

powerful publicity

How to get
Potent PR
pieces that engage
and attract
more customers

Alex Moscow

Founder of [Intennar](#) and [9mm PR](#)

THE MEDIA CHALLENGE

I've been running PR programmes for companies that sell Business to Business services for over a decade now and there's one thing I know for sure - if you're not a super brand, getting the media interested in you is tough.

Look at any national newspaper or trade magazine and it's clear that most are dominated by news and views from the top dogs.

But then the big brands have it easy. Not only do they have the ear of journalists but they also have what the media wants in abundance – NEWS.

Microsoft just has to blow its nose and a press release falls out of it.

The rest of us are not so lucky. You spend an age waiting for a piece of news to come along that you hope will blow the media's head off.

When it does, you finally create a flurry of interest and column inches.

Problem is it doesn't always last very long. The news dries up once again, you go back to ground zero and all of that momentum you've built comes to a grinding halt.

What you may not know is that there's a way to keep the coverage train moving or even get it started in the first place. Better still it gets you the kind of coverage that really gets people talking about you.

PR people call it thought leadership and it's something that anyone can use to generate media coverage at any time. And if you're thinking that to be a thought leader you need to be the head of a big corporation, famous and or have the IQ of Stephen Hawking, you're wrong.

You just need to be willing to help others by sharing what you know.

And that is exactly what I want to help you to do. In the following pages you will find a guide to generating more media coverage using the stuff that you know but never thought was valuable to anybody else. Until now.

I hope you find it useful.

Alex

WHY WHAT YOU KNOW HAS GREAT VALUE

It's a strange quirk of nature that when we know something, we automatically assume that everyone else knows it as well.

This isn't true.

If you've been working in any industry for a year or more, chances are that you know a load of stuff that most people don't.

In all honesty, much of it is likely to bore the pants off anyone that doesn't do what you do. Like the really technical know-how that enables you to do your job well.

Believe me I know. I've tried explaining what I do to friends and family and although they continue to smile sweetly, I can actually see their brains disengaging after about 2 minutes.

Having said that, if you know what to look for, you can unearth a load of stuff that, rather than putting your prospects to sleep, will have them sitting bolt upright and paying attention.

What's more, it's also the kind of information that will get you noticed by journalists and enable you to build awareness of your business through the media.

The key is to stop thinking about what you want to tell your prospects and focus instead on what they actually want to hear.

Here's an example: a friend of mine came to me the other day. They had just discovered www.linkedin.com and wanted to use it to generate some new sales leads.

I was amazed. I thought everybody knew about LinkedIn and as far as I was concerned creating a profile was a doddle. My friend, however, was nervous. They didn't know how to set their profile up, what to write and they had all kinds of fears about inviting people to connect with them.

I realised that not everything that was easy for me was the same for others. There were clearly things that I knew that others would appreciate knowing as well.

What's more it's information that, to me, is fairly low value, so I don't mind giving it away for free. To my friend though it was gold and as far as they are concerned in their eyes I am now a bit of an online networking guru.

This is the stuff that I am talking about. The stuff you know that can help others achieve something that they want.

Remember it's not about the value that you place on what you know, but the importance that others place on your knowledge that makes it valuable.

THE LINK BETWEEN WHAT YOU KNOW AND GETTING MORE MEDIA COVERAGE

I have a task for you.

Go to www.businesszone.co.uk and take a look around.

(You may need to create an account to see all of the content)

This is an online media portal that aims to arm owners of small and medium businesses with the information they need to become more successful.

While there is some news on the site, it's mostly feature driven. Some are written by the team at Businesszone, the vast majority by the likes of you and me. All draw on the knowledge of the writer to help readers achieve their business goals.

Whether you sell into a specific company department or to the head of companies directly, there are likely to be portals such as this that are read by the people that you want to get in front of.

The good news is that many of the editors that run online portals are actively looking for content and want to create relationships with people who can help lighten their load and that of their in-house team.

I like Businesszone for a number of reasons.

- First it's very targeted. If you sell stuff to SMEs you can bet that your feature will get read by the very people that could become your next client
- Second it's pretty much jargon free. Dan Martin, the Editor, keeps a very tight ship and ensures that anything written will both appeal and be accessible to his readers
- Third and possibly most important for us, is that you can see the exact number of people who have read your article

The benefits of contributing to media portals are three-fold:

- 1) You increase awareness of your business amongst the specific people that you want to sell to
- 2) When you offer your expertise through the media you quickly achieve expert status and build trust and credibility with the readership
- 3) The likelihood is that if you help them achieve a little bit of what they want, people are more likely to come back to you to achieve the rest

This kind of trust is invaluable in today's difficult economy where people are more risk averse than ever. Buying decisions are still being made but they are taking a lot longer as buyers want to make sure that their money is not going to go to waste.

Also buying Business to Business services isn't easy. There are lots of companies selling similar stuff to you in almost every industry sector and they all seem to say the same thing on their websites.

The trust and credibility that you build by appearing in the media can easily be the slight edge that wins you the business.

You don't need to give away all of your secrets. Just enough to help the reader achieve some of what they want.

For example, I work with a sales improvement specialist who offers sales and sales management courses that run into the £1,000s a month. He knows that the reason why so many people struggle with making sales has nothing to do with their ability but with the negative stuff they carry in their head. Mostly it's fear.

That is why our media pieces focus on helping readers to do the things they fear.

Below is a link to a piece that we did on cold calling. Something that every salesman knows that they should be doing but which most would rather cut off a limb than do.

<http://www.businesszone.co.uk/topic/sales/fight-fear-how-make-success-cold-calling>

The really great thing about coverage such as this is that you can start generating it today.

YOU DA MAN! (OR WOMAN)

Have you ever noticed that when you achieve something other people want, those people are eager to find out how you did it? They ply you with questions trying to get the information they need to replicate your success.

Then when you help them, you go up in their esteem and back they come for more help when they need it. What if your prospects did the same thing? Would that be worth something?

The idea is to use these pieces to position yourself as somebody that can help your prospects get what they want. But to do this you've got to know what that is.

The first and most important step is to work out exactly who your target audience is. The better you know who you are writing for the easier it will be to come up with ideas for pieces and to identify the best media to place them in.

There are all kinds of research that you could do but I'm guessing that if you are anything like me your time is a rare commodity.

Happily you will already have a certain amount of data available in-house.

Get together with your staff and ask the following 3 questions:

What is the profile of your ideal prospect?

Consider the size of company you service best, the job role of the person you want to target and how they are measured.

This is an important step because you need to start getting specific. You are unlikely to have the time or the resource to target more than one group at any one time.

Also by focusing on your ideal customer you avoid targeting the crappy prospects that spend most of their time wasting yours.

What do they want?

People are motivated towards the things they want. Do not think purely in terms of what is expected of them in their job. Get a bit more personal. Think about what is important to them as people.

The truth is no matter what they are buying, people always make their purchasing decisions emotionally not logically.

What they think about you is far less important than how they feel about you and how you make them feel about their decision.

The better you know your customer and what is important to them, the greater your ability to come up with content ideas that create that vital emotional connection required to draw them to your business.

Knowing what people want is important because they are emotionally invested in their dreams and goals. They will also be invested in the people that they feel can help get them there.

Why can't they get what they want?

Knowing what they want is important, however, it's responding to the things that are stopping them from getting what they want that will create the greatest impact.

These are the fears and frustrations that they face in their daily lives.

In the same way that people are emotionally wedded to what they want, they are also bound emotionally to the obstacles that get in the way of them achieving their dreams.

In fact more so. Albeit a very different kind of emotion.

These negative emotions are in some ways more powerful than the positive ones. They are painful and people are never more motivated to take action than when something is painful.

How do you think they would feel about someone who can help remove these obstacles? Knowing what frustrates people and causes them pain is powerful and information that helps them to avoid or overcome their pain makes excellent themes for your opinion pieces.

Once you have done your in-house research, take it onto the street. Talk to your friendliest customers. They will give you all of the information you need to create pieces that really connect in the ways that you need to motivate more people like them to your business.

Why I wrote this book

This book is a very good example of what I'm talking about. I went through the process above in order to identify what would be a good topic to cover in it.

My Customer Profile

Many of my clients are business owners that have been operating between 5 – 10 years.

What they want

They are successful and want to continue to grow by attracting a constant stream of quality leads.

Why they can't get what they want

They are well liked by their clients but struggle to find and attract good prospects. They've usually built their business on referral and haven't had to do a great deal of marketing.

They now need to get out there and drum up some business but it's not as easy as sending out a few emails or spending some money on Google adwords.

I know that getting in the media is desirable but also know that they struggle to do so.

PR is something I know a great deal about and so I've used my experience to help others achieve the same sort of success.

The result is this book.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Thanks to the Internet there are more opportunities than ever for raising your profile through the media. Pretty much any magazine, radio station and TV channel has a digital version.

On top of that there are now many more media portals that offer news and features to people from all walks and works of life.

Hopefully, earlier you took a look around www.Businesszone.co.uk. This is just one of a long list of media portals that target small and medium size businesses. If you are a company that wants to attract this audience, here's a list of sites that you could offer content to:

<http://realbusiness.co.uk/>

<http://www.freshbusinessthinking.com/>

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/>

<http://www.growingbusiness.co.uk/>

<http://talkbusinessmagazine.co.uk/>

<http://www.ukbusiness-today.co.uk/>

<http://www.smallbusiness.co.uk/>

The list goes on...

Go offline as well. This system works just as well for traditional media. Have a look at some magazines that target your prospects. Build a list of their trade media. Look at the contents of the magazines. Sections such as opinion or comment are ripe for your content.

Remember it's not about how big or small your company it's about the value of the knowledge you are sharing.

One of my clients is a retail design consultancy. They are not the biggest or the best known but they are extremely skilled at what they do. We consistently share their opinion and advice in the Retail trade magazines.

Here's an example of a piece:

OPINION



The Gok Wan effect

Mark Fanthorpe of Umbrella Design discusses the future of technology in retail

Retail has a funny relationship with technology. On the one hand, the Internet is copping the blame for killing off the high street. On the other, hi-tech is more present in-store than ever before. Personally, I think that the Internet makes for an easy scapegoat. What is really hurting the high street is the shopping experience itself - or rather the lack of one.

We can continue to blame the internet for poor sales, but in truth, if the high street is going to compete, retailers must work out how to connect better with customers. Technology will play a key part but it's the people, not the gadgetry that will keep shoppers coming back for more.

The Internet is definitely a powerful purchasing tool, but the reason we hit the high street is because we want a different kind of experience. We want something more touchy feely and the Internet will never replace the personal relationship we have with sales assistants, nor the emotional connection made through experiencing certain products in the flesh.

In-store technology, therefore, shouldn't try and compete with the technology we have at home. What it should do is help to facilitate a better in-store shopping experience. A key strength is its capacity to eliminate those elements that take the enjoyment out of shopping. It makes sense to have self-service tills in supermarkets or PDAs that allow staff to check stock rather than traipse into the storeroom. Anything that helps the customer to move more efficiently through the shop is useful.

However, I believe that the real power of technology is its potential to transform the role of the shop assistant. By relieving them of the more laborious tasks of stock check and checkout, their time will be freed up to offer a more personal service. Savvy retailers will recruit and train highly skilled, knowledgeable consultants to provide genuine help and assistance. The kind that you find in B&Q, Jessops and many independent retail outlets. The kind that I found in Diesel.

I used to hate buying jeans. I would buy a pair, get them home and they would never look right. That changed the day I walked into Diesel in Glasgow. I tried a pair on and the sales assistant looked at me and said: 'They're not right for you'. She then went to get me a pair of jeans that I would never have selected because there was something in my head that said that they weren't for me.

I tried them on and they felt fantastic. I took a leap of faith and bought them. Once home they still felt really good. This is a perfect example of a sales assistant who had the courage to tell me that something wasn't right and potentially give up the sale. That girl not only sold me one pair of jeans. In a roundabout way she has sold me another four pairs since, as Diesel is now the only place I will buy them.

Increasing demand through a more consultative approach is certainly nothing new. Think about what trained beauty consultants have done for the cosmetics industry. You go into John Lewis and have a makeover. You very rarely come out with just one purchase. You come out with a whole look. You have a lipstick, eyeliner, foundation and eye shadow. People can be very dismissive of the girls on the cosmetics counters, but they are some of the best salespeople in the world and help to maintain a billion dollar industry.

Technology could help do the same thing in fashion stores. If a customer is interested in a jacket, the consultant could use a computer to show how to create a great look with other products in-store. It would be like having a Gok Wan in every shop!

Helping the customer has another interesting side effect; happier employees. At a recent roundtable I picked up something very interesting from one of the other participants. She said that it's proven that people who work on the self-service tills, the ones who are there to solve a problem, get more job satisfaction than the ones sitting behind the tills, because they felt that they were helping customers more.

Technology is not the future of retail - people are. What is for sure is that when used tactically, that technology will play an important part in facilitating a closer relationship between brands and their customers. ■



Mark Fanthorpe has over 25 years of experience helping budding brands achieve retail dominance. You can read more of his thoughts on retail design at www.umbrelladesign.co.uk/news

20 | WWW.RDTMAGAZINE.CO.UK | December 2011

Whether you achieve online or offline coverage, make sure you include a web link so that people can find you.

Your media playground

Once you know who your audience is, it's fairly straight forward to work out the media that you have to play with. Again your first port of call should be the very people that you are selling to. Ask them and they will tell you which media influences them the most.

Media databases are the quickest route but at the time of writing this there didn't seem to be any free versions available. That means that you will either have to do your research online yourself or pay for a list. There are a number of services on offer.

<http://www.gorkana.com>

<http://uk.cision.com/media-databases>

<http://www.vocus.com/uk>

<http://www.prmx.co.uk>

Making nice with journalists

Who'd want to be a journalist? You work long hours and are constantly fighting against deadlines. Then, each day you are bombarded with hundreds of emails all desperately seeking your attention. Not to mention the phone ringing off the hook.

Getting the attention of journalists can be tough at first but once you have, you will be on easy street. So how do you make sure that you get heard amongst all the noise?

The good news is that 80% of what lands in the inbox of your average journalist is rubbish. Even if the story is a good one, you would be amazed at how often the person who has sent the email doesn't really know how to get the journalist's attention. So it gets lost.

Much like a sales email, your job is to write a headline that is going to grab the journalist's attention.

So a good place to start would be to highlight in the email header that this is a content pitch and the headline of the piece

Then in the main body of the email you should provide the following:

- An overview of your company
- An overview of the person that the piece is coming from
- A profile of the people that your company helps
- The headline of the piece
- A one line overview of what it's about
- 3 bullet points outlining what individual elements will be covered

Most editors will come back to you if they are interested but there is nothing wrong with giving them a call to pitch it as well.

Warning!

Do not phone to find out if they received your email. There is nothing that winds a journalist up more than this.

If you don't hear anything they either got it and ignored it or they didn't see it. Either way you will gain nothing by asking if they saw it.

Better to pretend you never sent it in the first place. Just pitch as if this is the first time you considered contacting them. Keep your pitch brief and to the point. You have about 30 seconds to make an impact, so use them wisely!

Below is an example email. Only the clients' and Editors' name has been changed to protect the innocent!

In the example I only offer one piece but it makes sense to include 2 or 3 ideas. It's always good to not put all your eggs in the one basket.

To: Jolly Journalist

Subject: Opinion piece pitches: Are SMEs Gambling their Business Away

Hi Jolly

I don't suppose the following opinion piece would be of interest for your Sales and Marketing section?

1. Are You Gambling Your Business Away?

Here my client, a sales improvement specialist, discusses why taking part in pitches and proposals is like playing Russian roulette with your business. The article will cover:

- The real cost of pitches and proposals
- How to avoid pitches and proposals and win business
- The 10 questions you must ask to unearth whether you should take part

About My Client ([link to website or LinkedIn page](#))

Marcus Cauchi is a sales improvement specialist who works across a number of business sectors including the PR industry. His mission is to help companies who have had enough of falling prey to their prospects manipulation. Manipulation that consistently sees them offering uneconomical discounts, wasting valuable budget and resource chasing dud leads and suffering costly and indeterminate sales cycles.

This is a real life example and led to the following piece on SMEweb:

<http://www.smeweb.com/sales-and-marketing/features/gambling-your-time-away-on-pitches-061009.html>

THIS IS A LEAD GENERATION ACTIVITY

I've said it before and I'll say it again: getting coverage in the media is worthless.

Let me clarify. Clearly there is value in being seen in the media, but you do have to be seen.

In itself coverage has no value unless:

- a) Someone has seen it
- b) It connects with them in such a way that they pay attention to what is being said and the person saying it
- c) You give them a compelling reason to seek you out

Although you may peak their interest the first time they read a piece of yours, realistically you are only going to build something meaningful with your reader once you have been in front of them a number of times.

You therefore need to be strategic. This is not a game of throwing spaghetti and seeing what sticks. Focusing your activity is important because trust and credibility grows over time.

If you try and go too wide in terms of both the people and the media you are targeting, it will take forever to get the traction you need. If it was me, I would build a relationship with around 3-5 media that target a similar audience.

Ensuring that there are clear calls to action in all of your pieces means that you can start generating the one thing that your business really does need...LEADS.

At the end of each piece you should give the reader the opportunity to further their relationship with you.

Many businesses miss a trick here. For them all inbound links point straight at their home page. Realistically this wastes the link.

Yes you have sparked interest in the reader if they are willing to follow the link to your website but they are far from ready to buy.

Your best bet is to take them to a landing page that provides further information around the issue you covered in your piece and perhaps a case study that shows the reader the problems you've helped your clients solve.

Getting started

It's up to you now.

The hardest part is getting started. So here's a final piece of advice to get you going...

Take a look at your current customer base. Think about the problems that they were experiencing when they came to you. Write a list.

These are the hooks that will inspire you to create your pieces.

- What are the 5 –7 top tips that would help other people who find themselves in the same position?
- How can you help others to avoid these problems in the first place?
- What kind of results can they expect if they do as you tell them?

Remember you don't need to try to sell them anything. You are doing this to pull people to your website by raising your credibility by sharing your authority.

The more valuable your content, the more people will be attracted to you.