

copy. Media placements that are not paid give you no control over how the particular media outlet represents you – or if they decide to use your information at all. The media is under no obligation to interview you, include a quote from you, or utilize information you may have sent them.

A finer point of distinction can be made between editorial and advertorial. With paid advertising and advertorials, you

example, if you are quoted in an issue of a national women's magazine one month, it is unlikely that you will be quoted in another issue of the same magazine for several months, or even a year or more.

There is no denying that savvy consumers know when they read an advertisement trying to sell them a product or service.

They understand that you have paid to present your

coverage of you on television, they likely perceive it as more authentic, since you did not pay for it with your own advertising dollars. A publicist that can generate this type of buzz can build greater credibility for your brand in the long-term.

The decision of how to allocate your expenditures toward public relations or other marketing activities will vary by each individual situation. PR is only one component of a total marketing plan, and it takes time to generate results. A minimum commitment of six months to a year is generally a baseline in which you can expect to reap the rewards.

Furthermore, no one can guarantee coverage for every initiative into which you enter. If you are sponsoring or participating in an event, you can send out a press release, and the media might pick it up; but they may or may not cover or attend the event.

Ultimately, PR cannot operate in a vacuum. If you do not have a complementary marketing campaign – which may include everything from email marketing, web optimization, internal marketing and social networking to community outreach and special events – your media outreach efforts will not be optimized.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The reach of your PR efforts will vary depending on how relevant your story is to the various markets in which you seek

When someone reads a third-party article written about your products or services, or views coverage of you on television, they likely perceive it as more authentic, since you did not pay for it with your own advertising dollars.

have the opportunity to repeat your messaging in the same publication, or in another media vehicle, as often as you wish. When the media covers you or your story pitch in editorial copy, they will only do it once. For

message; and thus, they will view your messages with more skepticism than when you appear in the media as an expert source. When someone reads a third-party article written about your products or services, or views



to promote yourself and your practice. National media will be less interested in practices and medspas that are located in smaller markets and tend to focus on New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and other major media hubs.

However, local media placements can be even more compelling in certain markets; and an appearance on the evening news, or a column in the local papers, can be highly effective to drive new customers into your facility.

Any PR campaign you launch should be targeted toward and directly aligned with specific audiences or patient populations. For example, if your aim is to reach soccer or hockey moms, being quoted in a feature in Men's Health probably won't make much of an impact on your bottom line - unless these particular moms happen to read their husbands' magazines. Although a public relations plan can deliver results in measurable, impactful ways, the onus is on you to constantly provide meaningful news, developments, case studies, and story ideas to make it work.

It is critical to maintain a database of patients who have expressed a willingness to be interviewed and photographed or filmed by the media if such a request is made. Although you may have some flexibility with media in terms of putting restrictions on your case studies - offering photos of a patient without providing a name, for example - the more barricades you put on your story, the harder

it will be to get placed. You may also request an interview in which your patient is hidden in shadow, or referred to by a first name only or a pseudonym, to protect his or her privacy. While you (in concert with the patient) have the final say in how much information you wish to provide to the media, the media has the final say as to whether they can and will include you in a story, given your boundaries.

According to Melissa Kelz, Principal of Kelz Public Relations in Chicago, "An experienced public relations

will come across - and the more likely you will get significant placements."

THE PITFALLS OF DO-IT-YOURSELF PR

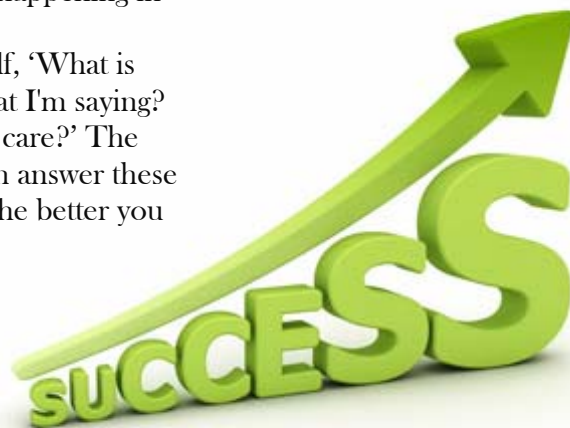
Although it may seem tempting as a cost-saving measure, DIY PR is not always advisable or effective. An example of do-it-yourself PR is placing a press release you crafted in-house on a free or inexpensive newswire service. Firstly, even if you are a brilliant writer and strategist, writing an effective press release requires

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practitioner works with you and your practice to develop strong message points. He or she goes to the press armed with those key message points and fills the communication toolbox with multiple types of written materials which will help get your story told. But you have to keep your PR abreast of all that is happening in your practice.

"Ask yourself, 'What is significant about what I'm saying? Why would anyone care?'" The more clearly you can answer these questions yourself, the better you

experience, and every single word counts. Secondly, you likely will not have the time to follow up to the extent required to insure media success. Thirdly, a talented publicist is skilled at communicating with the media in a manner that is appropriate and appealing to their target



demographic. Finally, unless you enlist a professional with existing connections to the specific media outlets you are targeting, your release may not generate the quantity or quality of placements you need to achieve tangible results for your practice.

A professional publicist who can craft a solid press release to hit all your key messages and place it on a premier newswire helps you to reach millions of

for, and what stories they might be working on. In these turbulent times when tracking down media can be tantamount to a full time job, PRs stay in constant contact.

An essential quality in a publicist is the ability to creatively search for news, package it for the media, and generate buzz through the news they choose to disseminate. There is no substitute for relevant experience when working with physicians,

requests, this sector is also facing significant challenges.

Network television, radio, and national and local newspapers – which have historically been key channels for dispersing public relations messages – are also feeling the pinch. Pick up a copy of any magazine or newspaper today and you will see the impact of the economy on traditional media: publications are smaller, thinner, and have fewer ads and spreads. It now seems probable that, at some point in the near future, printed newspapers will cease to be a choice channel through which to communicate PR messaging.

It should come as no surprise that Internet spending is up. The online channel abounds with opportunities to communicate, educate, and influence public opinion. From social networking sites to blogs to online patient advocacy organizations, public relations can also effectively deliver messaging across the Internet for your practice and your brand.

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people instantly. This goes a long way toward boosting your website traffic and search engine optimization and improving your online ranking. A publicist with solid media contacts on her speed dial can make things happen for you that you would not be able to do on your own. As Melissa Kelz says, “A public relations practitioner acts as a counselor as well as a mediator, helping to translate your individual goals into action by anticipating, analyzing, and interpreting consumer attitudes and issues that might impact your industry. He or she serves the role of an external Communications Director for your practice.”

Publicists interact with the media on a day-to-day basis and develop long-term relationships. They stay on top of where they are working, who they are working

medical spas, and beauty and health media. If you enlist a PR firm that does not have direct expertise in your industry, the learning curve can be steep; and you may find yourself essentially financing their on-the-job training.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Opportunities for placements in traditional media are drying up. A look at the trends in consumer advertising spending will provide valuable insights into what the future may hold. Advertising spent by channel has profoundly changed in recent years, and this change is progressive. For example, Internet advertising continues to outpace all other channels, including broadcast and print media. Although national monthly magazines rank high in placement

ADDING PR TO YOUR MARKETING MIX

This is a good time to look at what PR can deliver to your marketing program. The return on investment (ROI) of a PR campaign, compared to strictly “pay for play” advertising, is undisputed. Even an extensive national public relations campaign pales in comparison to large-scale advertising placements when it comes to reaching groups of consumers. PR should ideally deliver results as part of a fully

integrated marketing campaign rather than as a stand-alone program.

The credibility of editorial message delivery has increased in many instances with the growth and legitimization of peer-to-peer communication, such as online message boards.

In the aesthetics arena, the advent of peer-to-peer empowerment manifests itself in several ways. As consumers become more educated about cosmetic procedures, a physician can no longer dictate treatment in a vacuum. A modern-day consultation may involve a prospective patient coming in with preconceived notions of what he or she wants or needs to have done. Patients are more apt to challenge or question a practitioner's treatment approach, and they will often ask questions that were originally generated by a direct-to-consumer marketing or public relations campaign. The nature of public relations today offers an opportunity to shape and deliver content to target audiences that are seeking

and receiving information across new venues and may be receptive to content that is credible and meaningful. Often it is the media who introduce a first time patient to a new procedure. People trust the media because they are seen as a disinterested third party talking about a topic and are, therefore, considered a credible source. It is a reciprocal relationship; the media must trust publicists enough to know that the stories they pitch are based in research and fact, rather than blindly promoting a client.

"PR can be an economical way to reach your target audience en masse. It stimulates awareness of and demand for your products or services. Media coverage is a way to strengthen your image and perception and, ultimately, to increase your search engine visibility and organic results. Stories placed in the media can result in a meaningful number of new consultation visits and procedures," offers Melissa Kelz.

Using the power of PR effectively gives you a leg up on your competitors who may not be

utilizing PR to promote their brand. A well executed, professional public relations program creates a significant impact on profitability that is greater than what can be achieved with traditional marketing or advertising vehicles alone. If PR is not yet a part of your marketing program, it may be time to consider taking the next logical step to grow your brand. **WLI**



About the Author

Wendy Lewis is the President of Wendy Lewis & Co., Ltd., global aesthetics consultancy established in 1997 and an internationally renowned expert in social media strategy and practice marketing. She is the author of 10 books on aesthetics and beauty and Founder and Editor in Chief of www.beautyinthebag.com.

Contact her at 1.877.WLBEAUTY; wl@wlbeauty.com. Visit her on the worldwide web: www.cosmeticmedrx.com.

