

# Strategic planning turbo charges high-tech PR

By Dan Garza

Opportunities to expand beyond traditional PR tools abound in the high-tech arena, thanks to the dynamic nature of rapidly evolving software and hardware technologies. High-tech PR offers a wide range of tools, allowing companies to craft and deliver special technical marketing messages both in print and online.

The traditional news release still plays a vital role to announce products or new developments. However, these news announcements are few and far between for many high-tech companies. Plus, editors pay little attention to many run-of-the mill announcements, making market awareness efforts futile in most cases. So, what is an in-house PR professional to do to create and sustain greater market visibility for his or her product lines?

One has to change his mindset and think in terms of replacing conventional product publicity with a marketing-oriented PR program, or at least, make it more prevalent than simply distributing news releases. Product publicity involves pitching editors, cranking out news releases, and trying to get product mentions in staff-written features. By putting out occasional news releases, it may appear as though PR is taking the initiative.

But in reality, this is reactive as PR people wait for editors to call them following a round of release distribution. Editors are left to interpret company news as they choose or not at all. As for product releases, they are

edited down to a couple of paragraphs and stuck in the new product section at the back of the publication. Consequently, such brief mentions fail to generate the aura of technology leadership most electronics companies seek.

Lackluster PR like this produces unappealing results and usually leads to poor communications with markets. Relying on such an approach, one runs the risk of being viewed as a non-market or weak player and one who loses market share. This in turn generates only scant interest from the investment community.

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## Re-evaluation needed

PR practitioners can get a clearer perspective on weak spots by re-evaluating their company's present PR practices. Are they effective in light of growing competitive strengths? Are year-to-year goals and results virtually staying the same? Are there signs that lesser-known companies are gaining greater market visibility and acceptance? Do customer communications produce less-than-expected results? Are erroneous messages being delivered to the market? Is the competition using the press to sabotage your company and products?

Turbo charged marketing PR is the elixir that remedies this unhealthy PR scenario. Rather than being myopic with traditional and reactive product publicity, marketing PR looks outside the box and focuses on technology and industry trends and issues. This is the caliber of information editors live on and eagerly seek to develop their stories. PR effectiveness will reach new levels by adopting stories based on issues, spiced up with marketing objectives, and then constantly pumped out to the technical press.

Planning and communicating are vital in high-tech PR for one basic reason: electronics technology is dynamic, continually moving forward with new, better, and more marketable features. That's why it's so important for PR practitioners to work hand-in-hand with strategic marketing. PR must frequently plot and scheme with marketing to update the PR plan to fully meet market communications objectives.

The unique selling proposition is the linchpin of a marketing PR program. USP means the product or service features and technologies a client owns is exclusive. A series of no more than three USP-

related marketing messages are then developed to form the program's foundation.

However, for the program to speak forcefully, it must have a proactively developed and planned PR tactical campaign targeted at the print technical press, market analysts, industry experts, online industry publications, and others. The big guns firing out the messages are bylined technical features and articles, op-eds, industry events, customer success stories, application articles, technical conference papers, and others left to the imagination of the high-tech PR practitioner. The key to success is frequency, the more, the better.

## Writing is prized

Find a writer in your area who is tech savvy to help with articles and other major projects. Arrange a meeting with the writer and client. Listen closely, take a few notes because there are times the technical expert that the writer is interviewing will casually mention a new development.

To him or her, it may not be a big deal, but for you with your news nose, that little gem can be polished up and parlayed into what's known as "making news where there's not any." Also, look for technical issues and competitive shortcomings because these are rich in editorial grist.

## Re-purpose material

Customer success stories certainly belong on your company website. But you can re-purpose them into problem-solution bylined features in the vertical press as well as create customer-approved news or press releases. Plus, if the customer project is substantially innovative, you can conduct individual briefings with key publications.

Also, don't let white papers sit idly. Put them to work. Sometimes, they're self-serving. But tap into the meaty technical details and industry issues. Then, get the writer to produce bylined technical article abstracts and email them to selected editors, giving



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## PR SERVICES NEWS

### Monitoring shop has grants

CyberAlert, Stratford, Conn., said it has at least 10 grants for not-for-profit organizations for news monitoring and press clipping services.

The company said it will dole out \$25,000 worth of grants, which range from \$2,700 to \$3,900 per organization.

Previous recipients included the Alliance for Consumer Education, the Global Fund for Women, and the Oklahoma City National Memorial. Not-for-profits, educational and charitable groups can apply through December 31 via the company's website: [www.cyberalert.com](http://www.cyberalert.com). ■

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## Strategic planning for PR

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each a different spin to avoid the bad editorial reputation of "shopping around the same article." In some cases, a PR person may be dealing with specific customer market segments like auto, medical, industrial, or military/aerospace. One can work both the electronics trade press and vertical press with these same subjects, although they'll need to be tailored to meet specific editorial needs.

The press release (not to be confused with a news release) is another valuable tool. Here, the press release is defined as a one to two page feature sent to selected editors and is not an announcement, per se. Information in a press release can encourage editors to generate a particular feature story or use it as

### PR SERVICES NEWS

#### Tobin marks a decade

**T**obin Communications, a Maryland-based radio PR company, has marked its 10th year.

CEO Maury Tobin noted the enduring popularity of radio amid upheaval in the media realm. "Despite the changes we've seen in the media landscape in the past 10 years, radio continues to be a strong and vital medium," he said.

TC handles radio media tours, sponsored radio features and telephone media training. Clients include major PR firms, corporations, non-profits and trade groups, and political campaigns. ■

filler for another.

One way to productively use these and other PR tactics is to support a new major product launch. A carefully plotted marketing PR program is executed in several consecutive phases over a period of time to set the stage prior to formal product announcement. For example, four major PR activity phases are mapped out with marketing, and there is never a mention of the new product in these tactics, only subtle hints.

In phase one, for instance, stories and articles based on issues, technology trends, and future design challenges are generated and placed for publication.

In phase two, company-initiated articles concentrate on new system problems and possible generic solutions. Here, one has the option of alluding to new product features.

At the program's apex is phase 3, the actual product announcement, replete with news release distribution, press briefings with company execs, and other associated PR activities.

Quickly following on the heels of phase three are such post-announcement tactics as customer jointly-authored bylined technical articles, application articles, conference papers, and others.

So far, only the technical press has been mentioned and not the business press. Here's why. Most often, unless you've got a dynamite story, it's difficult getting business press attention if a company has limited market exposure. But here patience is the name of the game.

Consider there's an inherent cascading effect associated with a well-planned and executed high-tech PR campaign. With the frequency and intensity of published articles

and news stories you get in the technical press, you can bet business editors will become well acquainted with your company, its products, and technologies. Business editors, as well as security and market analysts voraciously read the technical press to keep updated on fast-paced electronics advances. After gaining substantial momentum and being perceived as a top industry player via the technical press, it'll be much easier to pitch a more responsive business press.

In summary, what does this PR approach get you? Here are some key benefits:

Sustained market visibility to create an aura of market and technology leadership.

Educates customers and potential customers and directs them toward products and/or services.

Provides an avenue for explaining why customers should use your products and/or services.

- Builds market credibility.
- Influences major market influentials and helps to win their trust and respect.
- Earns second- and third-party endorsements for a product or service.
- Helps cultivate or explore new markets and business opportunities.
- Creates preference for product or service.
- Builds perceived competitive barriers.
- Positions competition away from your main market target and puts them in separate market categories.

Best of all, marketing PR puts the PR staffer in charge of a client's communications destiny.

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