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Narrow focus can prove to be beneficial

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Even the smallest businesses can land prominent coverage in the Business section. It just depends on the pitch.

For example, Connect2 Communications netted a placement for its client Acme Packet in a November 5 *Wall Street Journal* article, "Small Firms Hire Guides As They Head Abroad," which focused on companies wrestling with expansion overseas.

Acme sells telecommunications equipment, "playing an important role in network security, but it is not the size company many business [titles] profile," says Richard Williams, principal of Connect2. However, Acme earned a mention in the *Journal* because 20% of its 300 employees are overseas in 22 countries.

"You need to understand what the business press is interested in and then figure out what your client's perspective is," he notes. "You also have to understand the difference between the story the reporter wants to write and the story the client wants to tell."

Williams suggests making a list of the top five topics relevant to business media for which your company has a unique perspective.

Cultivate the relationship, he adds. Know the reporter, his or her beat and writing style, and understand there can be a long lead time in writing the story. It's also important to be creative, articulate, and quotable. "Saying the same thing as everyone else won't help establish the relationship,"

Williams stresses.

All this is based on having a firm grip on the company's and client's perspective.

"Stop thinking... tactically and don't knee-jerk press releases because you saw a [rival] in a business magazine," says Rodger Roeser, president of Eisen Management Group (EMG). "Success starts with a well-conceived marketing strategy. What is your company's story? Why is your brand unique? What differentiates your perspective on specific issues?"

Roeser recommends researching how competitors are being covered, participating in industry trade groups, and requesting an audience with the editorial board at the major media outlets in your core markets.

It's also important to create unique opportunities for coverage. For example, EMG client Reardon Smith Whittaker, which provides lead generation and business development consulting, has prompted vast business-press coverage by producing three annual surveys and issuing perspective pieces that focus on major trends, says Mark Sneider, US MD.

Timing is also important when trying to get the business media's attention.

On the anniversary of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Stanton Communications helped launch a new PC-based simulation that included a severe storm recovery scenario designed to help first responders train for multi-agency emergency situations.

Developed for the Department of Justice (DOJ) by BreakAway, the product was a so-called "serious game," or a software application, developed with game technology for a primary purpose other than pure entertainment, a category rarely covered by national business media.

Ultimately, tying a small business or its products or services to an upcoming anniversary, or its use by a major client, can deliver the news hook reporters seek to differentiate their coverage. Jessica Trzyna, VP at Stanton, was able to do so and landed BreakAway placements in national business media, ranging from *BusinessWeek* to *The Washington Post*.

"From a strategic PR perspective," she says, "we had the launch of the game to first responders on the actual anniversary, testimony from a user who attributed his success at running an 800-bed hospital to his test-use of the game, and the fact it was commissioned by the DOJ. Obviously, it was really an awful situation you never want to happen, but it all came together to help us secure extensive national media coverage."

Do

Analyze what sets your company apart from the competition

Scan the calendar for key dates relevant to your product/service

Develop market data and surveys. Reporters love to break trends

Don't

Pitch a product. Pitch a perspective

Repeat the same things that a larger competitor is saying

Just think nationally. Local business media like to cover hometown success stories