

MODULE 8C Advocate Advanced Topics

MORE MARKETING

L7 Public Relations Two

In this report, we will continue on the theme of marketing without advertising using the Public Relations approach to market exposure. The purpose of most PR campaigns is to attract new customers to an existing company without large expenditures of capital. This goal is best achieved by using the following approach:

Identify your Market

Before beginning your PR campaign, you must be sure that your PR approach will reach your intended audience of potential customers. The only way to ensure that this occurs is to identify exactly who or what types of individuals would most likely utilize your services. To properly identify your potential customer base, list those demographic characteristics that most closely describe your potential customer.

Customer Demographics

The following list describes important general characteristics of a person who would be a good candidate for disability consulting services:

- 1) Client's age ranges from 19-64.
- 2) Income history ranging from \$20,000 - \$120,000 dollars per year.
- 3) The client worked full time for a period of at least five of the last ten years.
- 4) Client is suffering from a severe condition that has reduced his ability to work.
- 5) The client has applied or is thinking of applying for disability benefits.
- 6) The client has visited a medical source for his condition on a regular basis.

As you can see from the above list, the disability market is fairly generalized. This means that the best PR sources will also be general in nature. Media sources such as local newspapers, magazines or community related information outlets are usually the best sources for reaching our described market. The exception to this rule is when you are trying to reach a specific niche market such as a church population. In these instances, you should use the media that best reaches this niche market.

Creating A News Story

In Part One of our Public Relations segment, we mentioned the importance of gathering information about yourself, your employees and your company. The information collected is used by you or your Public Relations firm to create news stories about your company. Here is where creativity becomes extremely important! At this stage, you must look at disability advocacy through the eyes of your perspective customers. This will allow you to create a story line that educates the customer while passively offering

your valuable services.

It is important to understand that disability representation is a community-based service. This means that it is designed to serve the representational needs of a specific community. The very existence of this type of service in a community is important news for that community. Disability advocacy is not only valuable to those currently applying for disability benefits, it is also a valuable asset for those who may apply in the future. Presenting your business as a community asset, instead of just another consulting firm, makes your offer more valuable and much less threatening to a potential customer.

Most people do not know that they can apply for SSA disability benefits. A customer usually has no idea of what his rights are under the SSA program. For this reason, you should use Public Relations as a means of educating your potential customers.

Instead of asking the customer to come and utilize your services, treat the customer to free and interesting information about their rights under the SSA disability program. The fact that they can apply and receive cash benefits will be “News” to most citizens. Mix this educational approach with a free offer, such as a free case assessment, and you can expect your potential customers to seek you out in large numbers.

A story about yourself or your business should be pursued first in a local media source as a means of introducing yourself to the community. Once this has been done, you should then concentrate on informational story lines. That is, stories about the SSA disability program in general or some specific aspect of disability that might be of interest to the general population. In these articles about the disability program, you needn't mention yourself or your business until the very end of the article. Here is what we say at the end of our general interest stories:

“ If you would like additional information about the Social Security disability program or would like assistance with your disability claim, contact (Your company name) at (Your Phone number, e-mail, web address, etc.).” In this end of article statement, you also have the option of informing the audience of any specials or free services you are offering through your company.

[Approaching a Media Source](#)

Editors of newspapers, newsletters, magazines, etc., are constantly looking for new and interesting stories to fill the pages of their media product. However, they are not desperate for content. They could care less about you or your story! What the editor wants is to fill the pages of his product with information that would be of interest to his readership. Therefore, you must offer the editor a story line that is consistent with the informational needs of the editor's customer base. The basic criteria used by editors in choosing a story are:

- 1) The subject of the story fits the theme of the media outlet. This is easy for a newspaper source because most have numerous subject categories such as Business,

Health, or Community news segments. Get a story in any of these sections of your local paper and you can expect a large number of calls.

- 2) The story must be of interest to the editor's readership.
- 3) The more exciting the story the better! Personal experience stories work well here. If people can relate to the story, this will increase your credibility.
- 4) The story must be of a particular length, usually ranging from 750-1200 words.

Before deciding on a media source, make sure that the source's audience matches your identified market. This is usually no problem given the generalized nature of the disability market. However, running an article about disability representation in a local fishing magazine would probably not reach your intended market. It would make no sense to run an article in a media source where your potential customers will never see it.

Getting the Media Source to Write the Story

Many students feel uneasy with writing articles. If this describes you, the best alternative is to have the media source write the story. Generally, a media source will only write a story if:

- a) The story is about you or your business.
- b) When investigating your company or the subject of SSA disability in general.
- c) In response to other news or stories about SSA disability.

Example: If you want your local newspaper to write a story about your company, you must let them know that you exist. If you're the only service of this type in your area, this is big news and you must let the editor know. You must also attempt to present a few interesting facts that are specific to your service and clearly explain the reason for the article. Example: You propose an article introducing your service to the community in the form of a grand opening. You are the only disability advocate in your area specializing in female related impairments such as breast cancer.

There are several ways to propose an article to an editor. Usually it involves the creation of a news release. Before offering a simple example of a news release, let's first list a few of the basic rules for presenting such a document to an editor.

- a) Use 8 1/2 X 11, twenty-pound white paper.
- b) Use only one side of the paper, keeping the release a one-page document.
- c) Double-space each line.
- d) Place the name, address, etc. of your company in the upper left hand corner of the page. You may also use your letterhead. However, just below your letterhead you must have a bold title "News Release" or "For Immediate Release".
- e) Use language that attempts to sell your story or concept.
- f) Keep the release brief.

- g) Focus on a single basic message.

Sample News Release

Your Company
Company Phone
Date:

For Immediate Release:

My Disability Services Inc. would like to announce our grand opening March 1st of this year. Our unique service specializes in the representation of Social Security disability claims. We assist others who are applying for Social Security disability benefits. We are the only non-attorney representational service in this area specializing in helping disabled women acquire their SSA disability benefits. (Here is where you would expand upon the main theme of your proposed article or request an interview to allow the media's reporter to develop a story about you). Make sure you include the name of a contact person, phone number and e-mail address in your news release.