

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

CHECK SUITABLE PUBLICATIONS BEFORE PITCHING BUSINESS STORIES



Jacqueline Taylor, Deputy Director, Strategic Operations, Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center Network, shares her expert business advice in her bi-weekly column seen in the Houston Chronicle.

Q. I see stories about other small businesses in the local paper all the time. How do I get them to write about my business? I could use some free publicity.

A. Coverage in the press can certainly help get the word out about your business. And since putting out a newspaper or

magazine on a daily, weekly or monthly basis means a lot of pages to fill, most local media are always on the lookout for good content. But the key word here is “good.” You’ll have to pitch something newsworthy about your business for the media to take notice.

If you’re just getting started, you could most likely get the local paper to cover your grand opening or ribbon cutting. But if you’ve been around for awhile and it’s just business as usual, you’ll have to be more creative. Think about your people, your products, and your activities. You or your staff may have unusual backgrounds or interests, or you may have recently hired a new employee, which could in itself be newsworthy. Perhaps your staff has recently learned new techniques or obtained certifications. Maybe you’ve introduced a new product, or you’ve won an award for customer service. This is community news the local paper might find worth printing.

Outside activities can also be news. If you participate in or sponsor any community events, let the media know. If you don’t, get something going. Hold a contest. Sponsor a charity drive. You could also position yourself as an expert and suggest an article offering free advice.

Whatever your angle, the best way to approach getting free publicity is to do your homework first. Find the right paper or media outlet to approach, and the journalist most appropriate to cover your topic. Start with those publications and writers that published the articles you mentioned about other businesses. Once you’ve determined that you’ve found a good fit, make your pitch. You can typically send an email pitch, although a phone call may also work. You should be able to find contact information within the publication, although you may have to do a little digging.

Make the lead-in catchy, and include the “who, what, when, where and how” of your story. Keep the pitch short and to the point. Make yourself available for an interview or to answer questions the writer may have. If they like working with you, they may come back to you when there’s another suitable opportunity, and you’ll have a chance to promote your business again. And if you don’t get an immediate shot at publicity, keep trying. Another story or a different news outlet might make the difference.



The Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center (TGC SBDC) Network serves 32 counties in Southeast Texas. The program is anchored by a vibrant office facility in midtown Houston and supported by fourteen centers located with or sponsored by colleges and universities and economic development organizations throughout the Gulf Coast. The TGC SBDC Network focuses on providing business training and advising to start-up entrepreneurs, emerging businesses, and firms needing strategies for high growth. Professional business advisors work with client companies to assess feasibility of ideas and business models, develop business plans, identify funding opportunities, prepare loan and financing packages, and analyze financial results. Business advising is supplemented by a wide range of training classes and seminars concentrating on growing a successful business. Workshops are taught by experienced businessmen and women who blend formal learning and real-world experiences into practical curriculum.

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