

# Engineer's Guide to Product Publicity

By: Steven M. Stroum

Product publicity is the most versatile and powerful marketing tool available today and also the most misunderstood. A major reason is because publicity is free. Remember the old adage, "The best things in life are free." It totally applies to product publicity which results from news releases. Please be aware that the role of a news release is to provide editors and web hosts with content that will interest their readers and audiences. They choose content from a vast array of sources. This content is valuable and is the reason why a publication or website exists in the first place. Think about it, the most credible media outlet is clearly the one that provides the "best content." In business, "The Wall Street Journal" is a prime example.

Just because the editorial exposure [publicity] you get is *free* doesn't mean it has no value. On the contrary, publicity is much more valuable than paid advertising because with "news," the editor is telling his or her readers about you in the non-paid, editorial section of the media. This third party description of your goods and services is free. Furthermore, as a reader, you expect the media to tell you about new things or applications you hadn't previously heard about.

Given that news provides tremendous exposure and credibility for the manufacturer or distributor of a product being described by an editor, ask yourself the question: why get the exposure in the first place? The best answer to that question was provided by Al Ries & Laura Ries in their book, "The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR." They wrote, "Perception is everything. The only question is how to create a favorable impression in the customer's mind. And advertising has racked up a poor track record in this respect."

The answer to the question of how to create a favorable impression is simple: Product publicity. When someone reads about how your products can solve their problems, they remember and respond. Most importantly, when they consistently read about your products and services in the best media outlets and are shown how they solve problems for customers, your company becomes perceived and "branded" as a problem-solver. Again, perception is everything! And repetition is essential to driving home the perception that your company solves problems.

Having created, written, and distributed well over 15,000 product news releases since 1976, I have helped many companies who manufacture or distribute industrial and technical products and provide services grow by focusing on the different features, benefits, and applications of their products and services. These news releases have helped them become "branded" or recognized as innovative problem-solvers by OEMs, distributors, and end-users alike. The result: controlled growth in a very cost-effective manner.

Today, in the internet age, the importance and impact of using news releases to arouse interest in your products and to help influence where your products show up in searches for those prospective customers who already know what they need, or think they do, is critical. The fact is, writing product news releases today has to be addressed from the standpoint of humans as well as inanimate search engine spiders, crawlers, and robots. In other words, today you need to have remarkable content for editors and readers and you need to also know how to identify and select the most appropriate presentation and keywords for the internet .

Product publicity is the most cost-effective SEO (search engine optimization) tool available. Google, for example, is the runaway leader in search because it harnesses the collective judgments of Web surfers. Its PageRank technology (named after co-founder Larry Page) is based on the idea that the best way to find relevant information is to prioritize search results not by the characteristics of a document but by the number of websites that are linking to it. Product news [publicity] in high-quality, respected websites is the best way to develop links.

## Here are 10 Rules for Preparing Effective News Releases:

1. **Write Clearly and Concisely.** Be aware of “engineering speak” and don’t write at too high a technical level because the personnel at publications and websites who actually critique and select news for publication do not always have technical degrees. This does not imply that journalists are not competent, it points out that engineers should be sensitive to their audience and respectful of their requirements for clarity and brevity. Always include a human editorial contact as a service to editors should they need more information. This also allows you to establish a relationship with those editors.
2. **Adopt a Giving Mindset.** Remember the key to creating a successful product release is to prepare your materials from the perspective that you are trying to serve the media by contributing content. That is why “problem-solving” approaches work extremely well. Yes, the result will be “free” publicity. However, don’t take the approach that you want something for nothing. Truly adopt the mindset of a giver, not a taker, and you will get much better results with editors. Think about it, nobody wants to be taken advantage of.
3. **Be a Romantic and KISS.** For the uninitiated, KISS means “Keep it Simple Stupid.” Designing a product requires limits and a clear sense of space constraints. A news release is similar. You must restrict your presentation to about 200 words. Further, remember that a product release is about a product: what it is, what it does, how it does it, where you get it, and what it costs. It is not appropriate to include quotations from the president or another person in a product release. Product application stories, however, are different because the benefits from the use of your product are often qualified by a statement from the actual customer.

4. **Substantiate Performance Claims.** Don't write a glorified advertisement and call it a "news release." If you make a claim such as high tolerance, then provide a number. If your product is compact, then provide the dimensions. If your product operates over a high temperature range, then provide the range. Get the point? Quantify wherever possible. Your message will have a greater likelihood to be received as "credible" news by an editor if you quantify your claims or substantiate them via their ability to meet the specifications of an independent organization such as the FDA, ASTM, or Military.
5. **Understand What Makes a Product Newsworthy.** An older product can be upgraded or can be totally new to a different market segment. These new applications represent something newsworthy to a new audience. Also, a product may have different features that are of interest to different audiences. For example, paint can be easy to apply, chemical-resistant, and yield a hard finish. Separate product news releases and different media lists can be developed featuring each characteristic. Furthermore, each feature of the paint may be more or less important to various audiences. For example, UV resistance doesn't typically matter for interior applications, but is very important to a boat- or bridge builder for obvious reasons.
6. **Don't Try to Stuff too Much Information into a News Release.** Believing that the more information you include in a news release, the more value you will receive is a huge mistake. Nothing could be further from the truth with respect to news releases. Less is more! The fact is, most editors are seeking problem-solving information for their readers. Generally speaking, the more specific the problem being solved; the better the publicity coverage will be. In the above example, if you focus on a hard finish, you are solving a problem relative to durability or abrasion resistance. Moreover, the sales inquiries will reflect that interest. In other words, you know what your prospect's problem is and can arm yourself to solve it, increasing the likelihood of making a sale.
7. **Realize the Importance of a Professional Photograph.** When preparing a product news release, the old cliché, "one picture is worth a thousand words" has never been as relevant as it is today. A phenomenal photograph that is congruous with the message being conveyed will reinforce your message. More importantly, it will provide an editor with great content. As the editor of *Plastics Auxiliaries & Machinery* wrote to the author, "Perhaps you can use this situation to make a point to your client regarding what can be done by producing a *gorgeous photo* of a fundamentally plain product." Realize also that photographers are like actors, they need solid direction to be successful.
8. **Know That Publicity Works for Any Product.** Not believing publicity will work for your product or service is plain crazy! Publicity will work for any product for which there is a "legitimate need." That said, I'm not certain what the legitimate need was for "Beenie Babies" and "Pet Rocks," but they were very successfully introduced using publicity only! In fact, the most successful products in history were all introduced using publicity.

The Apple Mac was introduced in 1984 with a legendary publicity stunt by Steve Jobs who had the computer introduce him! The Microsoft Tablet, Vista Software, and numerous other products were also introduced with publicity. If there is a need your product or service fills, there will be an audience interested and, therefore, publications, websites, and blogs available to satisfy that interest.

9. **Prepare and Disseminate News Releases Regularly.** Don't just send out news releases occasionally. Send them out consistently. What many engineers fail to appreciate is that editors are always looking for information and if you become a reliable source it increases the odds your product news will be published regularly. In effect you are building relationships with editors through a consistent news release program. Equally important today is that news releases increase your odds of showing up on page one of Google and other search engines. The reason for this is because Google, for example, bases their search not on the characteristics of a particular document, but on the basis of the number of websites that are linking to the document. So, product news releases are a terrific way to illustrate your ability to solve problems and, therefore, become known as a problem-solving company, and they also help keep your products highly visible on the first page of *organic searches*.
  
10. **Don't Ever Promise to Advertise.** Many engineers assume that they can't get news releases published unless they advertise. Nothing could be further from the truth. Don't even think of trying to "leverage" an editor by implying that if they publish your news release you are going to advertise with them. High quality publishers know that editorial integrity is their most important product. The greater their credibility, the greater will be their value to their readers or website visitors. According to *Penton Media*, "A publication should not sell editorial. It should be independent from the advertising sales department and free to select only the material of interest, relevance and value to the reader." A leading editor once wrote an editorial entitled, "Church and State? ... Journalism 101" in which she stated, "*The other day I got a press release in the mail and the envelope in which it came had the following stamped on the front: 'Advertisers Press Release Enclosed.' I was tempted to throw it away without even looking at it. The sender was implying that my judgment on the value of the release would be affected by the word 'advertiser.' So, if you ever wondered whether I favored advertisers with editorial coverage that wasn't warranted, there's your answer.*"

As a small businessperson myself who has been preparing product news releases for clients since 1976, I understand the real challenges facing smaller, technical companies and am passionate about helping you compete with larger multinational firms; given the uneven playing field we're playing on in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century... If this guide has helped you appreciate that preparing effective product news releases is not a simple task and can play a very critical role in your company's marketing program; I have achieved my goal. There are certain things in

life you shouldn't skip on. It is my belief that with your car you shouldn't skip on brakes and tires and with your company you shouldn't skip on accounting, legal, and marketing advisors. Get a great accounting firm, get a great law firm, and we invite you to contact Venmark International and get a great product publicity firm.

Finally, don't assume that if a prospective client needs what you sell they will Google you. Use publicity to *tell your story* and give prospects a reason to contact you. **Henry Ford once said, "If I asked prospective customers what they wanted, they would have said faster horses!"**

## About the Author

The "**The Engineer's Guide to Product Publicity**" was created by Steven M. Stroum, president of Venmark International, a company he founded in 1976. Since that time he has been recognized as the "best in the business" by many leading editors. In recognition for his contribution to the success of many smaller companies, Mr. Stroum was elected to serve on the *Commonwealth of Massachusetts Small Business Task Force* and was later appointed to serve a four-year term as one of 18 small business advisors to the Governor and served on the *SBANE* (Smaller Business Association of New England) board of directors as Publicity Advisor. Mr. Stroum's contribution to the small business community was recognized further when he was selected by the *International Rotary Foundation* to join a five-man Group Study Exchange Team and tour South Korea for six weeks as an ambassador. He has also been listed in "Who's Who in the East," was an executive member of the *American Marketing Association*, addressed the *Inventors Association of New England* at MIT, and the *New England Chapter of IEEE*. Mr. Stroum was also appointed to the Norbert Weiner Forum at Tufts University to study the impact of technology on society. He has been a guest lecturer at Babson College, Boston College, Northeastern University, and has addressed numerous business and civic groups. Most importantly, Mr. Stroum is a small business advocate who realizes the important contribution small businesses make to our society in terms of creating jobs, opportunities, and the "spirit of achievement" which is the essence of American free enterprise.

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