

Publicity increases your audience to include those who do not read advertising. It can attract new readers to your Web site. Publicity can be tailored to your objectives because you decide what, where, and when to send to the media. It establishes you as an expert in your field and allows your audience to develop a feeling of knowing and trusting you.

Publicity also allows you to develop community good will in general and especially when you participate in a community health program or stage such an event. (It is not necessary for you to risk malpractice lawsuits in such programs; you can serve in such activities as fundraising where your name will be associated with the events.)

OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE

Letters, press releases, news items and events, and expert opinions are all sought by editors when they contain real news and are timely. If you are seriously interested in making the large audience in your community aware of what you have to offer, start developing a plan. The process can be challenging, exhilarating and financially rewarding. And you will find your PR program easy to maintain once you have it established.

WHERE PR BEGINS

PR starts with two objectives:

It can be **qualitative**, designed to form favorable public attitudes that enhance your practice's image, convince the audience of the effectiveness of your product or services, and reinforce patient communications.

Or it can be **quantitative**, designed to attract new clients, with efforts intended to measurably increase the perceived need for a strategic procedure.

PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS

These are the most commonly used vehicles for getting your name, practice, and expertise before the public to achieve your goals: press releases, feature articles, media interviews, letters to the editor, event planning, mentions in columns and mentions by speakers.

PUBLICITY AS MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL

Publicity is both a marketing and public relations tool that must be newsworthy to obtain **free** editorial space in the print media or time on television and radio. You can send publicity in the form of press releases which can relate to news events or feature stories, such as a human-interest topic, which will result in positive coverage about you, your staff or your practice.

GETTING STARTED

With your marketing strategy and goals and objectives clearly defined, you can create and execute a **Public Relations Strategy** and a **Plan of Action** by deciding what you want to publicize, and selecting the publications or other media you will use. (Don't overlook magazines directed to residents of targeted cities, counties or your state).

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

For best results, it is important to know the editors/reporters who will be involved in processing your press release. Some newspapers publish listings on their Web sites. If you find those you believe are your contacts, introduce yourself on the telephone and inform them that you are planning a PR campaign. Ask if they are the staffers who should receive your material. Then:

- Build an **editorial contact file** of all the media people you'll want as contacts.
- **Follow up** by phone a couple days after your press release is sent out.
- Make yourself the **expert for commentary** on news related to your field. Invite the media to contact you for your expert opinions.
- Take a **broad approach** by building your list with contacts in local daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, health care publications, larger daily newspapers, and the community news Web sites.

THE PRESS RELEASE

To avoid confusion, three frequently used terms – **press release, news release and media release** – all mean the same thing. They are short (no more than 2-3 pages) and should be kept to one page whenever possible. They contain information that is timely, newsworthy, credible, informative/educational, simple and sincere.

Because you are asking newspapers, magazines or electronic media to disseminate your message rather than you paying for the space or time, you must keep in mind the "likes" and "dislikes" of the specific media.

As we indicated earlier, the press release is the most commonly used tool for conveying your message to the print media.

When writing a press release, approach it as a reporter writing a news story as a staff member of the publication you are targeting. Remember that you are competing for space or airtime with staffers who are covering multiple news stories as well as other non-staffers seeking free publicity and that no matter what media, you are competing with the hundreds of other publicity seekers from whom publications receive press releases and articles daily.

To stand out, you must create an **attention-grabbing headline** and opening paragraph, known as the **lead paragraph**. You need a "hook" or angle to attract and induce the editor to read the article for further information.

If your article is selected for publication or for airing, the media may recast it by embellishing it with details obtained from their own research. Before publishing your piece, they may call you for additional comments or seek to interview you.

WRITING YOUR RELEASE

You should begin your release with the most important news; and follow with **who, what, when, where, how**, and sometimes **why**. Answering these questions **in the lead** is critically important because sometimes editors run only the first paragraph. Try to answer these questions in your best 40-50 words.

Provide **contact information** on the first page of your release. Editors may need additional information from you. They may call to clarify something in the release, to insert additional details or seek to interview you for a story with more depth. Sometimes they may call to confirm that you are the person who sent them the material to avoid bogus publication.

In her excellent paperback book, *6 Steps to Free Publicity*, writer Marcia Yudkin listed the following actions she has found pay off handsomely for getting material published:

Find a news angle for your headline, such as something new or distinctive about your practice, an upcoming event, a tie-in with a major news item, and so forth.

Compose an **eye-catching, informative headline using that hook**. The headline can take up more than one line; you can go on as long as necessary to complete the idea. As a general rule, **editors prefer headlines limited to two lines**.

For more complex articles, some writers use a large two-line "head," followed by another several lines below that give an important additional fact. Like a good salesperson pushing a product's benefit, headlines based on such information will attract editors' attention. In newspaper headlines, Yudkin points out, you can use a **compressed telegraphic style**. For example:

OLYMPIC COACH RECOMMENDS ANAEROBICS
NO SWEAT EXERCISE—FOR COUCH POTATOES

In paragraph one, present the basic facts for the angle of your headline. Answer the journalist's "Five W's"— Who? What? When? Where? Why or how? Provide the basic facts *for the angle of your headline*, not the basic facts about your practice, because in many cases they are not the same. Note the following example of a release Yudkin produced for a client:

NEW DRAINAGE SYSTEM SAVES BOAT OWNERS TOIL AND EXPENSE

Miami, February 11, 1993 – Among those who dread rain most are boat owners. Until now, every one of them watching a downpour has known either that they'll have to get over to the boat soon and bail out the buckets of water accumulating on the boat cover or, although they've installed a system to drain the water, it is endangering the longevity of their tarpaulin. Now, however, boat owners can buy peace of mind with a simple Punch-Drain that removes rainwater automatically, protecting the boat and prolonging the life of their boat cover. "The Punch-Drain came to me out of necessity," says boat owner Daniel Gabison, the inventor. "In the rainy season, my boat cover would fill with water, and I'm not just talking about a bucket or two. Although I drained the water every few days, after a short time the tarpaulin would start to sag, tear, and deteriorate under the great weight of the collected water."

In her book, Yudkin points out that she didn't answer the Five W's of the product, but rather the Five W's about how it saves boat owners toil and expense, **the angle stated in the headline**.

Who: Boat owners

What: They can buy a device called the Punch-Drain that removes rainwater automatically from tarpaulins. (*The basic facts of her headline*, not the basic facts about the product.)

When: Now.

Where: Implicitly, anywhere boats get rained on.

Why: To protect their boat and prolong the life of the boat cover.

In Paragraph One – Weave your *who, what, when, where and why* together. If you can make your pitch catchy, fine. But a straightforward, factual style is okay, too.

In Paragraph Two – Gather or create a lively quote that elaborates on the basic facts. Quote someone who can back up the basic claim of the release (you, the originator of what you are writing about, a satisfied patient, someone who carries special weight with your target audience). A quote can bring the story to life, provide perspective, or add star appeal. Often, you really will be the ideal person to quote.

In Paragraph Three – Elaborate further on basic facts. Whatever else you wish to communicate, you can do by quoting yourself, someone besides whoever you quoted in the second paragraph, or report additional facts that support your claims. You can place biographical information about you or historical data about your subject here. Guard against using extraneous information - don't distract to support your story.

End with the small or practical details. Include prices, addresses, dates, phone numbers, how to register, etc., that any media notice about your subject should include. **Provide these details in a sentence or two.** Now, you will have drafted a four-paragraph news release.

SUBMITTING YOUR RELEASE

Chances are you will need only a few copies for your local media (including municipality-sponsored television stations). If so, you can reproduce sufficient copies on your office copy machine. Obtain media phone numbers from your local telephone directory or, for printed media, you can find them in the publications.

Beyond your geographical area (regional, national or international) if you have news of significant interest, you would be better off hiring one of the **commercial release delivery services**.

These services are expensive, generally costing several hundred dollars, but they offer a large menu of distribution points from which you can select the group that will best serve your communication needs. They save you the trouble of researching the names, addresses and contacts at the papers or stations you want to reach.

You can also buy a **media database**, either in printed or electronic form, which you can use over and over, but such databases are out of date the day after they are created. The news release delivery services keep their databases current, making their service costly. You can buy the database right before you need it for a big, one-time publicity push. They usually include postal addresses, phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and Web URLs.

You can track down the addresses yourself **on the Web** which takes considerable time. Use online media directories, which provide well-organized links to their Web sites. At the Web sites, search for contact information for editors, reporters, and producers. If you know which media you want to target, type in their URL or track them down in a general search engine. There are comprehensive online media directories (also known as media jump sites).

Use resources in the **public library**. It should have one or more media directories. If you are targeting a narrow topical niche, this may be important research if you wish to reach every appropriate publication in your market. Printed directories may contain magazines, newspapers, and newsletters that don't show up in an online search. (These directories cost several hundred dollars each to buy.) Some media directories are:

- Bacon's Newspaper and Magazine Directories
- Bacon's Radio/TV/Cable Directories
- Standard Periodical Directory
- Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media

Standard Rate and Data Service
Oxbridge Directory of Newsletters

Many PR people prefer Bacon's books because they contain each media person's preferred medium of contact – phone, fax, e-mail, or U.S. Postal Service.

E-mail

This means of communication will not win you many journalistic friends because attached files frequently do not open properly. They can harbor a virus danger so some companies will not open files from unknown sources. Files can take forever to download on a dial-up connection. Attached PDF files can only be read on-screen or printed out so that the reporter cannot cut and paste text from them in a story. And text may be unreadable if your e-mail program is more advanced than the reporter's.

Learn to submit appropriately:

- Use "bcc (blind carbon copy) instead of "cc" function, which fills the beginning of each recipient's e-mail with your distribution list.
- Include your phone number so a reporter working on a deadline can contact you.
- Use e-mail or fax – sending just a link to a release wastes reporters' time when they are under deadline.
- Use the same care as though writing on paper – sloppy writing is often the result of e-mail's informality.
- Use the release's headline in "subject" lines; more informative than "Press Release."
- Submit to the appropriate reporter/editor – avoid wildly misdirected releases.
- Send a pitch letter to a reporter describing your e-mail newsletter – don't make them a subscriber without their permission.

PRODUCING YOUR PRESS RELEASE

- Begin your press release about **one-third of the way down** the page to enable an editor to write a headline that fits into the space allocated for placement in the publication.
- Always include a **concise** and **compelling headline** at the top of your press release – the key to getting an editor's attention.
- The **more concise the copy**, the better your chances of having your release read by an editor in its entirety.
- Construct a newspaper-style multi-paragraph story, called the **inverted pyramid**, meaning that information is provided in descending order of importance after your lead paragraph. Editors can delete information from the bottom up without affecting your story when your later paragraphs contain non-essential information.
- Write in an **unbiased** reporting style to save the editor from rewriting or excising what you have written. If you submit one-sided writing, editors will shun your copy.
- **Use testimonials and direct quotes** to make a strong point about your practice or services; especially those of a nationally-known figure or expert in your field.
- **Don't name call.** In fact, don't mention competitors' names at all. Publications don't like to be used to air other people's conflicts.
- **Proofread** rigorously to eliminate any possible errors. Some reporters round-file releases with typos or misspellings. Watch out for these common pitfalls:
 1. Avoid self-aggrandizement – too much "tooting your own horn"
 2. Too many words or overly long words. Keep it simple. Remember, you are writing for the mass media, not for DMD's, PhD's, etc.

3. Claims that are easily challenged or clearly untrue (i.e., "best practice in the state")

- Some editors require releases of coming events two weeks before the date on which you want to see the story in print. They may be published in a weekly "**Coming Events**" column. **To determine your mailing date**, count back two weeks from the column's expected appearance, plus the days you allow for mail delivery.
- Use plain **white paper** (company letterhead can take up too much space) and print or write on **one side only**.
- Write **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** in all caps on the left margin two lines below your address, phone number, etc. If you use the U.S. Postal Service, you may want to mail it **several additional days** before you would like to see it in print. In that case, you should type in: FOR RELEASE (insert date).
- **Indent** paragraphs, **double space** and use a **ragged right** margin.
- If your release requires more than one page, insert **-more-** at the bottom of each page, except the last.
- At the **top left of each page after the first**, write the subject of your release and "add 1", "add 2", etc., i.e. Dr. Smith – add 1. (Keep in mind that your release should be held to one page if possible and should not exceed three pages.)
- Type either: ### or **-30-** centered two lines below the last line of each release. They are journalistic symbols for: The End.
- Use **cover letters**, personalized and customized for each publication to get the editor's attention.
- Be prepared to send out a **second news release** in a few weeks. If possible, ask an editor if he desires a second release – it is an annoyance to them to publish the same release twice and they will remember the source. If you haven't seen the first in print, make sure the second focuses on a **new point**.
- You may **call** to confirm receipt of the release if you have established a contact relationship at the publication. Take the opportunity to grow your relationship as you learn information about deadlines and submission requirements and use discretion in regard to placing follow-up phone calls. An editor and staff are busy and will call you if they have questions. Always take a professional approach; don't become a pest.
- Send a **photograph** with every press release, if possible, to increase the chances of your release being read and published. Usually a 5" x 7" black and white photo of an individual or 8" x 10" of a scene or activity is preferable, but ask if the magazine or newspaper accepts color photos.
- Check with an editor to learn whether your story and photo can be delivered on **disk or CD rather than on paper**. If there is no photo included, you may be able to simply e-mail your news. Ask the editor beforehand if they accept e-mailed releases.

ADDITIONAL PR OPPORTUNITIES

As noted earlier, the press release is the most widely used form of press relations. But they are not, by any means, the only tools at your disposal. Others include:

- Feature Articles
- Interviews
- Planning Events
- Mentions in Columns
- Cooperative Press Releases
- Letters to the Editor
- Speeches

FEATURE ARTICLES

- **Write a story** on a timely technique, a public perception about your profession, etc. Solicit national trade journals, professional medical or business journals, local chamber of commerce publications, newspapers, and magazines directed to lay audiences.
- Publication can establish you as an **expert in your field**, building patient confidence.
- You can also pitch to have a **feature article** written about you or your practice if you have a hook – something unique or newsworthy that you are doing in your practice.
- To get started, **pitch the idea** of your article by phone and, if the editor is interested, follow up with an outline. Learn the minimum and maximum lengths to which you should limit your piece and the publication deadline to receive it. Feature articles can **build a solid relationship** with publications.

INTERVIEWS

- These provide assistance to your local media because your presence **localizes the story** for them.
- Contact your media, show them your credentials, and offer yourself as an expert in your field. In effect, you will become a **spokesperson for your specialty**.
- You may serve as a local expert explaining a disease, a new procedure or piece of equipment, developing **wider community recognition** of your expertise.
- Serving as an expert builds **name recognition**. The key to PR is repetition. Your plan must enable you to get your name **in and on the media repeatedly**.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Don't mail information aimlessly to publications – be aware that newspapers and magazines have many distinct sections and categories, each with its own editor in charge. It is imperative that you reach the right publication, right section and right column author/editor.
- Take some time to study your target, the publication and its guidelines. If you are not sure what they will accept to publish, send for a media kit or phone the publication to discuss your subject matter and learn to whom you should send it.

INTERVIEWING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

DOs: When interviewing for print or electronic media, be confident, emphasize the positive. Be sure to take the time you need before you speak. Think of whom your audience is composed; speak in simple terms; avoid jargon unless you are speaking to an audience of peers – such as readers of dental/medical journals. Stay away from issues in which you are not expert. If you must decline to answer a question, explain why (it's in litigation...we are doing a study to determine the best solution to the problem). Make sure you understand the questions. Correct misinformation as soon as you hear it. Communicate from the perspective of the public's interest. And, answer a reporter's direct question with a direct answer.

DON'Ts: Don't dwell on any negatives or mistakes of your organization. Don't repeat negative language, even to refute it. Never assume the reporter understands the complexity of the issue. Don't stray from the agreed upon subject area. Don't say, "no comment" because that is often a more dangerous comment than "I don't know"; people are usually suspicious of the reason one offers no comment. Never comment on rumors or speculation or speak "off the record". Don't ask to see or have read to you a story before it is printed or aired. Don't speak from the perspective of your practice's interest. Don't hedge; if you must equivocate, say so immediately and explain why.

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW POINTERS

- State the conclusion or **most important fact first**.
- Don't use the reporter's questions in your answer.
- **Don't bluff** an answer.
- **Tell the truth**, even if it hurts. In dealing with the press, honesty is the **ONLY** policy.
- **Don't exaggerate**.
- **Be open and accessible** – respect reporters' deadlines. If you don't respond to their calls, they will include that in the story to demonstrate their fairness in having sought your comments.
- **Use humor** to relieve tension.
- Be as **simple, clear, and direct** as possible.
- Package your news in the **reporter's reverse pyramid style**.
- **Don't use "off the record."** You don't know that the reporter will honor your request. Think before you speak.

(The media covering the federal government has a relationship that enables it to gather information without revealing its source. The code words for government officials and other employees include such expressions as the aforementioned "off the record", "for background only", "not for attribution", "not for direct quotation", "no comment", and "don't quote me". But these phrases **do not protect you**. So, don't risk the chance.)

TV

A great many Americans get an extremely high percentage of their news, including that regarding their health, from television. We will discuss preparing for a television interview in a later section. Because the audience can see you in the interview, your personal appearance is of greater importance than it would be in other media.

EVENT PLANNING

Staging an event that focuses on your practice or involvement in national, state or local activities, such as charities, education, professional or service organizations, or patient-appreciation parties provides opportunities for you to invite the press.

When you are participating in a group other than that of your office colleagues, take a highly visible roll so that you can be the spokesperson for the event.

MENTIONS IN COLUMNS

Your PR efforts may not always be published in their entirety, but may be mentioned in well-read columns. Once you develop a rapport with a columnist, you may find that you are often quoted.

COOPERATIVE PRESS RELEASES

When you purchase some new high-technology equipment for your office, check to learn whether the manufacturer can provide you with pre-written press releases, or even video news releases, which you can customize and send to local media. Tell the story through your use of the equipment in your practice.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This is one of the most overlooked and least expensive vehicles available to establish yourself as an expert in your field and place your name before the public. You don't have to limit letters to dental/medical subjects but be wary of expressing views that are controversial. Some newspapers limit writers to one letter per month, so choose your subjects carefully.

SPEECHES

Opportunities to discuss the latest advances in your specialty, or perhaps a unique hobby you enjoy, can be found with local affiliates of service clubs, parent-teacher and church organizations, veterans groups and others. In addition to reaching your audience at these affairs, you may also benefit from news coverage of your talks.

Just about all of the "Do's" and "Don'ts" that apply to press interviews should be employed in speeches and the audience questions which follow them. Be sure to speak in personal terms.

When delivering speeches or being interviewed by the media, **prepare carefully:** Identify two or three major points you want to communicate. Evaluate probable and possible questions and construct appropriate answers.

PREPARING FOR YOUR TELEVISION INTERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, in the case of televised interviews, the audience may judge you not only on the content of what you express, but also on your **appearance**. Be aware of the following:

- Dress to project the image you want to project.
- Avoid bold or clashing patterns.
- Gray or blue slacks look good on camera.
- Women may wear simple jewelry, but no clanking bracelets.
- Men should shave just before a television appearance.
- Men should wear high socks; gaps between socks and trousers make a poor impression.

IN THE STUDIO:

Follow directions given to you. You will be told when to go on the set; they'll take care of the microphone, etc. (If the studio is a union shop, you will not be allowed touch the mike.) Try to **disregard the cameras**. Also **disregard the people cueing** from the studio floor; they are giving signals intended for the host only. **The one exception** is if the floor director looks directly at you and tells you to speed up. They may be running out of time and the host has not been able to break in to close. Always look at and relate to the host.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW:

There's always an excellent chance that the host hasn't read your book, press packet, or official biography, as their time is often limited. So, how can you improve your interview?

THE PRE-INTERVIEW:

Always make sure someone from the staff of the show has talked with you or your marketing coordinator before the day of the interview to **discuss focus, possible questions, sidelights, etc.** This should happen automatically but may not occur. The host, the booker, or a production assistant might be writing the segment; it helps to give them an indication of the angle you would like. When you talk with a staff member from the show, suggest questions that have to do with what you want to talk about. This can **swing the interview your way**.

DURING THE INTERVIEW:

Again, disregard the camera. When the host introduces you, there may be an awkward moment while they list your credits and the camera sits on you. **Look at the interviewer and nod** once or twice, making you look alive and comfortable. If the host welcomes you to the show, **respond briefly** with "Thank you". At the **end of the interview**, the host will wrap you up with something like, "Thank you, (name) for joining us." At that point, just nod. They may or may not cut to you; your microphone may or may not be on. **Just smile and nod** and you'll be covered either way and still look natural.

HOW TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS:

Here again a good technique follows the **pyramid construction**. Start with a brief statement that answers the question, then elaborate from the most important point to the least important. If you've used pyramid construction, you have made your point and the host is able to cut in, making for a livelier, easier to watch interview. If the host interrupts in the middle of an important point, ask them to wait while you finish. If the point they are bringing up is more interesting, let yours go and follow theirs.

THINGS YOU SHOULD ALSO KNOW:

Have ready information about where your book, product, or service is available and the street or web address where people can write to you if you like. If you give the staff this information a few days ahead of time, sometimes they will list it on the screen.

If you are being interviewed as an expert source for a newscast, keep your comments short and meaty. Unless the story is about you specifically, they will most likely cut anything longer.

If you forget a few things, don't worry. Think about the process as friendly and intimate in terms of speaking to just one or two viewers at a time. Relax and try to enjoy the interview.

TIPS TO REMEMBER

In whatever media you appear, keep in mind:

- You have a responsibility to tell the **truth** all the time.
- **Timing** is everything. If you say the information will be in the media's hands by a certain time, make sure it is.
- **Thank-you** notes to editors are good business and excellent manners.

SHARING INFORMATION

A good PR plan is only as good as the information on which it is based. If you have concerns about confidentiality, have your attorney draw up a *Privacy Plan* to be signed by all involved parties.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following information will lay the **groundwork** for your PR plan:

- Mission statement
- Marketing plan
- Client description (demographic profile)
- List of your services
- Job descriptions (who does what on your staff)
- Organization chart (how the office functions)
- Brochures (including any you had developed by outside sources, such as professional organizations)
- Copies of any previous PR or other marketing efforts
- Health care professional or trade journals of service write-ups
- Meet with the individual you have chosen as your marketing coordinator or the team you are working with to educate them about your overall practice goals, objectives and history. Consider yourself a member of the team and work together to establish your public relations goals.
- If you have project ideas, pass them along to your marketing coordinator or other team members.

Be aware of where to draw the line so that you **do not to burn any bridges**. If an article is rejected, depending on your relationship with the editor or publication, there is nothing wrong with pursuing the article with a different angle or hook but don't overdo it. If they are simply not interested, thank them for their time and effort and move on.

TOPICS PUBLISHED

News organizations have a general interest in publishing information on these subjects: New practice; research accomplishment, publication of scientific papers; staff hires; new office building; appointments to community boards/committees; involvement in professional organization activities; building remodeling; staff promotions; new/promoted staff member.

You and your marketing coordinator should be aware of **editorial calendars**, which indicate topics a publication will cover in future issues.

Lead times are crucial to monitor; they may be from two weeks before you expect to see an announcement of a coming event – not two weeks before the event – up to 90 days, especially for magazine publication.

MEDIA KIT

This (also called a **Press Kit**) is the key force in public relations, especially when you or your practice is unknown to your publications or stations. Press kits provide additional information that can further explain the doctor, the practice, an event, or an announcement. Press kits also serve as **long-term reference tools**. They should be kept on hand to fill requests from reporters/editors and whenever you are scheduled to appear on a talk show.

They are nothing more than **packets of materials** that explain who you are and what you do. Everything you need for the kit, except photos, can be obtained at any office supply store and a copy shop.

Components:

- **Backgrounders** – Brief history of the practice or background of the doctor; also give a description of your service offerings and accomplishments. Backgrounders should always conclude with a brief description of the practice and positioning statement, location of your office, phone number, web address, and e-mail for inquiries or appointments. They should be no more than two to four pages long. If you are preparing a release on the results of clinical research conducted in your office, backgrounders on such a technical subject can range up to 20 pages. These are intended to give a reporter who is not familiar with the subject of your release the necessary understanding to write an intelligent article. So you must assume that the person who is going to work on your release at the publication lacks any knowledge of your subject.
- **Biographies** – Of the doctor and key staff members can also be included. Basically these are written in news release narrative form but include special interests, outside interests related to your work, especially if you or professional staff members have published scientific papers. Such papers should be titled with publication name or names and dates of the scientific conferences at which they were presented. Also include professional and non-professional organizations/activities. These should be no more than one to two pages.
- **Photos** – Black & white photos (color is acceptable) of the doctor should be included. Print media prefer pictures of individuals be professionally shot “head and shoulder” and printed no less than 5” x 7” with good contrast. If you submit photos of clinical scenes, have the doctor facing the camera, patient’s back to the camera to hide his/her identity and maintain the focus on you, the doctor, who the story is about.

- **Published articles** – About you or your work. A common practice is to clip the publication’s masthead (name in distinctive type style) and paste it above the article. Spotting a familiar publication’s logo will more likely attract someone to read the article. Frame and hang them on a wall in your reception area for patients to read.
- **Tip sheets** – These sheets could contain one-line health tips written by you for lay audiences. If you are unable to do desktop publishing, take them to a nearby place that can typeset and format them for you.
- **Recent news releases** that still characterize your practice.
- **Other marketing or publicity material** – If you have a brochure or printed newsletters, these will be fine.
- **Media contact sheet** – If you have been featured in press or electronic TV several times, print a list of the publications or shows.
- **Fact Sheet** – These easy reference facts about your practice, written in layman’s language, help position you as a credible source that reporters can turn to for interpretation or elaboration on major healthcare news items. Appropriate subjects include statistics on various oral health issues and diseases, hints for preventing or treating them, and shattering myths about them. Reporters retain such items and turn to them for facts to be used in issue-oriented articles, even though they do not focus on your practice. They can be printed on your letterhead so reporters will be able to easily contact you, if necessary.
- **Talking points** – Have you ever noticed how well some people handle radio and press interviews? Many successful guests do, indeed, prepare for interviews by giving producers subjects, or talking points, on which they can be comfortably interviewed.

You or your marketing coordinator may want to **send multiple press kits** so they can be distributed to other editors at your targeted publications.

Effectiveness

Despite advances in technique over the years, it still is difficult to measure the effectiveness of publicity as a communication tool. If you are sending your material to a large number of publications or radio/television stations, you probably should employ a “**clipping service**.” These organizations monitor a large number of publications and radio/TV stations, cutting out items about clients such as yourself, and send them to you weekly or monthly, as

you prefer. Clients receive the actual items with identification of the media and date of publication attached to them. This method enables you to know where your story appeared, but there is no way to measure its impact on readers.

Weekly Newspapers

The **weekly newspaper** published in or near the city or town in which you reside and those where you maintain your dental office will probably be your principal targets for news releases and feature material. Because of their **local orientation**, they will be the easiest ones in which to place material.

Weeklies and, to a somewhat lesser extent, **small daily newspapers**, serve as the major news sources for what is happening in a community. The majority of news and feature stories they publish involve **local people**.

Because of their focus, weekly newspapers are very important to service professionals. A high percentage of the material received by the editor of a weekly – as long as it has local orientation – is printed. Weekly newspapers are excellent places to **gain public exposure** for your practice. And the releases are likely to be read, since people like to learn about local people and events.

Daily Newspapers

It most likely will be **more difficult** to get the daily newspaper to print news releases than with the weekly papers. Dailies are not as locally oriented as weeklies. Daily newspapers are highly departmentalized perhaps with state, city and suburban desks (and national and international news desks on larger papers). The challenge is to **find the appropriate department** and recipient(s) for your press release.

The publicity advantage that daily newspapers provide is the **wide exposure** that a news release or feature story can receive. Daily newspaper circulation is far greater than that of most weeklies. With that comes **increased prestige and credibility** when your practice is mentioned on the pages of the daily.

DOING THE PR

You may be thinking that PR is intriguing but your time is too limited to sit down and do the work yourself. This emphasizes the importance of selecting a trusted, responsible and knowledgeable team member to serve as your **marketing coordinator**. The time you spend working together to initiate your public relations program will pay off significantly as this individual takes over the footwork for you and becomes your permanent “go-to” contact and representative.

You may wish to consider hiring a **part-time consultant** to do the work for you. Although an added expense, a big benefit from passing the project on to a consultant is that he or she should be well equipped to handle the task.

- A consultant may help you define, in demographic terms, the audiences you wish to reach, a message that will best appeal to them, and the media that will reach them with the greatest impact.
- Hiring a PR professional, one who has already established media contacts in your area and has the training and experience, can be a sound strategy.

CONCLUSION

By this point you may be feeling somewhat intimidated; perhaps reminiscent of the first time you attempted a difficult procedure. But, as you realize, you have successfully traveled the long road to your present position.

The contents of this **A+ Download** are designed to provide a step-by-step guide to the successful initiation of a public relations program for your practice. We assure you that you will satisfy all of your publicity objectives by following its suggestions. In fact, you will probably enjoy the task of obtaining the publicity you desire as you start to acquire experience in this endeavor.

(If you are searching for more detailed information – including release delivery service, media data base and online media directory reference information – please review “Creating Effective Public Relations” in **A+ Downloads**.) **THE END.**