

Making the Media Your Friend

By MARK L. HENDRICKSON

Editors and reporters are **media gatekeepers**. They decide which stories make it **online**, **on the air** or **in print**.

Here are FIVE SIMPLE STEPS to get your firm's own **no-cost media campaign** rolling.

Positive coverage in the news media, referred to as "earned media," is something every business cherishes. As a pest control operator, you can cultivate such earned media, but you have to know how editors and reports think and act.

By "earned media" we mean articles in which you are identified or quoted, and that appear in the editorial section of newspapers, magazines, broadcast or online news sources. This article explores why earned media is so valuable, and outlines five simple steps to get your own no-cost media campaign rolling.



online



magazines

THE VALUE OF EARNED MEDIA. People read or tune in to news sources to get the facts. They believe what they read in the editorial pages, and such material is the most trusted and credible of all media content. When you succeed in being quoted or identified as the community expert, readers will remember and your expertise will be cemented in their top-of-mind awareness the next time they have a pest control problem. To put it another way, earned media coverage provides your company the following benefits:

- Increases your credibility and name recognition in the marketplace
- Positions your company as a market leader and your technicians as pest control experts

Earned media is more valuable than advertising space, called “paid media,” which you have to buy. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) developed a formula stating that the value of earned media coverage is equal to 2.5 times the advertising value of the column inch space, or airtime, spent on the story. This calculation is based on a PRSA assumption that editorial content is 150 percent more credible than advertising content. To calculate the value of earned media, you simply determine the space or time the story earned, figure out the advertising cost for such time or space and multiply that total by 150 percent. Here is how this might work:

Let’s say you pitch a story to your local paper on a revolutionary bed bug control treatment. A week later, the local paper runs a front-page story about the bed bug epidemic and your new treatment methodology. The story spans 4 columns by 8 inches deep,

for a total of 32 column inches. You investigate and find out a display ad in this paper costs \$50 per column inch on a week day. Thus, a 32-inch display ad would cost \$1,600. Multiply that by 2.5 to determine the dollar value of the story. From this example, your earned media efforts were worth \$4,000.

Beyond the dollar value of earned media is another benefit: earned media never stops working for you. Once you secure such earned media coverage you can do many things with the material:

- Buy reprints of the article from the source to hand out to potential new customers, or for your technicians to leave behind after a service call.
- Buy and archive reprints as PDF files on your company Web site for customer downloading.
- Frame earned media coverage for display in your lobby, waiting room or conference room.

Earned media is extremely valuable and it costs you nothing to get in print whereas advertising, or paid media, can be very expensive. That’s the advantage of earned media over paid media. The disadvantage? We have no control whether editors and reporters pick up on our story idea. That’s why we play the media game.

HOW TO WIN AT THE MEDIA GAME.

Editors and reporters are media gatekeepers. They decide which stories make it online, on the air or in print. Editors make their decisions by evaluating a particular story in terms of how valuable it is to readers, and whether the subject matters to readers.

What they will not print or air is a

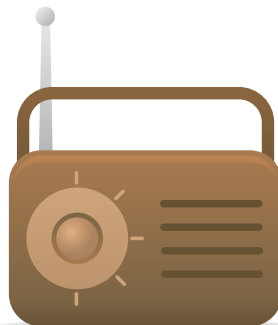
news release that is overly inflated, or full of puffery and exaggerated claims. So, how do you go about earning media coverage? Here are five strategies for your pest control firm:

1 Most media outlets have a staff list on their Web site. Begin by developing a contact list of local editors and reporters. Perform this task yourself or delegate it. Record the name, title and e-mail address of each news media contact in your service territory. Go back and update the list every six months to account for staff turnover. Larger publications or stations will have specific beat assignments for their staff. Now, they are not likely to have someone on the “pest control beat,” but you can select editors and reporters in related beat areas such as business and industry, environment or education.

2 Develop and distribute one story idea per quarter to your media contact list. You could generate more than this, but you do not want the effort to be burdensome and you do not want to wear out your welcome with the media. Story ideas work well because editors and reporters need and want your ideas because they cannot think of everything to cover by themselves. A story idea includes two to three sentences about the subject, why it is timely and important, and who to contact at your company for more information. Be sure to alert anyone who answers the phone or responds to email to be aware of your outgoing media campaign.



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2010

National Conference on Urban Entomology

May 16–19, 2010
Portland, Oregon

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DEADLINES

Conference Pre-Registration
April 2, 2010

Hotel Reservations
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Reservations can be made by contacting
Double Tree Hotel
1000 NE Multnomah St.
Portland, OR 97232
Phone: (503) 281-6111
Rate: \$132 per night
(single and double)



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

The NCUE emphasizes innovation and research on household, structural and public health arthropod pests. The conference goal is to facilitate open communication of information among pest management professionals and scientists in industry, academia and government.

For more information visit

<http://ncue.tamu.edu>

/// PUBLIC RELATIONS

3. Prepare and distribute news releases to your media contacts via e-mail. News releases are brief news updates about your business, and you can use them to announce new services or staff additions. Often, news releases will appear in edited form in a “business digest,” or “marketplace” section in a publication. Sometimes, a news release can serve as a story idea and provide the impetus for a reporter to develop a longer story. Remember to always conclude the news release with a call to action. That is, encouraging the reader to call you, send an e-mail or visit your company Web site.

4. Be aware of seasonal pest concerns in the area where you live, and develop story ideas or news releases that take advantage of these timely issues. For example, if overwintering pests such as stinkbugs or boxelder bugs are problems in the fall, be proactive and put your earned media plan in action with a story idea. Focus on the problem confronting homeowners and then offer practical solutions such as sealing all exterior cracks (especially those on the southern and western walls of the house), and the need to hire licensed experts to apply a synthetic pyrethroid in the fall before the bugs show up. You do not have to explicitly tell readers to call you. If you are mentioned as the credible expert in the article, they will know whom to call.

5. Create opportunities for news coverage. And we are talking about real opportunities here, not just a news conference. Some organizations will host a news conference to announce a grand opening, a groundbreaking or some other such event. Media outlets often avoid such things because they know they are events designed to be covered and are not really news or feature material. Think outside the box; be innovative in creating such opportunities. For example, Batzner Pest Management, a firm in the Milwaukee area, hosts an annual Madagascar hissing cockroach race at its company headquarters. The Batzner event, now in its 8th year, is part of the company’s customer service week festivities. A number of activities are coordinated to boost morale, motivation and teamwork, and raise awareness throughout Batzner Pest Management of the importance of customer service. The cockroach race has produced local and national media attention from newspapers, online news posts, and ESPN.

FINAL THOUGHTS. Earned media clearly has value, but it is not free media. It takes some work, and it can be a powerful tool in your overall marketing plan. Unlike advertising, earned media carries more weight and credibility with readers and viewers. It is the media you cannot afford to be without. **PCT**

The author is president of The Wingra Group (www.wingrroup.com), a business development and marketing agency based in Madison, Wis. Wingra Group has served organizations in the pest control industry, such as the Wisconsin Pest Control Association, and the Greater Chicago Pest Management Alliance.