

Financial Forum **BOOKstore**

YOUR IMAGE IN PRINT

By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

In our media-oriented society, whether you like it or not, your survival and growth is often based on how you appear in print. Worse, many of your prospects will select your competitor based on what they read about him--in the local press or in their own trade journals!

Pick up your area's business magazines or even the business section of your daily newspaper. Every issue of these publications carries an interview with or feature on a local entrepreneur. The majority of these stories are placed by public relations firms who have been paid by the person for whom the story is about. The profiles you see are a part of a coordinated effort undertaken and funded by the company or individual publicized-- the people or companies being featured are paying for it.

Suppose you're a supplier in Kansas City, and the city council has voted to restore a historic building. One well-placed interview on the significance of this structure to the community is likely to catch the eye of hundreds of builders and developers, preservation groups, historical societies, and anyone else concerned with architecture and historic preservation. A Cleveland based distributor wanted to increase his visibility in the community and attract new business. To highlight and promote his line of products, he announced that he would sponsor an urban sculpture award (participants would use only junk hardware parts.) He had "in progress" and "completion" photos taken. A public relation agent was hired from the outset to ensure maximum exposure. A few weeks after the awards were judged, a major story appeared in one of the region's most prestigious monthly magazines, under the by-line of the publicity agent. To the average reader, it appeared that the publication had either contracted with the writer to produce this story or took the piece "over the transom."

Because publishers have long known of the healthy number of entrepreneurs in their community who wish to be written about and who have the funds to commission an article, publishers often get their material for free. The manner in which the name and the products of the supplier are publicized do not appear as advertisements--rather as articles of social or community interest. And, an article is far more influential than an ad taken out by that same company. Why does publicity like this pay? For one thing, it's not necessarily more costly or difficult to get an article written and placed than to simply pay for an ad. The cost of getting an article written, which may span several pages and include photos, is likely to cost far less than a single page ad in the same publication. While the advance planning, coordination, and acceptance of the self-generated article requires considerable effort, it is often a sound investment.

The next time you see an item in print about a company or individual with whom you compete, take an extra second and consider how it got there.



Jeff Davidson is a professional speaker who offers simple advice that makes profound differences in people's lives. Check out his bio at <http://www.financialspeakers.com>. He is the author of *The Joy of Simple Living* (Rodale), *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time* (Alpha), and *Breathing Space* (MasterMedia). His books can be ordered at <http://www.ffbookstore.com>. Additional information about Jeff is available at <http://www.financialspeakers.com>