



# Brand ignition

When you purchase a franchise, publicity might be the last thing on your mind as you face the challenges of a new business. But it could be time to shine a light on your franchise. PR director **Trina McColl** suggests ways to use the power of PR to get attention.

**W**ith more than 1100\* franchise systems in the market and counting the need to generate attention and command consumer interest in a brand is a necessity. While most franchisees are dedicated to seeking ways to improve their local area marketing, public relations often can be neglected. The reality is that public relations (PR) is one of the most effective communication tactics for generating market awareness.

### Credibility is king

PR as a medium has the ability to engage and enhance credibility for a brand faster than advertising; of course advertising has a distinct role to play too, however PR is proven to connect with consumers very effectively.

The 2009 AC Nielsen Consumer Survey revealed 67 per cent of respondents trusted the editorial content they read in newspapers over advertising (second only to personal recommendation).

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A study based on Interbrand's 2008 Best Global Brands report also supports the case for PR, revealing 27 per cent of brand value was tied to how often a brand name appeared in the press.

Basically, the message you need to take for your franchise is that PR works and you need to learn to harness its power to help build your businesses.

### Work the PR magic

The franchise business model provides great opportunities for franchisees to engage with the local community through the media and thus help drive

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business growth. Let's look at a few ways this has worked with a cross-section of clients in our portfolio.

An Xpresso Delight master franchisee used PR to help attract and recruit new franchisees by highlighting the success

of a current successful franchisee in the local paper. The week the story featured in the paper they received more potential leads than usual; their tracking process revealing people had been motivated to call after reading the news story. Credibility and making a connection with the audience paid off.

Chooks Fresh & Tasty franchisees utilise PR to help drive community initiatives such as charity sales days and to introduce franchisees to a community.

PoolWerx franchisees use PR to push pool safety and health messages into the local community after major weather events such as floods and cyclones and

in support of their alliance with the Royal Lifesaving Association of Australia.

A number of fast food franchises we work with engage the local media and thus the community through special reader giveaways.

There are many ways PR can be utilised to help a franchisee engage with the local community.

### Key ways to drive PR at a local level

Opportunities abound but here are four simple methods that can assist in generating media coverage:

1. Business success stories – everyone loves to hear about a local business doing well. What is your background, why did you choose franchising, does your family work in the business? To make this work for you the media will want real information so be ready to provide growth statistics such as profit increase figures, customer numbers, percentage sales increase. These won't reveal sensitive information to your competitors but will improve media interest.
2. New store openings – are you a multi-franchisee opening more stores? Is this your first foray into business? Have you sent the media a trial of

your product or service (this won't work for all models).

3. Support local organisations and charities – assisting local charities to raise money or providing product or services for free is something you should be recognised for. For instance, are you having a specials sales day to raise money for a charity, are you selling product in support of a cause, are you simply selling merchandise in support of an event?
4. Capitalise on current events – is there something happening in your region that your business can lend support too or provide expertise about? Assisting a local family in need is a good example.

## Once you've realised how PR can work for you the next step is to put it into action

An important and somewhat frustrating aspect of public relations that you need to be aware of is media coverage is not guaranteed. You are at the discretion of an editor or journalist to decide if they want to run your story. This should not deter you from using PR to grow your business as it is immensely powerful when it works.

### Working with media

Once you've realised how PR can work for you the next step is to put it into action and establish relationships with your key media. There are a few key things you should do and remember to make the media your friend.

1. Know the local media in your area – what newspapers, magazines, radio and TV are relevant to you? Take time to learn what type of stories they cover.

2. Establish strong relationships with the media. Make sure you know who the editors and producers are; send an introduction sample of your product or service so they know who you are and what you do.
3. Know the media deadlines. Media work to tight schedules so you must know the right time to get information to a journalist so your story can be considered. Journalists hate to be contacted when they are on deadline.
4. Pitch and follow up. Always call a journalist first to pitch your story idea and why it is relevant to the media and thus the community. This is an important part of the process for engaging the media's attention. Once you have sent through the information call them in a few days time to see if they need anything else to complete the story. Whatever you do don't harass a journalist as this will be the quickest way to annoy them. Public relations takes diligence and patience in understanding the media, knowing what type of stories are relevant for different media, and spending the time to maintain relationships with key contacts. PR is time consuming but can prove invaluable in helping to spark growth in a brand both new and existing. Is it time to shine a light on your franchise? ■

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\*Franchising Australia 2008 Griffith University Survey*