

**INDEX**

Accolades .....	Page 2
What's New .....	Page 21
Datebook .....	Page 23

**HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS  
IN THE NEWS**  
See Page 5

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# Chicago Hospital News<sup>®</sup> and HEALTHCARE REPORT

THE REGION'S MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS & PHYSICIANS

## Marketing & Public Relations

### Public Relations Could Be The Differentiator In Provider Healthcare Marketing

Healthcare providers seek to harness the "power of the press" to help augment relationships with targeted audiences. Often times, the mistaken belief is that advertising alone equals marketing.

A provider's comprehensive marketing strategy needs to have accountability for well articulated deliverables that yield results. Everything counts in the provider's world of limited financial resources that support branding, image-building, revenue generation and relationship development.

A provider's vision of what they want to promote is always very high, coupled with the fact that corresponding marketing budgets are comparatively low. Expanding the marketing mix to include public relations may hold the key to maximizing the overall marketing investment. As stated by the Public Relations Society of America, "Public Relations helps an organization and its public adapt mutually to each other." The strategy of connecting the organization to its key publics is characterized through newsworthy media references that are unpaid.

#### HERE'S A CHECKLIST TO HELP PROVIDERS' MAXIMIZE THEIR INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR)

**PR is Part of the Marketing Mix and Needs to be Viewed in the Strategic Context of Marketing.**

Like advertising, it is part of a comprehensive strategy, but it does not represent the strategy in itself. Action plans to support marketing objectives should include tactical build-out that may include advertising, public relations, promotions, etc.

#### Set Specific Goals and Track Results

Ask on the front end – if the media hits are effective, what did we accomplish? What did the media placement position us to do next as part of building awareness or relationship development? All media hits are not valued equally so use your time and resources wisely. Track and evaluate media hits for your organization as well as that of your competitors.

#### Understand What is Newsworthy in the Eyes of the Media

Seek leverage points to garner media attention – then market your "miracles" – after all this is healthcare. Develop a plan to "mine" stories in accordance with marketing plan objectives. Don't make the mistake of thinking that your hospital newsletter is inter-



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changeable copy with a press release. Remember the focus is not what you want to say – but what media deems newsworthy for their readership

#### Make The Reporter's Job As Easy As Possible

Media likes to work with valued sources that are credible and make their job easy. Be accessible and provide staff cell phone numbers to allow immediate accessibility. When press comes to your facility, discuss with them in advance expectations. Create an outline, emailed in advance with proposed agenda. Follow-up to make sure it meets their needs, timeframe and deadline. Build relationships with media through high-level customer service, the payoff will be huge.

#### Go the Distance with Community Relations

If your organization is promoting a health fair or screening program through paid ads, don't overlook obvious opportunities. Repackage info in the form of a press release to be included in a newspaper's community event calendar. Maximize the value of media hits with reprints mailed to target audiences or used as reading materials in reception areas. A strong community relations focus can do much to fuel PR opportunities.

#### Know When To Bring in the Professionals

A basic understanding of PR and its value as a marketing tactic should be a core competency for internal marketing staff. Additional value should be augmented by working with a marketing agency that has PR expertise as part of its collective skill set. In cases, where the organization has a high profile or damage control needs - a dedicated PR agency to maximize media opportunities is important.

As should be the case with all marketing vendors, align vendors & agencies behind a shared marketing plan. Leverage collective expertise around objectives, not functions and most importantly, set performance standards and expectations.

#### PR is Not Really Free

Although PR is characterized as newsworthy media references that are unpaid, be prepared to put paid resources behind garnering better & more media attention. There are significant costs associated with the time and talent of internal resources, marketing agencies, dedicated professionals and appropriate PR tools. If you intend to win at the PR game, hedge your bets by knowing which messages need to be communicated to which audiences- and target media appropriately. Appropriately invest in PR and it will yield returns for your organization.

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