



HOW TO:

## PR DO'S AND DON'TS

### HOW YOU SHOULD—AND SHOULDN'T—INTERACT WITH THE MEDIA

Sometimes, a company can be its own worst enemy when it comes to working with the media. Here's some typical behaviors you should avoid if you want to generate ink for your brand.

**1. The Amazing Disappearing Press Release:** Beware the Bermuda Triangle Effect, aka the legal department being good brand stewards and over-cautiously smothering releases. Then, when the news leaks to the media, everyone points fingers and scrambles to cover their tracks.

**Solution:** Agency and client should agree upon press release datelines. All materials should be prepared well in advance of their proposed release and vetted through the clearance process. Consider, in lieu of a formal news release, using a letter or fact sheet that covers off the key points that may not require a formal legal okay before sending to key journalists.

**2. The “know-it-all” interview answer:** Yes, we live in the age of the sound bite and being pithy and concise are valuable interviewing skills. But often

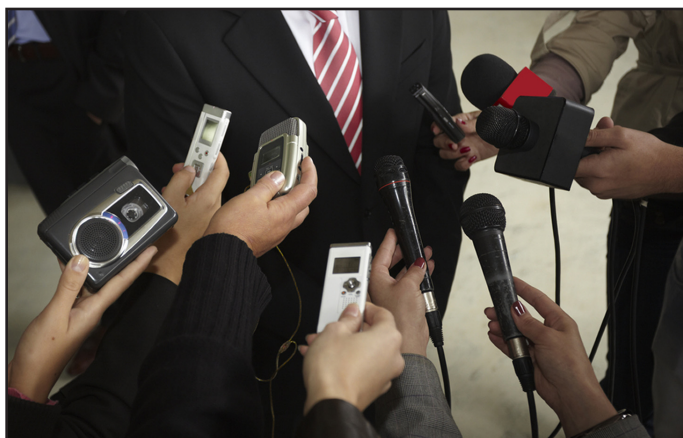
clients are so close to the action that they reply in five or 10 words and think they've covered the topic. That type of response won't get them much editorial real estate, on- or off-line.

**Solution:** Before an interview, plan ahead for key topics. Prepare a cue card with bullet points and examples to illustrate topics you expect to be queried about.

**3. No comment:** “They're not going to corner me with that issue. I'll just ignore their calls, e-mails, etc.” This is always the wrong move. The media love to include “no comment” or “numerous calls were

not returned” in their coverage. Those are not the kind of press clips that further one's business or reputation. The trickier the situation, the more one needs to plan a response—and “no comment” is the perceived last resort of scoundrels and miscreants.

**Solution:** When the going gets tough, the tough get organized. Difficult situations rarely emerge fully-grown from the head of Zeus, so be forewarned and prepare a response, preferably one that is truthful. In this era of transparency, “no comment” bites harder than ever and lingers longer than an elephant's memory, making it difficult the next time you have something you want to tell the media.



**4. Oops, that was a real deadline?** An industry expert swears to write, review and edit the column copy that will bear his/her name, but gets too busy to do so. But deadlines are deadlines and nothing damages a publicist's reputation more than missing a commitment.

**Solution:** An editor doesn't want to constantly harangue you about a deadline. Work as far ahead of deadline as possible—consider giving yourself a false early deadline if you're a procrastinator—and care enough about your company's reputation (and your own as well) to get promised articles in on time.

—LEN STEIN, president, Visibility Public Relations

## Meet the Press

WE ASKED CHIEF MARKETER'S EDITORS TO SHARE THEIR OWN PET PEEVES ABOUT DEALING WITH PR REPS AND TIPS ON HOW YOU CAN GET YOUR BRAND COVERED BY THE BUSINESS MEDIA.

**KNOW THEIR BEAT.** Sending out press releases blindly won't get you any street cred—or any coverage. Just like dogs smelling fear, editors know immediately when someone pitching a story has no idea what their publication covers. Before doing a “spray and pray” email blast, take a little time to research the magazines and websites that cover your niche, and learn what type of stories they are looking for.

**STALKING DOESN'T BECOME YOU.** If you email a press release, don't call the reporter over and over and over to see if they received it. Chances are they're swamped on deadline and—if your release is relevant to what they cover—they'll respond as soon as they can. And don't try to friend a reporter you don't know on Facebook just so you can access them in another online venue to pitch stories. *You* don't friend strangers on *your* personal FB account, do you?

**THE PERSONAL TOUCH IS GREAT.** But for goodness sake, get it right. Pitch letters created from a template—and then filled in wrong—make you look like a joke. “Dear [Name of Reporter at Competing Magazine], I've been reading your weekly (wait, we're a monthly!) coverage in [Wrong Magazine]....” won't win you any points.

**EDITORIAL DOESN'T = ADVERTISING.** And vice versa. Reporters *do* want to hear about your company and its customers (and we love, love, love case histories). But we're not going to publish a commercial for you, which means we don't want a half-hour pitch on why your platform/widget/thin-gamabob is the best/brightest/most revolutionary thing ever. Do that and you're ultimately wasting not only the reporter's time but your own as well.

—BETH NEGUS VIVEIROS



## WARLOCK WISDOM?

Whether you love him so much you forked over \$\$\$ to see him on tour, or you avoid his ranting like the plague, one thing is for certain: Charlie Sheen knows how to get media attention. But ultimately, is he destroying or building a tiger-blood-fueled brand? Is there anything marketers could learn from Sheen's "winning" PR strategy?"

Chief Marketer asked several PR professionals who work with marketers what tips they thought could be found in Charlie's wit and wisdom.

### ✓ DON'T FORGET THE CLASSICS.

I'd say that Charlie Sheen Redux is the product of reality television, the blurring of news and entertainment, and available technology. But here's the question: Can marketers today create brand myths? Build a brand through a fiction? Or is truth truly more strange and interesting? The historian Daniel Boorstein famously coined the phrase, "pseudo events," referring to manufactured events staged for the purpose of favorable media attention. Is there anything "pseudo" about Charlie Sheen or—name him/her—any other enfant terrible in the headlines? It seems they're awfully real. And we're back to the Colosseum watching Christians being fed to the lions, in box seats. —ROSALIE HARRIS (clients have included Chicago Association of Direct Marketing, DePaul University School of Music, Chicago Council on Science and Technology)

### ✓ NEWS GOES GLOBAL AT THE SPEED OF SOCIAL.

Marketers should have good insurance if their brand is tied to a celebrity, first of all. But they should also remember to keep social media at the forefront of their marketing plans, versus traditional media. As we can see in this instance in



particular, news travels even faster with Twitter, Facebook and CNN alerts! —LISA SKRILOFF (clients have included KLAAdvertising, E-tech, Globalworks and Zubi)

### ✓ ALL HAIL THE MIGHTY POWER OF CELEBRITY.

Whether the PR buzz is good or bad, the power of social media to take an established brand viral in either direction seems to satisfy a public that craves celebrity content in ever-greater amounts 24/7.

Did you notice that Twitter verified and set up a Sheen account in just a day's time? Twitter doesn't take these steps for just anyone. And quickly Sheen's profile hit a million followers—that goes to show the appetite among some of us for celebrity banter. —CHET DALZELL (clients have included The Direct Marketing Association and Harte-Hanks)

### ✓ HAVE FAITH IN YOUR BRAND, NO MATTER WHAT.

I'd say that all those fans following his antics are kind of like the Twitter version of a crowd gathering at the site of a car wreck. Charlie's lessons for marketers? First, he has begun referring to himself in the third person a lot, so that helps create his brand, although the details may be a bit fuzzy. Maybe the lesson is absolute faith in your product—you don't see Charlie weakened with doubt. Charlie's on-the-edge approach pays off nicely as observers huddle closer, waiting across all channels for impact. He nurtures his leads down an effective stream of shock, uneasiness and amusement—a triple play that could rivet a marketer's most jaded prospects. —JIM MCNULTY (clients have included SIGMA Marketing Group, 89 Degrees and Conversen)

—BETH NEGUS VIVEIROS

### WORD OF MOUTH:

## Get Consumers From Mad to Glad

WHEN COLLOQUY ASKED 3,295 U.S. CONSUMERS ABOUT THEIR WORD-OF-MOUTH HABITS, slightly more than one out of every four (26%) said they are far more likely to spread the word to family, friends and coworkers about a bad experience with a product or service than a good one.

In a survey finding of equal significance, even the most loyal consumers who say they typically recommend brands they like, 31% were far more likely to share information about a bad experience with a product or service than a good one.

The takeaway? Bad news travels fast. Here's three tips for turning "Madvocates" into Advocates:

- 1. Customers should have an opportunity for a dialogue, not a monologue, with their favorite brands, and they should be able to have a dialogue with each other. Get the conversations started by asking for opinions and insights, and recognize contributions.
- 2. Loyalty programs should involve customers in WOM activities in the form of online social sharing communities, panels and co-development platforms. Do your own social media.
- 3. Brands should be innovative and make sure content is relevant, fresh and rewarding. Start by transforming your marketing mindset from 'incentive' to 'service.' Be sure to nip any service problems in the bud and head off any negative WOM that can quickly go viral from well-connected customers.

Here's one more set of revealing numbers. Seventy-five percent of the general population said when they've had a bad experience with a product or service they advise family and friends. That surpasses the 42% who said they always recommend a product or service they really like. —JIM SULLIVAN, partner, Colloquy