

Grow Your Business Through Local Media

Most hobby retailers advertise, but there's no better way to advertise your store than by using the local media to generate free publicity for your business. Getting the media to recognize your business requires a mix of creativity, professionalism, persistence and some basic understanding of what the media is looking for.

Know Who to Contact – Find out who the sports editor is at the local newspapers, as well as the sports director at the local TV and radio outlets. Also find out who covers local business issues for your local media outlets. These people are good contacts if you have stories such as a store expansion, 20th anniversary, or even information on how a national story is affecting local sales.

Also, make sure you are reaching as many media outlets as possible in your community. You'll naturally contact TV stations in your marketplace, but does the local cable service provide any community news service? If so, make sure they know about you.

Find the Angles – Understand what is of greatest relevance to the media outlets you are contacting and cater your stories to those outlets. For instance, the 20th anniversary of your business won't mean anything to a daily newspaper in a major metropolitan market. It may be of interest to your weekly suburban newspaper. If there's a local radio station that offers sports programming, ask if they'd be interested in having you as a guest for a call-in show about collectibles.

Also, don't be afraid to pitch an idea to a local writer or TV station. For instance, if your store hosts weekly Yu-Gi-Oh! tournaments, propose a story on how popular the game has been among kids the past several years and invite the reporter to come down to interview some of the players. Papers love stories about what's trendy, especially among kids. Television stations love stories that have strong visual power, such as a group of kids playing together.

The Power of a Press Release – The best way to get your foot in the door with local media is to create a professional-looking press release. A press release is a great way to announce a major event at your store, such as an autograph appearance by a local athlete, or the pulling of a rare, valuable insert card by one of your customers.

Please note that every press release should contain the Who, What, Why and When of the news it is conveying. That means it should include contact information such as the name of the store's owner or manager, along with a phone number, and all of the vital information such as the date, time and location of an upcoming event. Make sure the release conveys a sense of why the announcement would even be of interest to local media. For instance, when a customer pulls a rare insert card in your store, that's exciting for you as a retailer. It's exciting for local media if there's a "human interest" angle, such as a 12-year-old boy pulls a card valued at \$2,500, or the only Babe Ruth autographed card in a nationally distributed set is found in your store.

Most importantly, make sure your press release doesn't contain spelling or punctuation mistakes. Those mistakes will minimize its credibility with the media. A software program such as Microsoft Word points out misspelled words and grammatical errors.

Be Persistent – Media outlets receive dozens of press releases and story ideas every day. They don't provide coverage for everything that comes across their desk. Just because you don't get the media to bite on your first or second – or even third – press release, don't give up your efforts to publicize your store and the hobby in general.

Capitalize on the Opportunity – If the media does follow up your release with a story, make sure you and your store look their best. The media is less likely to consider you an "expert" in the field if you operate a store that looks in disarray and you and your staff are not dressed

professionally. And always be sure to speak about the hobby in a positive manner – after all, it's your livelihood.

Free publicity is a valuable asset to any business. Make sure you are doing everything you can to make the local media aware of the many interesting story ideas your store and the hobby have to offer.