

Dollars for Coverage? Forget it!

The client calls and issues this edict: drop everything, call “the press” and get them right over to their store to cover the client’s big Annual Sale-a-bration event. The client wants coverage, and she wants it *now* – send the newspapers, the radio stations, the local networks news teams & the cable guys Bring in the *Entertainment Tonight* folks, too, if they’re willing. Because: “Don’t we spend a lot of money with those guys buying advertising in that [*newspaper; radio station; TV station?*]”

Or, this “we’re-so-newsworthy” scenario:

“Can you get me [*or my Aunt Lucille, or my choir director, or my mother-in-law*] on Oprah?” Because Oprah is nice. She’s approachable and down-to-earth. And wouldn’t she just love to tell the good folks on her show how we [*put together a cool recycling program in our neighborhood; raised \$101,204 in our recent Walk-a-Thon; or celebrated the retirement of our beloved school principal.*]”

Here’s another:

The client has invented a Chick-o-Matic Meat Chopper and wants it sold on the Shopping Network, or QVC. Or perhaps WalMart will like it, they say.

Now it’s not that these projects/ideas/products aren’t worthy. It’s not that ad agencies and PR firms don’t want to help their clients. And it’s not that dreams of this caliber are impossible. No, these aren’t the problem. The problem emerges when the client doesn’t understand the difficulty or length of time involved, or that you cannot pay your way into media. Doesn’t understand that by forcing the hand of your agency or media rep by suggesting such a trade-off (money or media buys for media coverage), will often put you at the end of any list for any coverage at all...ever.

Editorial and news departments at print and broadcast outlets must remain pure and untainted by any sales incentive. If they aren’t... if their editorial content can be traded for dollars, their credibility as a news source or even as entertainment goes belly-up. And when a source’s credibility, integrity and objectivity is compromised, consumers stop reading, viewing and buying. So, quite a bit is at stake on their end.

To keep this from happening, some media outlets will even keep their editorial and sales departments and personnel far away from each other geographically; one department on one end of the building, one on the other. Not unless it is a shoppers’ paper (a publication that exists solely to sell display and classified advertising with a bit of canned editorial thrown in), will you ever witness a sales person asking for coverage in exchange for a media buy.

Understanding this is crucial in your relationship with your marketing or PR firm. They may be smart, well-connected professionals, but they aren’t magicians. They may have a better shot at pulling off a media miracle than you would, but they’re not about to break

the rules or compromise their own objective position by granting requests that aren't ethical or feasible. Don't put them in a bad position, and the laws of the universe will gift you time and again with unexpected media opportunities you never dreamed would come your way.