

GS Insight

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Hit 'Em Where They Live:

Don't Underestimate The Power of Localized Communications

It's not that you can't teach old dogs new tricks. The problem is, we forget to try. The same often holds true for marketing communications. With relatively new pups such as database marketing and direct communications getting all the attention as we try to create stronger bonds with specific customers, we forget that old, reliable newspapers can be taught to do more than boost reach and frequency scores.

In fact, often-overlooked local media can help extend the value of a database investment by delivering credible, pertinent messages to customers and prospects that encourage relationships between them and local distributors or retailers.

The Value of Local Media

Local news media — television, radio, county dailies and even weekly community papers — can be powerful PR vehicles, especially when building understanding is of greater importance than creating awareness.

Readership studies show that people tend to turn to larger newspapers for a summary of U.S. and world news, scanning articles rather than reading them. They also tend to scan such publications on-the-go, either at the office, while commuting, or over breakfast — spending less than 15 minutes with the publication, on average.

On the other hand, people view the information in their local newspapers as having a more immediate impact on their lives and therefore they read these publications more thoroughly. In fact, weekly newspapers are the lowest circulation media in the country, yet they score at the top for information retention by readers.

Of course, targeting local publications will do little good if the information doesn't appeal to the news values of the editor and resonate with your target audience.

We've all heard the ubiquitous saying coined by a *New*

York Sun editor in the 1800s, "If a dog bites a man, it's not news. If a man bites a dog, it's news." Unfortunately, corporate or product news rarely lives up to the "man-bites-dog" standard. When it does, national media will likely achieve the desired reach and frequency goals.

Stanley Walker, a Texan who moved east to become city editor of *The New York Herald Tribune* in the early 1930s, said news was based on the three W's — "women, wampum and wrong-doing." By this he meant sex, money and crime. Unless you work for the White House, it's unlikely your marketing or corporate messages live up to this trifecta.

That leaves the comparatively mundane news values of *impact*, something that will likely affect many people; *prominence*, events involving well-known persons or institutions; and *proximity*, something pertinent to the local community. Of the three, proximity may be the easiest hook to incorporate into your media strategy and may ultimately score the most targeted impressions.

Give Them What They Want

In a study conducted by MediaLink PR Research, a media distribution and analyst group, the business sections of daily newspapers in the Chicago and Milwaukee area were analyzed for one month. Articles were





categorized as local news, syndicated news from non-commercial wire services, and national news, which included information provided by PR Newswire and BusinessWire. The result: 73 percent of the articles printed contained a local reference.

Interviews with lifestyle editors from the top 300 daily newspapers on what they want to receive from PR practitioners yielded similar results. Of the 300, 297 said they prefer local news over national news for their lifestyle sections.

Finally, in a comparison conducted for a major retail merchandiser, the company sent out “one-size-fits-all” news releases to 1,700 dailies. Only five media placements were documented. A month later, the same release was localized around 800 stores by including a quote by a local store manager, or a district manager in multiple store areas. The release was sent to one daily in each store’s area and was picked up by 350 publications! That’s a 1,000-fold increase in use even though the release was sent to less than half as many publications.

Efficient Localization

The obvious question is, who has the time or staff to localize press releases? Fortunately, technology provides the tools to efficiently localize most any release. By combining database information with software that allows for multi-tiered insertions, communications professionals can produce localized releases that look like they were individually crafted for the editor. This service often entails a setup and per-insertion charge on top of the normal distribution costs.

Coming up with a local angle isn’t that difficult either. News can center around local retailers, manufacturing plants, product availability, distributors,


health, business or demographic statistics, award recipients, local spokespersons or test market participants.

Practically any topic can also be localized by using meaningful statistics. For example, if you’re launching a new arthritis medicine and research shows that one out of 10 people suffer from this ailment, integrating a media list with the U.S. Census Bureau database can result in headlines such as “New Product May Spell Relief for 500,000 Cook County Residents.”

The localization strategy can be a useful public affairs tool as well. Recall notices can be localized to avoid spreading fears beyond affected areas and legislators can be influenced by articles quoting local statistics, or through localized Op-Eds from concerned retailers.

The technology that allows for localization of releases can even be used to generate letters in a grassroots initiative. When you need customers to support an issue, getting commitment is easy — getting action is another story. By using localization technology, sign-and-send letters can be generated by cross-matching your customer database with a listing of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The customer receives a letter and envelope addressed to his respective Senators and Representative that only requires a signature and a stamp.

Of course, all the virtues of localization do not mean your national media plan should be abandoned — a local strategy works best when it complements a sound national strategy. Nor should your company entirely abandon the shotgun approach. Localized releases do cost more and some generic re-

leases will still find readers. However, more often than not, to fully optimize the reach, frequency and impact of your news, it is wise to localize. 

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