

## HEAR YE, HEAR YE: *Growing Your Business Through Public Relations*

**P**erception is *nine-tenths of the law*. How you view what you believe you see strongly informs your actions and reactions. And often with customers, the “face” you project quickly translates into the sum total of your reality. Rightly or wrongly, many people believe that “what you see (and hear) is what you get.” That’s why well-done image crafting is vital to any organization.

Both effectively fanning the flames of a prize brand and dousing the firestorm from a grand misstep require skill and deliberateness. Seldom is sheer passion for vision, mission and goals enough to make the impression and establish the reputation a company wants. Even excellent past performance can’t always boost reception or stave off decline. A stellar public relations (PR) effort, however, can offer wings in showcase times and a cocoon during hours of desperation.

PR, *the targeted practice of establishing and promoting a favorable relationship with the public*, can help your business craft a competitive advantage. Besides general company promotion and crisis management, it covers media relations, lobbying, event management, and fundraising. While it’s great to advertise your strengths (in the traditional sense), it is far better when a reporter interviews you or writes about something you’re doing. And perhaps equally as great is when you can directly connect favorably with your target market on a consistent, interactive basis.

Even so, many small businesses don’t mine the riches in the PR field. One reason is they don’t have a firm enough grasp of its potential. Another is they think it’s something only Big Business or a fancy agency can do well. Also, being wedded to “pure” advertising’s gold-standard status for growing sales can stall a number of companies’ ventures into the publicity arena.

Budget, expertise, and popularity don’t have to dictate whether you engage in PR efforts or not. Each day, the increasing wonders of technology are making minimal, do-it-yourself public relations manageable for any business. And as for being comfortable with balancing the differences between advertising and PR, these days some promotional experts question the existence of a clear line of demarcation.

In “*Business: Good News; Public Relations in the Recession*” (*The Economist* - 1/16/10), Christopher Graves, of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, says, “When you look at advertising versus public relations, it’s not going to be those clearly defined silos. It may be indistinguishable at some point where one ends and the other begins.” Because the role of PR has expanded to include functions such as producing live events and facilitating web launches, it has displaced the absolute need to spend big in classic advertising veins.

Still, if you’re wary about plunging into Web-based PR platforms with real-time interface capability, such as Facebook and Twitter, there’s nothing wrong with starting out slow. *Entrepreneur.com*’s encyclopedia entry on “public relations” points out the continuing validity of connecting with media outlets via postal mail, e-mail, fax and phone. With press release and press kit templates widely available in libraries, bookstores and online, it’s fairly simple to professionally alert newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations of your company’s or your personal involvement in community-oriented events. The same is true for any time when you might have to engage in damage control.

Not only does *Entrepreneur* underscore how inexpensive traditional media PR is, but also it highlights the mileage possibilities of a journalistic “stamp of approval.” Objective party validation is far more credible than your own advertising, no matter the form. In short, the article points out that news mentions and features tend to resonate with people more than commercial or even print ad content does.

The key is to magnetize yourself and your business. Work internally before you reach out to snag attention. That is, in addition to knowing your product and industry thoroughly, be able to articulate exactly what makes you special. Comb through associate and customer feedback for story angle inspiration. Then write two versions of your pitch: a single sentence and a brief paragraph. The first should cast you in the light of “consummate problem-solver” in ten seconds or less; the second should be easily digestible in no more than 30 seconds. Think of them as your mobile billboard and on-demand commercial spot, respectively. Then practice reciting them until they flow naturally so you can maximize their value at every chance. Chances that you have to work diligently to carve out.

Need a jumpstart on ideas to create opportunities to turn yourself into a newsmaker? Experts suggest the following:

- Do free public speaking at organizational meetings.
- Volunteer to write articles, columns or opinion pieces.
- Conduct free mini-seminars or skill demonstrations.
- Be a free information “store” on social media sites.
- Host a local talk show, or be a frequent contributor.

With preparation and persistence, public relations can be a money-saving growth agent for any business. Work to keep it integral to your marketing plan.

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## MARTA Business Opportunities

*The procurement and contract opportunities noted below can be found on the Internet at [www.itsmarta.com](http://www.itsmarta.com). Because dates for noted events are subject to change, you should contact MARTA's Contracts & Procurement and Materials Division at (404) 848-5131 for verification.*

NAME OF BID/PROPOSAL	CONTRACT NUMBER	BID/PROPOSAL OPENING/DEADLINE DATE (Eastern Standard Time)
Pre-Solicitation Notice for the Atlanta Streetcar Project	RFP P19392	Deadline has not been determined
Disposal of Switch Steel	CP B19122	February 2, 2010 at 2:00 PM
MARTA Vending & Concessions Retail DVD Rental	RFP P19409	March 31, 2010 at 2:00 PM
MARTA Vending & Concessions Retail Beverage Sales	RFP P19410	April 7, 2010 at 2:00 PM

*Prospective vendors are urged to visit MARTA's web site for weekly updates.*

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## Announcements

### WEDA WORKSHOPS

The Women's Economic Development Agency (WEDA) offers various workshops to small business owners. For registration information, contact WEDA at (678) 904-2201 or <http://www.weda-atlanta.org/registration.htm>.

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### VISION WALK

**Sunday, March 14, 2010 at Centennial Olympic Park**

Vision Walk is a 5K (3.1 miles) walk designed to raise awareness and dollars for the fight against retinal degenerative diseases. All walk routes are wheelchair and stroller accessible. For more information, please contact Jennifer Assaff, Events Manager, at (919) 781-8014 or via email at [JAssaff@FightBlindness.org](mailto:JAssaff@FightBlindness.org).

**U. S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

**DISASTER LOANS - GEORGIA #11886 & #11887 (Disaster #GA-00027)**

For the Counties of Bartow, Carroll, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Heard, Newton, Paulding, Rockdale, Stephens and Walker; and for Economic Injury Only the contiguous counties of Banks, Barrow, Butts, Clayton, Dade, Dawson, Fayette, Floyd, Forsyth, Franklin, Gordon, Habersham, Hall, Haralson, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Meriwether, Morgan, Pickens, Polk, Spalding, Troup, Walton and Whitfield in the State of Georgia; contiguous counties of Cherokee, Cleburne, and DeKalb:

**Filing Deadline for applications for Economic Injury: June 24, 2010**

**For More Information, contact SBA at 1-800-659-2955 or [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov).**

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MARTA Information

All public events (i.e., bid openings and conferences) are held at the MARTA Headquarters Building, 2424 Piedmont Road, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30324, unless otherwise indicated.

Most solicitations may be downloaded free of charge and are available via the web at [www.itsmarta.com](http://www.itsmarta.com). Solicitations with drawings may be ordered for the above noted contracts via telephone by contacting MARTA's Documentation Control Branch at (404) 848-5580 or other sources as indicated.

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