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55 YEARS



Anyone can write. But not everyone can do PR - by Stanley Hurwitz

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Stanley Hurwitz

Sometimes clients—and individuals who should be clients—ask, “When did you first get into public relations and marketing? The answer is surprising: At age 8, I neatly typed short stories and poems on my dad’s manual typewriter, added a few drawings and then around 5 p.m., I’d

stand at the bus stop, greet people returning from work, and sell my creations for 25 cents each. Did they feel bad for this tiny “starving author?” Were they “supporting the arts?” Or maybe they just threw me some crumbs so I’d leave them alone? No matter the reason, I counted each quarter as a sign.

During my career, I’ve observed that most people can write. They’ve been writing stuff since kindergarten. You write passable letters, proposals, reports, emails. But building buzz to promote a business, product or service requires a different type of creativity and strategy. That’s what PR is all about; It’s the art of building favorable interest in your company, product or service to create buzz, identity, name recognition.

Prospective clients ask how long it takes to create an effective news story (press release.) Determining the message(s) and the target audience(s), and thoroughly researching and understanding the product/service and company you’re promoting is at least 50% of the project. Writing, editing and distributing the news story make up the remaining 50%. Creating a great news release can take a day or more.

Sometimes, no matter how good your PR person may be, things don’t always go according to plan. Among my most humorous, memorable and teachable publicity moments:

For a nursing home newsletter, I suggested a birthday party before July 4th spotlighting all residents age 100 or more (attributed to great care, of course). There were five women from 100 to 104. I wrote the news release and invited the media. Several reporters arrived, ready to capture photos of the centenarians with their pointy party hats, blowing out candles, with family and staff singing. Unfortunately, something nobody anticipated: At no time were all five awake simultaneously. We got good coverage but not the fun group photo I envisioned.

At a non-profit’s fundraising reception featuring legendary former secretary of state Henry Kissinger at a swanky Boston hotel, my role was to make sure every major donor got a photo memento with Dr. Kissinger. It was crowded and hectic. I rounded up each couple, introduced them to the guest of honor, and signaled the photographer to snap. The lights in the room were dim to add to the ambience, so photography required a flash. After the 10th couple had posed, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, seeing who was running things, violently shook his fist at me

and growled in his thick German accent, “Tell him to stop flashing in my face!” The photographer changed his settings, and, despite the lighting, there were great mementos and publicity shots.

A commercial real estate client needed a ‘space available’ banner on a building. I arranged with my sign contractor to fabricate and install the banner. After the installation, the sign company owner called to describe his installer’s morning excitement. A group of office workers in that building watched the installation which, it turned out, was just below the regional office of OSHA—and the staff was making a list of safety issues –improperly chocked tires, incorrect safety belt and helmet, lack of traffic safety cones. The fines were more than the cost of the banner.

It’s true – Anyone can write. But only a small percentage knows how to write for publicity, or has the time to research a company and products, interview key people, strategize regarding messaging and target audiences, create the right story, and put the story in front of the right editors and reporters locally, regionally or nationally. Editors’ inboxes are always packed and deadlines are always now, so your story needs to stand out. And that’s the job of an experienced, creative PR pro.

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