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Making a list and checking it twice

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When was the last time you updated your media list?

What do you mean, "What's a media list?" You don't have one? Other than your data base of clients and prospects, there's probably not a more important resource in your business development arsenal.

For the uninitiated, a media list is an up-to-date register of the names, contact information and key people at all the publications, radio and television stations in your market area. Without a complete and current media list, you're not taking full advantage of the public relations opportunities available to you and your company. Don't underestimate the promotional value that can be gained through many of these avenues, even the less obvious ones.

Putting together a media list isn't difficult; it simply requires a bit of legwork. Let's take the categories one at a time.

- * Newspapers: Your local library's reference section, in all likelihood, carries some type of media directory. Among those most popular with PR professionals are Bacon's and Burrelle's Media Directory. Be aware that what you find may be an older edition. But even if it's the latest issue, call each publication to confirm their contact information and the contact person (which in your case is probably the business or real estate editor). Why? Editors are highly mobile, often changing jobs.

- * Business journals, trade magazines and industry newsletters: You're probably already familiar with many of these. For example, The Boston Business Journal, New Hampshire Business Review, Vermont Business, and, of course, the New England Real Estate Journal. Every industry has at least a couple of trade magazines and most industry associations publish their own newsletters. The directories listed above also carry listings for business and trade publications. Follow the same steps, making sure to verify the accuracy of the information. Don't eliminate national publications; they need news, too, and often are happy to run your press releases. (Don't exclude, trade magazines in industries where you may have an overlapping interest; i.e., if you're a contractor who does a lot of healthcare work, make sure publications like New England's HealthCare Review are on your list.)

- * Radio and television: These folks should be on your media list also. Though more difficult to gain coverage from, it's still a good idea to include them in your mailings. News directors will eventually become familiar with you and your company, so when they're looking for someone to speak with about an industry-related story, you just might be the one they turn to. You'll find TV and radio media directories in the library also, however it's often as simple as looking in the TV Guide or local newspaper listings to find the stations' contact information. Once you identified them, just call and ask for name of the news director.

Once you've compiled your media list, put it on your computer in a way that allows you make changes easily, and permits you to print out labels and/or send them e-mails. Every six months or

so, have someone in your office call each publication and verify the contact person; mail directed to someone who's no longer in the position labels you as either sloppy or an amateur—or both.

Now that you've got this wonderful list up and running, what do you do with it? Just in case you haven't figured that out yet, the answer is—you send them stuff! What stuff? I recommend sending not only press releases, but newsletters, quarterly reports, new promotional literature when it comes out, and anything else that helps create visibility and exposure for your company in a professional manner.

Lastly, always remember these two important axioms: The media needs your information every bit as much you want them to have it, and God helps those who help themselves.

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