

PR for Your Practice

By Jennifer Thompson



You're sitting at home in front of your TV. It's 10:00 p.m. and you've finally carved out some time to catch up on the local news. You kick off those slippers and turn on favorite station. There's a story about a new high-performance sedan going on sale this year – new features, new design, new performance. You've got to have one. The news reporter reviews its safety features and describes the car

as a “top pick.” Later, you hear a radio commercial for the same car, and although you're still interested, it just doesn't pack the same punch as the news story did. Do you know why?

Credibility. Even the best advertisements in the world have a rough time establishing credibility, which is why it's so important to put an emphasis on public relations for your practice. You see, your patients and referral sources go through the same process that you did when you heard about the car when they hear about your practice. If they see you positioned as an expert for a story on the nightly news, you are an expert. It's that simple. You become the local, go-to doctor for

that subject. But, if they only see you in an advertisement, you become just another doctor in a white coat, just like the must-have sedan becomes another car.

The goal of an effective media relations plan is to raise awareness about your medical practice and create buzz about the things you're doing. A good PR plan is vital to continued success as it will establish the ever-important credibility your practice needs and can't get from traditional paid advertising – often at a fraction of the cost of an advertising campaign.

People trust the media because they are a (supposedly) unbiased third party that is reporting on what they hear or experience. The importance of having a

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successful PR plan in addition to your traditional “above the line” advertising cannot be stressed enough.

By now you’re probably thinking, “How can my practice reach out to the media and get the coverage we deserve?” Well, that’s a very good question. Below are just a few tips to help you get started on your media relations plan.

What Does the Media Want to Write About or Cover on the Nightly News?

Believe it or not, your practice is newsworthy. Adding new physicians and services, winning an award, utilizing a new technology, going paperless – they all make for desirable stories for news media.

It’s also helpful to tie your story into a larger trend that affects your community as a whole, if you can. For example, if you recently went paperless, see if that ties into a new county conservation initiative or a story about how big your local landfill is. The broader the interest is, the easier it is to sell the reporter.

Timing is Everything

Before you even begin to think about submitting a story, do your research and find out the deadlines for each outlet you’re interested in. Learn them well because your pitch will have to coincide with these hard deadlines, not the other way around. If you miss them, then you’re out. Remember to always make sure your announcement is timely, interesting and relevant.

Know Your Audience

Just like the media have to know who is watching, reading or listening to their stories, you have to be familiar with what that audience wants as well.

Reporters love straightforward news, so be careful not to over-spin your story or use too much marketing language. Ask yourself if the audience of that outlet would be interested in the proposed news piece. Think about it for a bit and then ask yourself again. It’s also worthwhile to find an outlets’ preferred delivery method. Most will want it by e-mail, but it’s always good to check. It’s a simple thing you can do to improve the chances of your story getting picked up.

Avoid Errors

Yes, avoid is spelled wrong on purpose. It’s to prove a point: do whatever you can to avoid typos, sloppy writing or grammatical errors – these mistakes will ruin your credibility with the media almost instantly. You only have one chance to submit your story so make sure everything is right before you do it. Again, take a few minutes and read over what you spent hours working on. Catching that typo could be the difference in your story getting picked up.

And there you have it. Although establishing an effective media relations plan may seem daunting at first, it is vital to the continued growth and success of your practice. Think of it as

the fuel that will keep your practice running. Speaking of which, when you go to buy that new car, do yourself a favor and buy the red one.

Jennifer Thompson is a Central Florida small business owner and serves as President of Insight Marketing Group, focusing on medical office marketing, community and public relations. In this capacity she is responsible for developing and implementing the long-term strategic vision for the overall organization including publishing the company’s community-based monthly news magazine and hosting the company’s weekly small business networking group. She can be reached at 321-228-9686 or jennifer@insightmg.com. ■

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