

## **Publicity and advertising; different yet complimentary**

Step back in time to WW1; many troops were being sent off into war zones while wives and children remained at home. One of the most memorable acts of propaganda was James Montgomery Flagg's poster advertising Uncle Sam – "I want you for the US army". Over four million copies were printed between 1917 and 1918 and used in a variety of recruitment and advertising campaigns in the United States. This is advertising; a paid, mass-mediated attempt to persuade.

Publicity also has early roots and was one of the earliest forms of public relations, taking us back to ancient civilization and Julius Caesar. Publicity is generally information about an event, an individual, group or product that appears as a news or feature story in the mass media and is unpaid.

Why the history lesson you may ask? Although the overall goal to inform and persuade is the same, the difference sometimes causes confusion. Publicity materials are generally prepared by a PR practitioner who crafts a message and story, otherwise known as a press release. It is then pitched to various media outlets where the editor determines whether or not the press release is news worthy and will interest readers. If so, it's reviewed, tweaked for clarity and is printed in the next edition; essentially, free publicity.

Advertising is paid space; from newspaper advertising to large bill boards, TV commercials and radio, the messages are delivered by a mass media outlet that has worked directly with the client to develop a plan and meet the advertising goals and objectives of the organization. Think of it as renting space.

With small businesses, sometimes it difficult to understand when the most appropriate time to advertise is and when it's worth trying a few publicity tactics as publicity is built upon using communication tools. Of course it depends on your budget but also on what you envision your return on investment to be. With publicity tactics such as media releases, PSAs and event calendar listings, you aren't taking much of a risk; if your communication plan is in place and you follow your timeline, it's ok if your first press release or two doesn't get picked up. Advertising tends to be costly but is beneficial when the intended audience, primarily consumers of goods and services is reached and an ROI is achieved based on intended results.

Publicity and advertising are tools that work well when coupled within a solid communications plan. They are effective business practices that aim to achieve the best results for your business.

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