

Making friends with the media

Put your assumptions about journalists to one side, says **Chris Baker**, and you may find that making friends with them can bring a big benefit to the media-savvy practice

They say you can judge a person by their friends. That surely doesn't augur well for journalists – aren't they all phone hacking, hard-drinking scoundrels? Who would want to be known as a friend to someone in the media?

But consider a few names – Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Pulitzer, Hunter S Thompson, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

I think it's fair to say that all these people left the world in a better state than they found it. So, on the basis that not all journalists are wanton drunks (or at least, not just that), perhaps it's time to reconsider your stance.

In fact, if you own or manage a dental practice, you should be looking to cultivate a long standing friendship with these people and with the media more generally. But why?

PEOPLE BUY PEOPLE

Let's imagine that you have a great story for the local paper, radio or TV. If you know no one at the media in question then it is going to have to be a light news week, or pretty special and newsworthy to go in. If people don't know you then I am afraid you will be further down the pecking order than those that they do. Start working at this relationship by looking to meet up with one of the editorial team and seeing how you can help them.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK, I'LL SCRATCH YOURS

You may have heard of the internet. Well, whether they work in online or offline media, it's having a huge effect on the lives of all journalists and media people. There are acres of space to be filled and doing so is not always an easy task. If you can come along and deliver them an editorially valid story that helps them and helps you, then everyone is a winner!

Chris Baker runs *Corona Design & Communication*, a specialist dental marketing company. For more information, visit www.coronadental.ie.

SAVE MONEY!

Advertising isn't cheap. But when done well it can still deliver great results. (I have to be honest at this point and say that most dental practices don't do it well. That, however, is a topic for another column.) If you build up a relationship with someone in advertising sales at the medium we are talking about, it can generally lead to lower rates, better positions and last minute deals that you wouldn't otherwise have access to.

EDITORIAL VS ADVERTISING

Editorial and advertising serve different purposes. It would serve you well to have contacts in both departments! Editorial scores over advertising in so many ways, as it conveys tacit third party approval for whatever is being discussed. However, there are some items that will never make it as a news story.

For instance, if you are running a promotion on Six Month Smiles, that's great, but it (should) never make the news pages. It will make an ideal advertisement, however – short, punchy, to the point.

ASK THE EXPERT

Position yourself as the person they should speak to in your area about dentistry. It is very common for the media to have a 'go to' person for certain specialist areas. Make sure that they have one for oral health and dentistry – and that it's you!



MATURITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP

As time passes, if you work at good, strong relationships with both editorial and advertising teams, you should find that there is a growing rapport between you.

It should mean that it is no longer a case of any of you 'pitching' at each other, but more of a consultative approach in which all three of you can further each other's agendas for the benefit of all.

At the risk of going back to the 'glory days' of the 1980s, work on your relationships with the media. It may well be a case of a few lunches and some schmoozing here and there, but hey, there are worse ways to spend your time.

It might be a couple of lunches that will gain you those all too valuable column inches/airtime that makes all the difference! **ID**