

To Separate Your Firm from the Pack, Publish Articles!

By Ken Lizotte, CMC

Back when most business flowed free and easy, in the good old days of the late 90s, any kind of marketing /selling technique worked pretty well. A modest website, glossy brochure, press releases sent periodically to the media, perhaps an ad campaign: It seemed even a bare minimum of these sufficed to lure prospects and insure profits.

Now times have changed requiring something more and some companies have found an answer: published articles. Explains research consultant Michael Norris of Norris Research, Rindge NH: "The general stumbling of many so-called 'high fliers' is due to marketing, or lack thereof. Until recently, answering the phone was their entire marketing strategy. But now so many firms and their products look more and more alike." Thus, a renewed marketing strategy has begun to emerge, Norris reports, centered around article-writing, columns, and other publishing vehicles.

Why this tactic? For one thing, it's far less expensive an approach than traditional advertising campaigns, no small side-benefit in these cost-crunching times. Second, and perhaps more important, writing articles for industry or business journals

affords a double benefit promotion-wise: by contributing useful knowledge to your targeted market as a way of indirectly advertising your wares, you are teaching and hawking at the same time, the best of all possible worlds.

What kind of articles should you write? They can't be direct ads or testimonials to your product or service but they can display your leadership in your industry. Your objective is to showcase your expertise and distinguish your firm as more than just another run-of-the-mill manufacturing outlet.

One client of mine, for example, a manufacturer of high-tech data storage systems wanted its insurance firm prospects to understand how easy-to-learn its product was, so its CEO wrote an article for an important insurance trade magazine about "The Dangers of Inaccessibility." While the article couldn't blatantly promote my client's product (the publication would not have allowed that), by discussing the competitive advantages of accessible, flexible data storage today it implied that if readers wanted to learn more, the best expert to contact on the subject would be the author.



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What considerations matter before you start? The first is to realize there's nothing to be afraid of. Many executives are scared to even attempt this approach, fearing that they (a) cannot write, or (b) haven't anything noteworthy to say. Yet editors will often work with an inexperienced writer, or a ghostwriter can be hired to help out. And good article ideas often start pouring out once a little brainstorming begins. In fact, it can be surprising how much we really do know about our subjects after we allow

ourselves to begin imagining what we might want to say.

A more important consideration before launching a publishing campaign might be the answers to these questions: (1) What issues can you write about that would directly advance your business objectives?; and (2) What publications do your customers actually read? Regarding the first, identify products and services of your company that you most want people to know about. Then determine what customer pain your product and its benefits effectively attack.

The CEO of a leather goods manufacturer, for example, once wrote an article called, "Why Leather is Still a Bargain." A maker of metal piping might write something like "Top Ten Mistakes

When Choosing Pipe." The idea is to focus on topics you know something about and which indirectly extol the superiority of the methods and finished products emanating from firms like yours. That makes you the author not just another shrill sales rep but a recognized "thought leader" in your field.

In terms of the second question, be sure the right people will be reading your wise words. The leather article, for example, should probably appear in a publication read by producers of handbags or shoes. The piping article needs to appear in publications read by architects, designers and construction managers.

Having answered these initial questions, you're next faced with

how to do it. The secret is to simply treat your targeted editors like prospects, emailing or cold-calling them directly and just making your pitch. The truth is that editors are always on the lookout for good ideas and do want to hear from someone like you on the "front lines." Treat them respectfully, endeavor to supply their needs, and you'll soon become proficient at this remarkable, underused marketing channel. Soon your publishing credits will pile up, and when that happens you may start encountering folks who virtually light up when they hear your name. You'll now be a noted author/expert, and as such you'll hear your fans remark, "Y'know, I really enjoy reading your articles. Please tell me more about your products. I'm all ears!"