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## How to Get News Out of Nothing

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*Build a better mousetrap, and people will beat a path to your door.*

That old adage was long ago disproven by marketers who realize that business success is as much about an effective marketing plan as it is a great product.

This is equally true in hotel public relations. You don't need the newest, glitziest and biggest hotel product to successfully generate media coverage for your property. In fact, with a little planning, strategic thinking and creativity, you can generate publicity for your hotel – virtually out of nothing. And positive publicity can and should play an important role in building awareness and visibility for your property within key target markets.

The following are some suggestions for taking advantage of the many opportunities to generate valuable press coverage for your property:

### Planning

- **Learn the nuts and bolts of media relations.**  
You undoubtedly know the fundamentals already of responding quickly when the media calls, having a top-notch press kit, etc. Also, think strategically about what sets your property apart from the competition. It might be a good investment to bring in a consultant to review your PR strategy and press materials.
- **Brainstorm with your department heads.**  
You'd be surprised at the wealth of promotional ideas that your colleagues can develop if you get them thinking like reporters. Getting your staff to dedicate the time necessary to accomplish this is easier said than done, but it's worth the effort. They need to feel a proprietary stake in working as part of the hotel's PR team and realize that PR is everyone's responsibility.
- **Use government and industry PR offices as resources.**  
City, county and state tourist offices, convention and visitors bureaus and travel industry associations can assist you in publicizing your property. Put them in your mailing list, have their PR people get to know your property, and build mutually-beneficial working relationships with these important offices. It will be time well spent in terms of promoting your hotel.

### Strategic Thinking

- **Capitalize on major trends.**  
A good first step in generating news out of nothing is to get your hotel's key executives "out front" on topical issues. For example, with the recession continuing as the major story of the day, you can promote your general manager or marketing director as a local "authority" on how the lodging industry is coping with this issue.

Develop "talking points" which describe what your hotel is doing to support travelers with value incentives and services and then arrange interviews with the local media.

- **Suggest service articles for the media.**

Just as the hospitality industry is founded on good service, the media always looks for ways to provide readers with useful service-oriented information. Capitalize on this by giving one of your department heads a special title and promoting him/her as an "expert" who can advise consumers on various issues. For example, designate your banquet director as the hotel's "director of weddings," and then pitch media interviews with him or her to give tips on how to save on wedding costs.

- **Promote your restaurant as a trend-setter.**

Promoting your hotel restaurant as the place to "be seen" for celebrities, social figures and business/political leaders is an excellent way to build awareness and traffic. A crackerjack maitre d' who knows who's who, and which social luminaries like publicity, is your key. With timely and accurate celebrity intelligence in hand, you can effectively feed the local society columns, which are always hungry for good news items about who's eating where and with whom.

## **Creativity**

- **Create excitement with contests**

Contests usually can be relied upon to generate media coverage and consumer excitement. For example, to capitalize on a small country inn's traditional turndown amenity of milk and freshly-baked chocolate chip cookies, a contest to search for the "Best Chocolate Chip Cookie" recipe in the country was developed. Through a mailing of one news release to food editors nationwide, we generated media placements for the property in all 50 states and Canada and Europe. In addition, a major publisher used the contest recipes to create a cookbook, which generated additional press coverage for the inn. A contest with a strong "hook" can get your hotel noticed.

- **Score big points with sports programs**

Sometimes the best promotional ideas are right in your own back yard, a fact underscored by Hyatt Resorts Puerto Rico's launching of the Hyatt Caribbean Sports Academy. With four championship golf courses, 21 regulation tennis courts and a complete water sports facility, Hyatt Resorts Puerto Rico was well positioned to "piggy back" on the growing interest in active travel, particularly sports learning vacations.

They creatively packaged their already existing sports and teaching facilities under the distinctive banner, Caribbean Sports Academy, thus helping Hyatt to put its Puerto Rico resorts at the cutting edge of a major travel trend. The result: Hyatt Resorts Puerto Rico received strong media coverage in consumer and trade media in a down travel market.

- **Generate ink with an essay contest**

When Fairmont Hotels decided to upgrade their bathroom amenities, they were faced with a large surplus of the old shampoo at their New Orleans property. Rather than just throw the extra shampoo away, they created an essay contest. The challenge: what to do with the shampoo (the winner got to keep the shampoo.). The contest was held simultaneously with the Republican National Convention, which took place in New Orleans in 1988. The news release, which billed the contest as an opportunity for the Democrats to "wash the Republicans out of their hair" during the convention, generated worldwide print and broadcast media coverage for the hotel.

- **Get creative with holidays and special events**

Reporters are always looking for engaging human interest stories around the holidays. New York's Waldorf-Astoria developed a special men's cooking session conducted by the hotel's

executive chef, who demonstrated ways for Dad to prepare dinner and give Mom a rest on Mother's Day.

Hyatt Key West, looking for a twist on the traditional New Year's Eve Party, held a "Noon Year's Eve" party. They created and staged a noontime celebration at the property's Oceanside pool, which included a Father Time costume contest. The event was fun, different and the media responded with stories that ran throughout Florida.

Hotels are surprisingly fertile ground for creating news and events that can lead to valuable publicity. All it takes is some creative and strategic thinking to unlock your hotel's hidden assets that can indeed generate news from nothing.