

Creating newsworthy content for your business in a digital age

By Natalie Sanderson, Managing Director at Sublime Public Relations
(www.sublimepr.co.uk)

- *How do I make my business newsworthy?*
- *How do I get noticed amongst the many hundreds of news stories received by the media every single day?*
- *How do I generate exposure across printed media and engaging stories online?*

If you're asking yourself these kinds of questions, you are not alone. As the changing landscape of what constitutes news continues to evolve, so to does the way we receive and make sense of that content. But arguably some things never change. Good stories still matter, if you expect to create engaging content and make the most of the opportunity social media provides for further amplification of your brand. But where does one begin?

The Guru

Become an expert. Know your stuff, share your knowledge and opinion regularly; be topical and controversial where appropriate and in time, you'll become a thought-leader in your industry sector. Becoming a recognisable thought-leader or expert commentator does take time, but you have to start somewhere.

If you know your subject well and you understand the issues that your audience will be able to identify with, you can educate, influence and engage people. Just don't 'sell at them', stick to the story – and remember that if you give out a piece of free advice (without obligation or agenda) more people will listen.

Keep it Topical

Hijack the current news agenda; it's the fastest and most effective way of generating exposure on a nationwide scale. If people are already talking about something that is relevant to your industry, service or product, adding a new dimension to the discussion simply boosts the opportunity for engagement.

It's simple really, don't create stories about the benefits of having a fireguard in your home in the month of July (just because you sell these products) – why not run a survey instead on how many people use their fires in the summer or keep their heating on at this time of year? Summer is already a hot topic in July, but you're creating stories that link to this season. It's common sense and logic really, read the news daily, pick up on stories that you could have a connection with and join the debate or conversation on topics that are of interest to your audience.

Share your brand personality through story

We can't stress it enough; stories matter. Every invention ever created was designed to solve a problem, and it is 'the problem' that is the news hook - not your business, not your product and certainly not how many awards you've been nominated for that month. Sadly, many press releases still contain dull, self-congratulatory puff that journalists and people simply don't want to read. If it's not interesting or readable, it won't sell. If it won't sell, it won't be published.

Creating news in a digital age is about creating great stories that excite, engage and provoke reaction. Then it's about distributing them in a way that reaches the right people at the right time. Focus on the story and keep it human to inject some personality into it – remember that people connect with people.

Our survey says

Independent research, polls and surveys go down well with the media but only if the statistics have the ingredients of a great story. Running a survey on how many people like your new hairdryer is not news. It's simply a commercial

business advertising its products and that is not what PR is about. Running a survey on how long people spend every week drying their hair, or reporting how many injuries are caused by faulty hairdryers each year might have the reverse effect. Think 'man bites dog' when it comes to survey themes. Don't go with the obvious, journalists always like stats that are unexpected because these make better stories.

The little black book

Be useful to journalists. Be helpful and willing to part with your expertise and knowledge on a given topic – and don't expect anything in return. It's not that you'll never generate exposure by speaking to the media, but if you give something for nothing it usually reaps the rewards later down the line.

If you help a journalist, the likelihood is they'll come back again, aim to get into their little black book of contacts and be prepared if you get in touch directly. Read their recent articles and retweet them if you like them. Understand their focus and readership so you can tailor your comments accordingly. Times have changed and many journalists don't have the time to meet up for lavish lunches, today it is about doing your research, delivering material they can use and trying not to pester them.

Blog it

Blogging has been around for some time now, but it's still one of the most cost effective and best ways to generate exposure and leads for your business. The key is consistency. Blog regularly even if that means once a week or even once a month, just give it some momentum and ensure your content follows the same rules for creating a great and readable story. Avoid jargon, sales pitches and spamming your readers; they won't subscribe for long if you do. Keep your content fresh and topical, inspire interaction and comments; get your readers involved in the conversation. Blogs should be written as first person, in a chatty and informal style designed to engage the reader on a personal and emotional level. It's also a great platform for sharing content across social media channels. Oh, and don't forget to include web links, images and videos within your blog –

just as images can be the make or break of whether a story is published or not, it also increases the chances of your blog being read or indeed, ignored.

Get some influential fans

Like it or not, celebrity angles sell news stories and once upon a time gaining access to a celebrity or generating any kind of endorsement for your product or service was an expensive and sometimes tricky business. Thankfully, the power of social media has made direct contact with celebrities much faster-paced and more accessible to the general public. Sending product samples to celebrities, tweeting about them and sharing images and videos can often result in a retweet or comment from a celebrity which can do wonders for your brand recognition.

Get help where you need it

Generating exposure for your business or product on a consistent basis is a full time job if done well. Be mindful that dabbling in PR activity often results in a spurge of sales activity (which is of course the desired effect of PR), but make sure you are ready to fulfil that demand if and when it happens because the minute you open yourself up to scrutiny from the general public, you have a reputation to protect. Speak to a PR professional about how you can maximise your PR exposure in the long term, there are lots of people out there willing to give you free advice, so take it and build on it. The fundamental principles of PR are by no means rocket science but the art is always in telling the stories in the right way and making the best use of the various channels to market.

For further information on effective public relations using the latest digital techniques, contact Natalie Sanderson at Sublime Public Relations Natalie@sublimepr.co.uk