



## RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH PUBLICITY

By **Bill Smith**

**P**ublicity is one of the most powerful tools available to help parking organizations meet their organizational goals. By publicizing an organization through the media, parking organizations can reach huge numbers of people with key messages. That could mean informing local residents of municipal parking plans and regulations, communicating about a product or service to prospective customers, or demonstrating a particular expertise to potential strategic partners.

Publicity revolves around generating coverage in the media. Unlike advertising, stories in newspapers, magazines, and online publications, as well as on TV and radio, don't cost anything beyond the time and resources required to arrange and complete them. In addition to being cost-effective, stories arranged in print, broadcast, and online media also carry much more weight and credibility than ads.

When developing a publicity strategy, parking organizations need to first determine what they want to accomplish. For example, a municipal parking system may wish to attract drivers to public parking facilities or keep the public informed of parking rules and regulations. A parking technology vendor, on the other hand, may want to inform the industry and potential clients in other industries why its technology is superior and about the unique benefits it can offer. A consulting firm may want to raise its profile among potential clients or strategic partners.

In addition to offering opportunities for free coverage, publicity offers extraordinary reach. A feature story in *The Parking Professional*, for example, is read by thousands of parking professionals, including the industry's leaders. A story in a local newspaper or on television news can be an effective way to disseminate information throughout the community. And a story in a national media outlet can reach tens of millions of people. Additionally, when stories run in a publication or on TV or radio, online versions also tend to run on those outlets' websites. There's really no better way to reach large numbers of people to raise awareness of a parking organization, product, or service.

### How to Get Coverage

Every parking organization has news to announce. It could be a new policy or facility for a municipality; a new client or project for a consultant; a new product or

service for a supplier; or a milestone, such as a new hire or an award. Press releases are the perfect tool for getting basic news out to the public. Make sure you keep the release short, to the point, and not overly promotional. Keep in mind how the release would read if printed in the media as-is; if it reads more like an advertisement than a news story, tone it down. There are a number of websites that offer free press release templates.

One of the most effective ways to use publicity is to arrange feature stories about your organization, someone within your organization, or a product or service. Feature stories are usually arranged through pitch (or story idea) letters or personal briefings. Successful pitches can revolve around industry trends, common challenges and solutions, or timely and interesting issues, and should always be presented in terms of why the reader (or listener or viewer) will be interested in the story. Editors don't care if you find a story idea interesting; they only care if their readers will. Like press releases, pitch letters and verbal pitches should be kept brief and succinct.

Another type of publicity that can raise awareness of an organization or its product is the bylined article. These are stories that are authored by an expert and printed in industry press or general or business publications. They typically offer overviews of common challenges and solutions, examples of best practices, and/or case studies demonstrating a particular solution. They can't openly promote the organization but provide enormous benefit by demonstrating the author's valuable expertise. Bylines are also typically arranged through pitch letters or personal pitches.

Depending on the needs of the organization, a publicity program can be low-key and simple or a full strategic program that's part of a larger PR effort. A strategic publicity program can be a valuable part of any PR and marketing effort and a terrific way to get the word out to your most important audiences. **P**



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