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WHAT CAN PUBLIC RELATIONS DO FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

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From KMR Communications - 06/30/2003

By Katherine Rothman, CEO, KMR Communications, www.kmrpr.com

The key question spas must ask is, how to capture the lion's share of your market in an increasingly competitive climate? One very effective way of doing so is through the use of public relations. Public relations means using the press and media in the form of editorial stories related to your spa, its treatments, operators, and aesthetic appeal as opposed to an ad. Public relations translates as unbiased because it gives consumers information they need and want to know as opposed to an ad which is basically a spa singing its praises.

The idea of public relations is to put a creative spin on a spa to differentiate it from the plethora of competition. Skilled PR professionals do this by linking spa treatments with something that is seasonal, controversial, related to a holiday, a trend, or has a celebrity tie-in.

It is important to remember that public relations is a cumulative process. Some media exposure is what we refer to as a home run where there is a direct correlation between media exposure and new clients calling to book appointments. Other exposure may simply position a spa as reputable but does not generate new business instantly. The latter is also extremely constructive because it generates overall name recognition. You would be amazed at how much credence women give to mentions of spas in the media. For some clients it even carries status to say that the spa they frequent appeared in Allure or Vogue Magazine. In addition, these media placements are good for your existing client population as it assures them that they made the right choice. It is also important to use media coverage in the continued marketing of your spa. You can do so by putting media coverage on your web-site, framing media placements conspicuously around the spa, and using language in your advertising such as "as seen in Elle Magazine."

For those of you with spas in the suburbs of major cities, it is always a battle to keep clients in your own backyard as opposed to having them choose urban spas. While a city client will not likely go to the suburbs, repeat media exposure will assure suburbanites that they can receive the same spa experience in their own backyard. Essentially, media coverage will help to dispel the notion that the best medical and aesthetic services are only found in a major city.

I spoke with Mike McCurdy the founder and publisher of Healthnewsdigest.com and executive producer of the syndicated program Healthy TV. I have asked him to convey some tips and pet peeves for all of you. Mike states that he would always prefer a story pitch to come from a pr professional as opposed to a spa owner because pr people uniquely understand how to gear a pitch to an editor as well as deadlines and true newsworthiness of stories. As he explained, stories that come directly from the spa owners tend to be skewed for the ego of the spa owner as opposed to having a real consumer merit. Mike suggests that spas be ready with both black and white as well as color photos of the spa facility in case they are requested by the media, which they often are. Another tip- Mike suggests focusing on things that are cutting edge such as new types of treatments such as Thai Massage, Stone Facials, Thalossotherapy, and Candeling.

A major turn off to Mike is a doctor or spa owner who thinks he/she is a member of the press and tries to tell the media expert how a story should be written or slanted.

Finally, when you do employ a public relations firm, please be patient. No one becomes famous overnight. Some of the spas whom you see all over the media have implemented PR for many years. It is not just about having one article in a magazine or one TV appearance. This exposure must occur with consistency over a period of time for the full effect to become apparent. Always keep your ethics and morals and never compromise them for a media appearance. A quality publicist would never put his or her client in a situation that would compromise them. Keep focused on your own success.


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Tips When Interviewing a prospective PR Firm:

- Ask for examples of successful campaign tactics
- Request to see examples of print and media coverage for other beauty and medical clients
- Assess their knowledge of the medi-spa industry
- Get a reasonable estimate of frequency of media coverage
- Know the markets that will be pursued and make sure they are appropriate for your target audience
- Ask for samples of press releases written for other clients
- Get references
- Know the account executive to client ratio and how much time will be devoted to account within a given week or month
- Learn what other companies the firm handles. You do not want to be a small fish in a big pond. If the firm is representing a huge cosmetic conglomerate, you can be sure that your retainer fee is a fraction of the mega client's. It would be safe to assume that your account would not receive the same level of attention or you might be farmed out to the pr firm's most junior account executive.
- Ask if there are any additional expenses such as monthly disbursements
- The PR firm should provide client with weekly written progress reports
- Prior to engaging a company ask for a written proposal, which will outline a campaign strategy and explain company client policy.
- Ask if there exists any conflict of interest. If a firm is representing your direct competition down the street, it would not be wise to proceed with this firm. Conversely, if you are in New York and the firm has a spa in Florida, this will not affect you at all.
- Make sure you get a good vibe from the people with whom you are meeting. If you get the sense that they feel they are doing you a favor by representing you, or any similar attitude, move on. Remember, you will be the client and you want a firm that will cater to your needs and be enthusiastic about having you on their client roster.