



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

Local Media and Your Practice

5 TIPS FOR LEVERAGING THIS WIN-WIN RELATIONSHIP

Kent Greenawalt

There are few things in life you can count on as certainties: death, taxes and change, as they say. Fortunately, the latter need not be fatal or costly, and in the case of local media, it is possible to keep up with the times. While television, radio and newspaper no longer dominate the media spectrum, they are still powerful players in reaching your community – and learning how to get exposure through them can have a dramatic impact on your practice. In fact, a 2014 [study by Nielsen](#) on the consumer decision-making process concluded *PR is almost 90% more effective than advertising* in convincing someone to pay for a product or service.

It makes sense: When the media mentions or features you or your practice, the public sees it as an impartial, *vett*ed endorsement, so the listeners, viewers and readers of your area – your prospective patients – are more likely to pay attention and indeed, may seek your care.

There's an old saying: "Advertising is what you pay for, publicity is what you pray for." Paid advertising has its place, of course, but why not spend some time trying to get your story some exposure for your practice at no cost to you? You don't have to be a communications expert or have a huge network. With a little planning and perseverance, getting the local media spotlight turned toward your practice is within reach. Here are five ways to do it.

1. Reach Out and Get Connected



Journalists are surprisingly easy to please, but remember, the news business – like any business – is all about relationships. Find out who covers what beat; any reporter covering health, small businesses or even local sports might be a good bet for you. Connect on social media. Follow their work, and "share" and leave thoughtful comments when you feel it's appropriate. (They'll appreciate this – they do what they do to reach people, after all – and it's a great way to associate your name with a positive experience in their minds.) Then introduce yourself at a local event or send an email and suggest a conversation at the local coffee house.

Especially in small to mid-sized markets, journalists are extremely accessible. They *have* to be: News people are constantly under pressure to find interesting stories in their community, and you, along with your fellow citizens, are their sources. Often, they just need *you* to make the first move.

2. Determine What's "News"

You've made the connection; now how do you decide what's relevant to share with your new journalist friend? Here are just a few examples of "newsworthy" items that might be worth a pitch:

- A new doctor (or other professional) joins your team.
- You add a new exciting product line or service to your practice. A few examples include nutritional products, orthotics, laser or massage therapy.
- You're about to hold or recently held a wellness event.
- Your practice is celebrating an anniversary or other milestone.
- You (or your team members) participated in a fundraiser, 5K, volunteer opportunity or similar event.
- You or someone in your practice achieved a postgraduate degree or special training, or you were appointed to be the team chiropractor for your local high school or college sports department.
- You've had remarkable success with a particular patient, and that patient has agreed to let you share their story. *Important: Be sure you have expressed, written permission from your*

patient to share details of their care.

3. Target Your Pitch

Remember your audience. Trying to convince the local courthouse writer to profile the new [massage therapist](#) on your team, for example, wastes your time (and the reporter's) and can result in frustration on both sides. In your communication, talk about the *what* and *why* it matters. For example, you're now offering nutritional supplements. You could mention rising obesity rates and poor nutrition, unfortunately commonplace in this country, and how now, more than ever, it's important for people to use supplemental nutrition. If it's an event, include relevant details (date, time, location) and mention the main highlights: Did you offer free health screenings or talk to attendees about how to maintain a healthy spine? Never miss an opportunity to tell others how you're improving yourself or your community.

See a trend here? *Your news should be new (that's why they call it "news," after all!)* and implicitly answer the "Why should they (the audience) care?" question. Perhaps your new product, event or staff member fills a need or addresses a common problem in your community. Perhaps your new service or recent event speaks to a larger national trend or conversation. Journalists are frequently looking for just such local examples of topics being discussed by the nation as a whole.

Consider approaching your local media outlet for a column or segment during which audience members submit their health questions, and you provide thoughtful answers. Whatever the medium, editors are hungry for content. Help them fill it.

As a chiropractor, you're the expert on a number of topics: biomechanics, conservative health care, sports injuries; perhaps you have additional training in nutrition, prenatal care, pediatrics or any number of topics.

Submitting an opinion piece or letters to the editor (or a response to someone else's) is another way to get your name and practice in the public eye. With the advent of social media, your piece could get [shared](#) or [retweeted](#) and seen by more people than ever before. In fact, social media can spread your message and "feed" your traditional presence media, and vice-versa.

For example, say you post something to your blog that becomes widely popular and is shared 100-plus times. Reach out to your local editors to let them know this is a topic that resonates with people, and ask if they would like to cover it, too. Just remember: Content lives forever on the Internet. Whatever you write or say, choose your words wisely.

4. Remember, Courtesy Is King

When you're attempting to share your story idea with an individual reporter, do so with courtesy. Reporters are extremely busy and are often feeling stressed as deadline looms. Thanks to the rise of the Internet, there are far fewer journalists today than years ago, which means the ones who are left have to work twice as hard. Make it easy by sending short, to-the-point communications, and then make yourself extra available for follow-up. Try to answer or return phone calls immediately; respond to emails within an hour or less (or make sure your staff does so). Frequently, the people you see quoted as "experts" in the news are those who can be reached, not necessarily those with the most impressive pedigrees.

Common courtesy will go a long way, too. Find out how your newsperson prefers to be contacted, whether it's phone, email or even a text. If you decide to issue a press release (ideally, a one-page document featuring the main highlights of your story, plus your contact information), always include a personalized note with your communication. Once they've expressed interest, make sure

you send everything they could possibly need to make their story great: high-resolution photos, quotes, facts and perhaps even a case study, if applicable.

5. Know When to Walk Away

No matter how hard you've worked to build a relationship, or how great your "news" or idea is, sometimes your pitch will fail. Don't take it personally. The story might not have been quite right for the time or the audience, or perhaps a similar story was already in the works. Accept the judgment of your news peer and move on, or pitch your idea somewhere else.

Media is changing - along with the rest of the world - but there are a few tried-and-true, common sense-based rules you can count on. Use them to your advantage and you may just find your practice featured on the nightly news or in your hometown paper, reaching hundreds and perhaps even thousands of potential patients.

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