

Making Your Brand Known



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Background

Here is where you use your brand to hold on to existing customers and to attract new customers. You now have a firm understanding of what a brand is and some background on how to create a solid brand. You also should know who your target audience is for your products. Finally, for your brand to be truly successful, you need to foster positive brand awareness. The question is: How do you create brand awareness? How do you get the word out about your brand?

Public relations (PR) covers all activities used to make your target audience better aware of your business.

The Goal

The goal is to develop a public relations plan for your brand that will increase customer awareness to increase sales and profits.

Beyond advertising and use of the media, public relations includes, for example, the things you do within the *community* to increase awareness of your brand. Maybe it's a charity function that you hold or that is sponsored by your business and brand, or perhaps it's the pancake breakfast that you host to celebrate the end of sugaring. It also includes *all communications* that you have as a representation of your brand – communication with customers, employees, involved family members, other businesses, etc. For example, communication with *employees* can be crucial. Happy and knowledgeable employees are the first step in providing quality service and increased customer satisfaction. This often reflects well upon both the business and the brand you have built. Other businesses, for example motels or bed-and-breakfasts, and visitor's bureaus can inform their guests about your business. Public relations can span a wide range of people and organizations. It's up to you to recognize who these people and groups are and they can be used in your public relations plan.

Developing a Public Relations Plan

Who do you begin with? Your target audience is the starting point for developing your public relations plan. In PR, your audience may be broader to include not just your customers, but also all those involved in the business (employees, for example) and others who influence purchasing decisions. For example, school teachers, youth group leaders, newspaper reporters, and radio personalities can influence people to try maple products or to visit your business. PR can encompass others in the industry. Establishing good relations with people in the industry that might be able to offer you help, or perhaps even with your competitors, can also be an asset to you in establishing a good reputation. Media relations, of course, are also of utmost importance. It is these groups that you may need most in promoting your brand and getting your name out there.

What's the plan? The public relations plan involves the methods you will use to get the message about your brand and products out to your target audiences. The methods include use of media (print, radio and TV for paid advertising or news coverage), printed materials (brochures, flyers, posters), signs (permanent and mobile), sponsorships and special events (ex. Maple Weekend, school tours). Advantages and limitations of each of these methods is



covered below. The method should relate to how your target audience usually learns about your business. Bulk syrup sales involve other producers, dealers and wholesalers who keep in touch through industry newsletters and mailing lists. Reaching consumers in metropolitan areas usually requires newspapers, radio, or TV. Reaching a very specific audience, for example public school teachers, may require some research.

Who, What, Where, and When. At this point you should know *who* you are targeting and have an idea of *what* you would like to do and *where*. Now, you need to decide *when* you would like to begin various communication events. Many producers take advantage of the sugaring season to attract customers. Finding out how their food is made is becoming an increasing interest of consumers and news media typically run stories about maple production at this time of year. Special events connected to other seasons (fall harvest, winter woods walks) can be developed. Participating in community festivals and craft shows limits your advertising costs. If you only have weekends available for maple sales, your advertising needs to make this an attractive time for the customers to stop by. Establishing a calendar for the events you plan to attend or create is a crucial step in your PR plan and also helps to assure that you will not slip on continuing to be aware of your reputation amongst various groups.

Advertising and Publicity

Advertising and publicity are the primary tools used to get knowledge of a brand out to the public. Advertising are messages that you create and distribute. Publicity involves a broader set of methods that include news stories and secondary referrals.

Advertising needs to be *forthright* in conveying information about your brand to a target audience. A good advertising campaign is clear, accurate, attention-grabbing, informative, and often emotional. Ultimately, the hope is to create an emotional attachment to the brand that is both memorable and recognizable.

It is crucial, as has been mentioned before, that you remain very *consistent* throughout everything that you do with your brand, and advertising is no exception. It is important in organizing and creating an advertising campaign that you continue to be consistent in what you are presenting. The message, image, logo, service, and appearance of your place of business and product displays should all convey a consistent image to your customer.

Things to Think About

You should have an idea of how your target audience views your brand right now, and how would you like to be viewed. With advertising, you have the opportunity to change how the public views your brand. This must be done carefully, of course. You need to consider how well you can foster a new view amongst your customers. Is it realistic? Is it likely your customers will respond in the way you want them to? Customers will respond differently to the same message. Emphasizing gourmet qualities, or local, or traditional will attract some customers and not others. Major retailers frequently test several different messages to gauge customer response before they decide on the one they will use. They look at response rate and who responds to different messages.

Once again, it is still important that you maintain consistency in the image you project



throughout everything you do. Also, it is often useful to be able to gauge how successful your advertising campaign is at increasing brand awareness in a positive way. Increased sales is the best indicator. You also could ask people upon purchase or inquiry how it is that they heard about you. You could have a brief questionnaire or encourage customers to share their opinion about your publicity and your business. These methods can give you a feeling for how successful your attempts are at reaching your target audience.

Getting the Word Out

Advertising is defined as a method through which groups or individuals attempt to persuade others of something (an idea, item, business, etc.) through various mediums of communication. These mediums include television, radio, magazines, movies, newspapers, out-of-home media (such as billboards), and the Internet, to name the major modes of communication. Advertisements are often paid, however there are cases in which advertisement space can be provided for free.

Publicity Methods

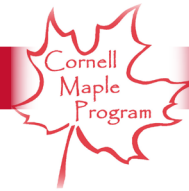
There are benefits and consequences to each of the various publicity methods. You need to decide which of the methods best meets your needs and does the most for your brand. Before committing to a particular method, you should get advice from people connected with each media outlet about who their typical readers are and what are the most effective ways to reach the readers or listeners. Pay attention to how other business are using these outlets. Print media are prime cases where a logo or ad design can attract attention.

Brochures and information cards can be very cost effective and their distribution can be flexibly targeted to places where potential customers are likely to find them. There are companies that will take responsibility for placing your brochures in hotel and restaurant information racks over a broader region than you could reach yourself.

Newspaper advertisements vary in their *reach*. They can, for example, reach a small local crowd in the local town newspaper such as the *Ithaca Journal* or the national crowd as a whole in papers such as *USA Today* or the international crowd in various shared papers around the world. Newspaper ads are generally not very expensive and as such are often a viable advertising medium for small business. Also, there is often not too much planning required for newspaper ads due to quick production cycles. This medium is reserved primarily for reaching adults since it is adults that often subscribe to and read newspapers. Local Pennysavers and Shoppers are also very common places to advertise and are especially targeted to small towns and rural areas.

Newspapers also provide opportunities for free publicity if you have a newsworthy event or work with reporters responsible for stories relating to food, agriculture, and natural resources use. It pays to become known to reporters as someone willing to work with them.

Magazine advertisements, on the other hand, are much more *targeted*. This is primarily because magazines themselves are often much more specific to their topic and the people that choose to subscribe to them are often much more specified than the broad reach of newspapers. This often results in much higher costs than for newspaper ads. Often, a bit more planning is necessary to place an ad in a magazine since production cycles are often



longer for magazines than those for newspapers. Magazine ads are often a good way to establish a firm, credible reputation.

As in the case for newspapers, magazines have possibilities to include something about your business as part of news items or articles. County and regional tourism guides may be useful advertising sites for certain businesses and special events.

Radio stations have a target audience and cover a defined geographic area. You will need to decide whether the customers you want have a preference for music, news, religious themes, or other ways that stations use to appeal to particular audiences. It does not usually cost too much to advertise on radio, but this depends on the time that you are advertising. The potential negative to radio is that you simply hear the ad rather than reading it or stumbling over it several times as when reading a newspaper or magazine. Visual logos have no role here, but slogans or sound logos (sap dripping in a pail, leaves rustling) can be useful. For this reason, it is often necessary to run the ad several times before the material becomes memorable.

Television advertisements provide another medium, however, the costs are much higher than most other methods. Like radio, however, variations in price depends both on the time of the advertisement and the number of expected people watching. Also like the radio, it is often necessary for ads to be run several times before they are remembered. Television provides advertisers with a good opportunity to really *show off* what they are advertising in a very visual way.

Online advertising is seeing increased use. Ads on websites, in directories, and within search engines are all viable options, but the list of approaches continues to grow as new developments are made in how people use online information. Usually the costs are relatively low, but they do vary, and most are based upon the number of viewings of the ads (i.e. the number of clicks on a banner). This is a medium that varies in its reach. Ads placed on specific web sites generally reach a targeted audience whereas those on search engines may reach a much broader crowd. Connecting with the NYSMPA webpage, county extension, or a county tourism website can increase exposure at a reasonable cost.

Mailing lists can be very effective. These are the most targeted advertising as the names usually are those who already have shown an interest in your business. Electronic mailing is the most cost-effective and is seeing increased use though you will need to deal with spam filters. Some producers keep in touch with customers through newsletters sent to their mailing list.

Signs can be placed in a large variety of locations from your vehicle and clothing to roadside signs and billboards. These are targeted geographically but not by interests of your target audience. Cost can vary widely for both the service, location and the creation of the ad itself.

Special events both create opportunities to advertise the event and to bring people to a location where you can deal with them directly. Maple Weekend is one example. Maple producers can have open houses throughout the year demonstrating how products are made,



forest walks, or special meals. Newspapers, radio or TV can pick up some special events as news items for some free advertising. Consider collaborating with other local businesses, for example the Culinary Bounty group of restaurants featuring local products. There seem to be an increasing number of craft fairs. Farmers Markets will sometimes sponsor special events where maple can be featured.

Examples

Examples of Getting the Word Out About the Brand/Business

Sugarbush Hollow in Springwater NY is developing the concept of a “community sugarhouse.” Located in a very rural area south of Canandaigua Lake, Chuck Winship maximizes his use of “free advertising.” He encourages an increasing group of customers to stop by through an expanding series of programs. Special programs include woods walks for forest management, wildlife ecology, and identifying and photographing wildflowers. Food-based events include cooking with leeks, End of Sap Season Ham and Leeks Celebration, and pancake breakfasts. He is advertising these events and his products through mailing lists, a website, word of mouth, and brochures. He sells product and distributes flyers and brochures at farmers markets, craft shows, and high traffic events such as the Rochester Lilac Festival. Chuck gets publicity from making himself available to radio and TV stations for interviews and he provides these outlets with press releases. He uses school tours to connect with kids and parents and provides syrup for local pancake breakfasts in exchange for recognition.

Schoolyard Sugarbush - Sells maple products at the sugarhouse, at Ithaca Farmers Market, and through some special events done jointly with other businesses. Organic sells in the Ithaca market so they have gone through organic certification. They work with an informal cooperative of organic maple producers to help each other with syrup supply and marketing. They have developed an attractive logo and are developing a customer base through direct experience with their product and word of mouth.

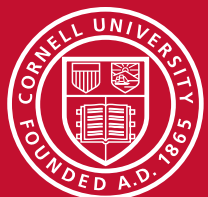
Critz Farms near Cazenovia advertises itself as “the place to come for family fun.” It is a diverse enterprise with a café, playground, and selling maple products, dug and cut trees, and other farm products throughout the year. Educational and family recreation activities are advertised through a well-designed web site, a large mailing list, newspaper ads, and word of mouth. They keep in touch with customers through newsletters sent four times a year. Matthew and Juanita use TV ads in very selective, targeted ways for fall harvest and Christmas events. They monitor the effectiveness of different ways to advertise to bring in customers vs. visitors.

Sprague’s Maple Farm draws many new and repeat customers to their integrated restaurant and maple production facility in southwestern NY. The restaurant, advertised with “Its Not Just Breakfast, Its an Adventure!” and “All Season Fun!” is a big draw. They have a very attractive website for visitor information and internet sales which along with a brochure and roadside signs are their most effective ways for continuous advertising. They use a company to help distribute the brochure around the region and they do some themselves. Newspaper and radio advertising is only used around special events where the costs where the customer flow



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will pay for the costs. Some special events get picked up as news items for free advertising. Though the business is well-established, Randy Sprague feels that advertising is essential to keep existing customers coming and to connect with potential customers.



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