

Marketing: Mind for Minutiae

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I never thought having a steel trap for a brain, a mind for minutiae, would amount to much good. The skill only seemed to help me hold grudges (and occasionally kick some butt during games of Trivial Pursuit) . . . until I started to work in public relations, and then I realized the winning potential of gleaning and storing seemingly useless nuggets.

When you're creating public relations – especially on a non-profit, shoestring or non-existent budget – you can't afford much, but your brain and its little grey folds can provide a wealth of resources to achieve your goal of media interest and coverage.

- Read, research and wrangle. Use your brain as a sponge to sop up as much free material as you can. Grab all the complimentary papers when you're at your favorite café and scan them for articles about similar organizations – who's writing what about your type of project. And if you're WiFi-ing (using wireless internet) at these same spots, scan the subscription newspapers sites (as well as those of radio and TV stations) for the same valuable info. Keep track of these details for your future pitches – nothing's smarter or stronger than pitching your project using current and pertinent, personal and specific details – *“Hi Harry – I enjoyed reading your piece about the new raku pottery craze in last month's Time magazine, and I wanted to let you know that my client Gabrielle is featuring raku pieces in her Chicago pottery show next month . . .”*
- Schmooze-a-palooza. This word, meaning conversing to make a social connection, is inextricably linked to marketing, because, quite simply, it works! You've got to get out in the world, the world of your artistic endeavor, to see what's happening in the field, to find and forge collaborations, to cross-pollinate with those in your field. Besides being a hoot (and often a source of complimentary refreshments!), going to openings, trade shows, workshops and the like puts you in touch with others in your discipline, and there is strength in numbers. From exploring shared advertising to flyer trades to soliciting new board members, getting yourself and your message into the community must be done regularly to assert your agenda and keep your finger on the pulse of the scene. It's true that word-of-mouth is the best form of advertising – it's personal, effective, and again, FREE – you just need to keep in mind all you've learned.
- Don't Forget to Remember. Mnemonic devices, notes in a diary, database entries – however you track your synapses, do so to keep apprised of what you read, who you meet, what's to do done. Always reference this info when writing a cover letter to go with your press release – it's always a plus if you can relate your product to current events, to the reporter's specific beat, and even to personal details – I guarantee if you remember that a writer's dog Fluffy had puppies the month before (something you found out when you talked to them at an opening), that your cover letter/e-mail will pop over the deluge of other requests. Writers, reporters and editors are people too, and it's probably refreshing to be asked about how they're doing and their own projects, since so much of the time folks call them to talk about only themselves. And nothing is more cost-effective (or just plain old effective) as courtesy. Corny, yet still true – your wits and wisdom are your most valuable resource, in life and in PR.

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