

By Bill Guertin

*The 800-Pound Gorilla*

[www.The800PoundGorilla.com](http://www.The800PoundGorilla.com)

## How To Start Earning Free Publicity

So you want to be a media star?

You gotta *earn* it.

Every business wants positive publicity, but getting your name in the paper, in a magazine article, on TV or on the radio is work, especially if you've never done it before.

The payoff is outstanding. Publicity via news stories or articles can be very persuasive to consumers, and can place your business top-of-mind in ways that regular paid advertising can't match.

It takes some time and energy, but with a little practice and by following a few simple guidelines, you can reap the rewards that come from a good publicity effort:

### 1. Feed The Media

Regardless of what you have available on the Web, the Yellow Pages, or any other source, you must give your information to the media. Don't expect the newspaper to automatically find you and "discover" your story. You must supply them with information if you're going to be noticed.

Don't just grab your brochure and send it to them, however. Media people know the value of their product as an advertising vehicle, and are not in a hurry to give you a free ride. The media's role, as they see it, is to inform, educate, and entertain. If your story helps them inform, educate or entertain their audience, you will be worth considering, so your approach is important.

### 2. Feed Them Correctly

Throughout my 20 years in Radio, I was amazed at some of the things that would come over the fax machine to our stations' news departments and program directors. Many were just blatant attempts to get free advertising. They offered nothing in the way of benefit to the radio station for airing their story.

The standard tool used by most companies to communicate information to the media is called a News Release or Press Release. If you want your Press Releases to be considered, your best bet is to put them on company letterhead, and use the standard

Press Release format. (If you'd like to see some examples of professional Press Releases, just go to the Tools section of [www.The800PoundGorilla.com](http://www.The800PoundGorilla.com) .)

Informative press releases – items that are newsworthy -- would be a grand opening, introducing a new salesperson, announcing a public appearance, or changing the company or product name.

Educational press releases might include a sponsorship of a public seminar or workshop, announcing research or surveys you have conducted, or the availability of free information.

Entertainment press releases are not hard news topics, but things that consumers find fun and interesting, such as a contest, a special event, or a local angle on a national or regional event, like a video rental store submitting an article about their local managers' opinions on who will win the Oscars.

### 3. Be Brief

One common press release mistake is to put too much information into one release. Keep your information limited to a single concept or subject. Most media editors are too busy to spend lots of time rewriting a story that's too long, so they will quickly dismiss things that look like too much work. Less is more.

Many of the best press releases contain a great headline and only three paragraphs, each one with a specific flow. Your headline should be in capital letters, and state the purpose of the piece in 5 to 10 words.

Make your opening paragraph a brief statement of what you're announcing, and who's announcing it. Your second paragraph should go into more detail on the announcement. If it's something about a person, perhaps a brief bio of their qualifications and history; if it's a new product or service, a brief description of what it is and what it can do to benefit consumers in the area, etc.

The third paragraph should be about how to contact the business. Here's where you can throw in a little bit about the business, where it's located, and what it provides.

If there's more information, you can attach it in the form of printed materials, a product description page, a Website, or other supporting information. Don't try to put all the information into the press release; remember, less is more.

### 4. Be A Resource

Reporters need a number of experts in their Rolodexes for quotes, corroboration of data, and story sources. Most of these trusted contacts are people that reached out to them at one time or another. If you're a lawn care expert, for example, the local reporters

should know you as the one to call when they do a feature story on the dry winter and what it means for area lawns.

Position yourself as the authority on a particular subject, and be very clear on that expertise. An expert in child psychology, for example, will receive more meaningful calls than one who claims to be an expert on everything about children.

If you say you're an expert, be prepared to back it up with solid evidence of your expertise. Are you a published expert on your subject? Have you been doing it for a number of years? Are there ways to prove it? Spell them out.

## 5. Don't Give Up

Just because the paper doesn't print your first submission doesn't mean it's worthless to send things. They're human, just like you, and things happen. They may just have missed your submission. Maybe things got hectic, and your press release got lost. Someone may have been on vacation, and the person covering didn't have time to consider your piece. Keep trying.

Repetition is the key. The race goes to the strong, and those who keep running the publicity race will be the ones to eventually cross the finish line.

*Bill Guertin is Chief Enthusiasm Officer of The 800-Pound Gorilla, a training and business development firm in Bourbonnais specializing in sales performance, customer service, and marketing. He can be reached at [bill@The800PoundGorilla.com](mailto:bill@The800PoundGorilla.com), or at (815) 932-5878.*