



INSIGHT MARKETING

PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR INDUSTRY, TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

SIX TIPS FOR FINE-TUNING PR EFFORTS DURING AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

By Chuck Schroeder, CEO, [Insight Marketing, LLC](http://www.insightmarketing.com)

As noted in my article “Fighting the Recession: a Brief Guide to PR Tactics and their Cost-benefit Advantages,” public relations can help you maintain brand awareness and support sales more cost-effectively than other marketing communications activities. If the economy has reduced your PR budget, use the opportunity to further streamline your PR strategies. Consider the following six tips:

1. **Put your sales hat on.** In tough economic times, concentrate on PR activities that prompt customers and prospects to upgrade equipment (or at least visit your Web site or call your 800#). Lead generation is the key nowadays. For example, nothing gets people motivated like the concept of “free.”

One of Insight Marketing’s clients had developed an attractive poster series that addressed common customer problems, their likely causes and solutions. The problem was that the customer never promoted the free posters—they were only distributed by sales people the same way an insurance broker hands out logoed pens.

Insight Marketing recommended and created a short press release for dissemination to the trade press whenever a

new poster came out. The response was immediate and substantial: calls rolled in right away from both customers and prospects, and they kept coming in for over three months. The client received a total of 737 poster requests and captured a wealth of prospect and customer information and buying intent data. The next poster press release generated several hundred more calls. Since “free” is a great motivator, using a relatively inexpensive press release to broadcast this “news” offered a great cost-benefit ratio.

2. **Get in lock step with business priorities.** In tough times, PR strategies should mirror core sales and marketing strategies. If your sales team is focusing on markets A, B and C because they’re the ones buying now, shift and narrow your communications accordingly. This strategy also takes advantage of the old saying that your best future sales prospects are your current customers.

3. **Focus.** In a financial downturn, you can’t use PR to support all of your products or services. Instead, focus on the 20 percent of your product or service line that generates 80 percent of your income (if you’re not familiar with the “80/20” rule, also known as the Pareto principle, look it up on Wikipedia).

4. Remember: base hits win ball games. PR success results from developing a game plan (commonly seen as objectives, strategies and tactics in a PR plan) and sticking to it. Don't plan on a single big event or feature story creating all the necessary results. Instead focus on consistency, such as distributing at least one news release per month and generating one feature story every quarter. This will create a steady steam of awareness, sales calls or other desired actions. Remember, baseball teams that consistently get base hits with runners in scoring position win more ball games. Home runs in the bottom of the 9th are flashy, but you can't count on them.

5. Automate your operation. Are your media relations efforts still "old school?" If your media list isn't segmented by markets and editor functions, and that information isn't in a contact management database, you're old school.

Using a database enables you to quickly e-mail a highly focused news release only to targeted markets and editor segments (e.g., "new products editors " or "automotive technology editor"). A database also easily enables distributing news releases with content customized to specific markets. For example, if market A values product simplicity the most, while market B values high-throughput the most, you can increase the customer relevancy of your news release by tailoring the lead paragraph(s) of your news release accordingly.

There are other software applications and tools that greatly accelerate other tasks to make PR more productive (and there are also some tasks that MUST

rely on old-fashioned legwork and a personal understanding of editors' needs). While it might not make sense for a client to own or manage such software, tools and tasks, a PR agency should be familiar with them or explore them on your behalf.

6. Pick audiences like jurors. A good defense lawyer or prosecutor will evaluate potential jurors very carefully, because each attorney is looking for an audience that is most receptive to their message. Editorial selection is a similar process. The shotgun approach to message dissemination and follow-up wastes time if the editorial venue rarely or never publishes the client's message (and it often annoys the editors). Spend time evaluating media and editors to ensure the audience is receptive and will consistently return the desired "verdict," which is editorial coverage.

For additional information about public relations for your business-to-business or business-to-consumer company, please feel free to contact Chuck Schroeder (chucks@imipr.com) or one of the other PR professionals at Insight Marketing, LLC (www.imipr.com or 262-240-9790).

About the Author

Chuck Schroeder, CEO of Insight Marketing, has provided PR counsel and services to business-to-business and business-to-consumer companies since 1988. He believes that successful PR isn't rocket science. It involves establishing good PR protocols, insightful writing and a commitment to become a clients' most trusted content partner.