

Publicizing Your Shopping Center

A Manager's Cheat Sheet of Publicity Ideas

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SO YOU'VE HELD YOUR GRAND OPENING, EXPERIENCED A GOOD ATTENDANCE, AND MAYBE EVEN RECEIVED A LOT OF ATTENTION FROM THE LOCAL MEDIA. Now what? As a manager, you would like to get the media to come back and give you that same kind of attention again, but what reason do you have to invite them? They probably won't be interested in your Mother's Day or Back-to-School specials, which are more appropriate for advertising and direct mail campaigns. Other than the occasional store opening or new vice president announcement, what news could you offer the press?

You can offer more than you might think. Because, as manager, you know more about your property than anyone else, you can be the greatest source of publicity ideas. Many things you encounter in your day-to-day activities can lead to PR opportunities if you recognize and exploit them. Even if you have a good marketing team, these simple observations can lend greatly to their efforts.

A Many-Splendored Opportunity

Here are a few questions to get you thinking about the many facets of your center that might make an interesting press release, by-lined article or informative conversation with a reporter.

- **Charity.** Are any scholarships or charitable gifts your center has given directly benefiting a person or group in your community or profession? If so, what are they doing with that gift now? This could be of interest to your neighborhood newspaper or TV reporter.
- **Construction.** When you hired the contractor for your

mall renovation, did you notice anyone on the crew who seemed to have a particularly interesting skill or unique background connected to the renovation (e.g., etching glass to make restaurant windows look old-fashioned, using a new environmentally-sound material)?

- **Trends.** Have any of your store managers had interesting experiences either supporting or countering a current shopping center trend? For example, if you're an enclosed mall, how are you succeeding in ways the lifestyle center down the road is not? Those insights might make a good contribution to business articles, at least regionally. Sometimes, these insights can be included in national publications as hefty as the *Wall Street Journal* if the opinion can be backed up with supporting data and can somehow link to a national trend. They could be trends of interest to your

shopping center trade magazines, as well. Incidentally, these national stories you should be prepared to offer exclusively (i.e., you hold the story with one publication until they publish it).

- **Economy.** Do you know the economic impact your center has on the community? Perhaps you could release current figures to your local business editor around your mall's fifth, 10th or 25th anniversary date.
- **Industry Talks.** Do you know of any lectures or talks members of your staff will give at professional organizations such as the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) or the local chapter of a commercial real estate organization? Often that lecture's summary can be reworked into a press release or by-lined article that may be of interest to trade magazines and the regional business media.
- **New Ventures.** Has your development company formed any new business partnerships? A joint venture to develop a new project can be of interest to the business press, especially when you include your long-term goals and a few short-term strategies for getting there.
- **The Environment.** Has your project faced and solved any environmental challenges? The environment is a key issue these

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days in many publications, including the shopping center magazines.

- **Tenant Strategies.** Have you developed tenant mix strategies you'd like to share with other potential tenants or even other shopping center managers? You could send this particular press release or article to the magazine most read by these groups.
- **Awards & Work.** Have any staff members recently won an award for projects or community service outside of your company, and can you see how their award-winning qualities have applied to their job at the center? This can make a nice human interest story in your neighborhood newspaper.
- **Events.** In addition to advertising and direct mail campaigns for your upcoming seasonal event or concert series, you might also want to send a press release – and not just to the entertainment editor. You'll also want to alert the calendar listings editor (some papers prefer you do this online), and photo editor. Sometimes, even if a reporter doesn't cover an event, the photo editor may still send a photographer. And that's fine. As the saying goes, a photo (with a caption mentioning your center) is worth a thousand words. For the photo editor, be sure you list exact-

ly what kind of images they might be able to capture (e.g., fireworks, people dressed in '40s attire, an audience of small children, etc.)

- **How You're Wired.** Are any unusual marketing strategies, blogs or web design features working for you, or giving surprising results? Marketing writers for newspapers, magazines and marketing blogs love to know what works in today's connected, tech-savvy age.
- **Helping Students.** Can your human resource manager share the various ways a high school student can come prepared for a job interview at the center or its stores? What should a first-time job seeker's resume look like? This can make an interesting local story on the eve of summer break or before the holiday season.
- **Even When It's Not Positive.** Last, but not least, does your center have anything controversial going on? The full disclosure of your professional view of the controversy (as much as is legally advised) can increase your community's support, given that you help your community feel safe and cherished. Admit to any mistakes and show you are doing something to correct the situation immediately. "Bad" press has an opportunity to become "respectful" press quickly if it is handled in both a warm and intelligent manner.

The Benefits

Don't forget. Well executed publicity can be one of the most cost effective elements in a marketing campaign, because for each dollar spent in publicity you may be gaining more value in column inches, airtime or blog space than you could possibly put in an advertising budget. Your marketing team can calculate the ROI and prove this in black and white. When you see that result, you'll naturally be on the lookout for more publicity opportunities. It's a positive feedback loop that grows your business while inspiring your valuable marketing team – and all of your other employees, for that matter. Who doesn't like to work for a well publicized, well respected company? ■

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