

What Have You Done That's "Front-Page" Good?

Do you remember your "Lunch Ladies"?

That's the universal term for the ladies behind the counter preparing and serving the food you had in school. Everybody called them "lunch ladies", and some even had names.

At Bishop McNamara High School, I remember my lunch ladies, especially Mrs. Hart. She and the others in the kitchen at McNamara were always there with a smile for us, even if we didn't always stop and chat. Mrs. Hart and her co-workers just seemed genuinely glad to be there to help us, and I was glad she and the others were there.

I was reminded of Mrs. Hart and the "lunch ladies" just last week.

I was hired to be a speaker on providing great customer service at the Illinois School Nutrition Association convention in Peoria. Eight months earlier, I had seen a front-page article in *The Daily Journal* about Limestone Grade School's "lunch ladies," and how they dress up for Halloween, decorate the cafeteria for holidays, and even perform skits for kids.

During the presentation, I showed the group a copy of the *Journal's* front-page "lunch lady" coverage. I then suggested that this would be a worthy goal for every one of the school lunch programs represented in the room.

"What could you and your foodservice team do this year that would be so cool that it would make the front page of your local paper?" I asked.

It was an intriguing question. Many were mesmerized in thought for several seconds; others took notes, preparing to take the question back to their teams once the school year had begun.

It was such a good question, I'd like to ask you, too.

What have YOU done that's worthy of front-page coverage of your local paper?

I'm not talking about disasters or bad news. I'm talking about a story that's so compelling, so interesting, and so unique that it merits at least a look from the local media as a story.

While there's never a guarantee that a story will be picked up and run as a front-page feature, here's a list of some of the things businesses might consider doing:

- Get behind a great cause. T.D. Pete's Citgo stations received front-page coverage for their record-setting sales of shamrocks for Muscular Dystrophy in their convenience stores. The hundreds of shamrocks taped onto every surface in each store made for a great photo opportunity.
- Create an outrageous event or contest. WKAN Radio had an unusual contest that involved a giant rock on St. Patrick's Day weekend. Ten contestants had to "kiss" (put their lips on) the giant rock (the "Blarney Stone"), and the one that kept their lips on the longest won a big prize package. The host business received dozens of onlookers to the event, and the radio station received good newspaper coverage... and of course, 10 people kissing a rock made for a great photo opportunity too.

If you can't think of anything yourself, pick up a Guinness Book of World Records and read some of the outrageous things that people are doing. You don't have to do those things exactly, but the examples may spark your creativity.

- Create a list of helpful hints for consumers. If you're a garden center, for example, you might write up a list of the best times to plant tomatoes to avoid frost. If you're a body shop, perhaps you could create a list of things to do to avoid the sun's glare in the summer while driving.

Be sure your list is timely, helpful, and most of all, credible. Put it in the form of a press release, and send it to the local media. (If you'd like to see the proper format of a Press Release, go to www.The800PoundGorilla.com and click on "Tools".)

- Do a survey and send in the results. A local employment agency does a survey of local Human Resources departments twice a year regarding their local hiring plans in the coming months. They publish the results, and they receive wonderful coverage each time it comes out. It's credible, it's newsworthy, and it's very local.

One caution here, however; make sure it's a well-done survey, with a solid number of credible responses, and your methodology is clearly spelled out. You can find help in [How To Conduct Your Own Survey](#), by Priscilla Salant and Don Dillman. There are also some excellent survey templates available at www.surveymshare.com.

- Be a little controversial. A car wash recently decided to boost business by hiring gorgeous young women in bikinis to towel dry their customers' cars. (Yes, it worked.) Controversy sells, but not always favorably, so use your better judgment.

- Do something nice for no reason at all. It's good for the community, and you never know who's watching.

It's important to note that not all of these examples received coverage on the front page. Every one, however, did receive exposure because of their news value, as determined by each media's management.

What will you do that's "front-page" good? Even if you don't get the front page, just the act of focusing your energies and doing something worthy of that kind of coverage is an excellent goal.

There are no guarantees that any of these ideas will generate the publicity you want, but the journey can be as good as the destination... and sometimes just as profitable.

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