

# INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

A Newsletter For Advertisers And Marketers Of High Performance Systems

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## PUBLIC RELATIONS

### PR programs linked to marketing objectives pay handsome dividends

By Dan Garza

Today's managements in high-tech companies, to a great extent, continue to naively foster traditional public relations practices of the '50's and '60's. Then, they wonder why their random and interspersed product releases don't exactly make them the "darlings of the trade press."

The big splash days of yesterday's press agency is really no more than a perception nurtured by Hollywood and Madison Avenue of the 1940's. The reality today is that successful marketing of advanced high performance systems and sophisticated VLSI electronics depends largely on strategically planned press programs linked very tightly to marketing and business objectives.

These kinds of well-thought-out programs targeted at an eventual product announcement work hard for both the systems houses and the editorial community. Quite often, companies focusing only on the big announcement either lose sight or are completely unaware of the potential number of news stories and tech articles they can have if they are properly cultivated. The in-depth audit, a major part of a well-conceived press program, helps to uncover bits of technical and design data that can be turned just right to become newsworthy stories once they're polished and refined. And material used as the basis for these articles barely borders on the new product's specifications,

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pricing or delivery schedule.

In fact, editors are not always looking for the new product story. Over the last 10 years or so, it has become more the exception, rather than the rule. Instead, very savvy editors day to day lean more toward industry issues, technology trends, and controversy — elements that are the basis for very effective press activities if packaged properly. Activities like these with considerable frequency give companies that much sought after technology leadership image.

For these stories to fully support and convey marketing messages as well as to be highly acceptable to editors, careful, methodical planning with marketing is essential. Plus, these marketing PR programs must be flexible enough to change direction, almost like calling an audible at the scrimmage line, because the nature of the high performance systems business is so dynamic.

As the chart shows, a carefully plotted press program with marketing can be executed at various levels prior to formal product announcement. These stages are used to bracket series of press projects relating to specific marketing objectives and can be iden-

tified by a variety of terms.

For illustration purposes here, they are simply Phases 1, 2, 3 and 4. Broadly categorized, Phase 1 generates stories based on issues, technology trends, emerging standards, and future design challenges, for example. Moving to Phase 2, company-initiated articles can usually retain the same categories in Phase 1, but forge more into system's problems and solutions; perhaps some tutorial as well as systems issues. At the program's apex is Phase 3, the product announcement, followed by such post-announcement ac-

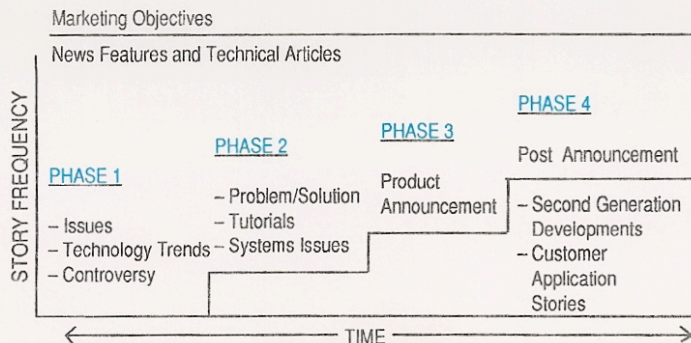
### *Editors are not always looking for the new product story*

tivities as customer jointly-authored tech articles and announcements relating to new product enhancements.

The secret to successful program execution is to get in early at the initial product development cycle to nose out newsworthy information relating to new issues and trends; develop it in a variety of ways working closely with mar-

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## USING THE RIGHT MARKETING PRESS RELATIONS TOOLS AT THE RIGHT TIME



## PUBLIC RELATIONS

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keting management; and negotiate the material with individual technical and news editors. As the product continues through its development cycle, newer information emerges which can be further turned into acceptable stories.

Unfortunately, in some instances, top management often confuses this methodology with product pre-announcement, a term that generates considerable upper echelon fear and concern, as well as hastily called meetings "to see what we can do to pull that story."

The key to avoiding these unproductive sessions is to get total management buy-in at the outset — meaning cooperation, involvement, and participation in all the projects comprising the program. At the same time, it's also important to start early negotiations with influential editors to get

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their interest and their suggestions to properly mold the stories for their readership.

In this regard, top editorial management for CMP Publications' Electronics Group encourages story packages that can be negotiated and developed ahead of time for *High Performance Sys-*

*tems* magazine, *EE Times*, and with a solid European or East Asia twist, for *Electronic World News*, as well. Specifically, in this instance, *EE Times* is excellent for fast-breaking news going to design management while *High Performance Systems* provides in-depth technical details through tech articles closely coordinated and tailored early on with its editors.

An approach similar to this was implemented by Data I/O Corporation, a programmable IC universal design tool company in Redmond, WA, to announce the industry's first field programmable gate array (FPGA) verification system. Fully aware that they had to hit the right time to market window and erect certain competitive barriers, the company's marketers moved fast and methodically at the outset of product development to set the stage through carefully mapped out and executed verification issues-related stories.

Subsequently, at announcement time, both *EE Times* and *Electronic Buyers' News* ran news stories covering technical and purchasing aspects for those respective readerships. A more detailed "Performance Project" tech article appeared two weeks later in *High Performance Systems* (see "In-Circuit Verifier for Reprogrammable Gate Arrays," February 1989).

This particular piece was negotiated with the magazine's west coast editor last October, allowing ample time for deadline dates. But getting the editor's valuable suggestions and story direction at that time was equally as important as the scheduling. As a leading industry book, *High Performance Systems* has several tech article platforms. Therefore, working closely with these editors on a specific type of technical article being negotiated increases chances for acceptance. □