



## Harness the Power of Free Publicity

*Joel Harris, CEO of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing, gives you seven steps toward improving practice exposure in the community.*

One of the most misunderstood disciplines within the marketing business is public relations. Most of the time it's simply referred to as "PR", and giant ad agencies and firms charge huge sums of money helping their clients get the right kind of media exposure. As someone who has personally spent a lot of money with professional PR firms, I can tell you that the business of professional public relations is difficult to quantify in terms of a return on your investment. However, I have also learned that there is nothing more valuable and than free media exposure, especially when it is obtained without the expense of hiring a pro.

As a dental professional getting free media exposure can be very easy in a small market or extremely difficult in larger markets. However as with most things, the harder it is, the more it's worth. Here are seven steps that any dentist or office manager can follow to create exposure for their practice that don't cost a dime.

### Step 1: Learn your local media market

Make a list of all the publications in your target market area. These will most likely be newspapers, business journals, free circulation publications, and local interest magazines. Ignore national publications and even regional publications because as a dentist your marketing target should be within just a few miles of your practice. Next, determine the radio and television



stations in your target market area. This includes AM, FM, public radio and college radio stations. Pay attention to the small stations with small broadcast areas. In most rural markets there are two or three obvious media outlets that everybody listens to or reads.

### Step 2: Develop a list of contacts

From each of the publications, understand where your news or announcement would fit best. Next, find out who the primary editor or reporter is for that part of the publication. Sometimes you'll deal with a feature editor, a feature reporter or the managing editor. Never send your press release to anybody and everybody at a particular publication. All that will do is cause frustration and possibly get you blacklisted. Follow the same steps for radio and TV stations. Find out who assigns the news to reporters. Find out who edits the on-air news.

### Step 3: Create a newsworthy story

At this point it is critical that you develop a story that has some appeal. No editor is going to run an article

on advanced flossing techniques or your cool new hand-piece. Stick with things like new technology and advancements in dental care. Even news that is not necessarily exclusive to your practice is great. An example would be the recent findings that periodontal disease is associated with heart disease. Become the local spokesperson of national dental news. Always make sure your information is not promotionally slanted. Try to average a new topic or announcement each month for one year. That kind of consistency will show news outlets that you are serious and not just one-dimensional.

#### Step 4: Write the actual press release

Editors love press releases that are easy to digest and to the point. A one-page press release that opens with who, what, where, when and why will make them happy and increase your probability of getting exposure in their publication or on their station. Include some background information, a quote from the dentist or another leader in the practice. It's that simple. It doesn't have to be the length of a novel and it doesn't have to have every single detail in it. If the reporter wants to lengthen the story, he or she will get your input or interview you in more detail.

#### Step 5: Send your press release to the list you created in step two

Some editors prefer faxed press releases, yet there is a growing trend toward receiving them by e-mail. Very rarely are press releases mailed with in an envelope, unless photos are part of the press release. Finding out the personal preferences of the editors or reporters will always increase your chance of publicity.

#### Step 6: Maintain relationships with editors, reporters and producers

The more relationships you have with your targeted publications, the increased likelihood you have of getting publicity. The time to do this is not when you have a breaking news story. Take your time in this area

and spread out your efforts. Remember to be sincere and don't come off as someone who's just looking for free advertising. Then when you do have that breaking news or blockbuster story, you'll know who to contact directly and quickly for the biggest PR impact.

#### Step 7: Use your press release as a marketing tool

You'll never get all of your press releases published. In fact, at first you might not get many at all. Don't let this stop you from continuing to issue the to your list of contacts. However, there are other things you can do with press releases. You can post them on your website. You can use them as statement stuffers to patients. Keep a stack in the reception area. Use your imagination, and you will be

surprised at the unique ways to generate publicity and ultimately buzz about you and your dental practice.

Spending just a little time every week on these seven steps will help you become very tuned into the local PR market. It will also help you create invaluable awareness for you dental practice in your community. The coolest of a PR strategy is the cost, or lack thereof. This is not expensive marketing, but rather it relies on your time, enthusiasm and imagination.

**"...getting free media exposure can be very easy in a small market..."**



*Joel Harris is a co-founder and President of ADA Intelligent Dental Marketing located in Salt Lake City, Utah. His company provides powerful marketing tools to help dentists grow their patient base, increase the profit and improve their image. Joel is also the author of the book, Breakthrough Dental Marketing.*