

Before You Advertise, You Need to Be News

by *Bonnie D. Huval*

A few years ago, I had the honor of being the first American patient for an acupuncturist who immigrated from China to southeast Texas. While we let her needles work, we talked. Although she had practiced at a hospital in China for a decade, she had just gotten American credentials to practice about two weeks earlier. Lacking an office of her own, she arranged to treat patients in a spare treatment room at a chiropractor's office. She still needed to get business cards, buy some advertising...

Whoa! I said not to run any advertisements yet.

She thought she had to run advertisements. If she didn't, nobody would know she was there.

I said she could run some later, if she wanted. "But first, you need to be news!"

Why News?

Years earlier, when I was doing a lot of volunteer work in a non-profit organization, we couldn't afford to buy much ad space. We relied on becoming news to get most of our publicity:

- It cost almost nothing.
- Being in the news gave us more weight and credibility than when we paid for advertisements.
- Our need to maintain momentum combined with our frugal budget to keep us constantly seeking ways to make news around and about our organization, which gave us a third benefit--we couldn't afford to slack off.

My acupuncturist, just getting started in America, did not have a big advertising budget. Fortunately for her, starting her practice *was* news. If she got any of the local media to pick up her story, that would introduce her to the community with instant credibility. Whenever she chose to run advertisements after that, the advertisements would stand on the foundation of news coverage instead of standing alone.

One Way to Become News

She asked how to make herself news. I pointed out that once a week, each local newspaper ran brief notices about business news in the area: the opening of a shop, a business moving its offices, an executive getting a major promotion at a local bank. I suggesting sending a press release to all the local newspapers (including small free weeklies) about starting her practice, with an eye toward getting at least some of her press release into at least one of those business briefs. Acupuncture was

unusual in the area. Her press release would stand out from the crowd and have a better than usual chance of getting published.

Because my acupuncturist had not been in the States very long, she did not feel confident enough about her English to write the press release. I wrote a draft for her with blanks where she could fill in her specific qualifications. She filled in the blanks and mailed it to all the local newspapers.

What Happened

She felt disappointed that only one newspaper included her notice in its weekly business briefs. I felt delighted because it was one of the largest dailies and it ran nearly the entire press release...

And then the ripple effect kicked in.

A local television news crew saw the newspaper. They filmed the acupuncturist treating my neck and another patient's knee, explaining the treatments while she worked. They also filmed a short clip with the chiropractor who was letting her use a treatment room. He was completely bewildered by the arrival of the news crew, but the whole package took up several minutes of the evening news--an astounding proportion of the broadcast.

It was literally publicity that money could not have bought, for both the acupuncturist and the chiropractor.

The acupuncturist has her own office now. She thrives--partly because she learned that before advertising, she needed to be news.

About the author: Bonnie D. Huval has been a consultant since 1992 helping companies make more money, especially with their automation and transaction systems. Her USA and UK business interests also include real estate, property management and a restaurant. Successful projects include cutting time to ship product from two days to two hours, and cutting downtime for product introduction by 40%. Go to <http://www.seneschal.biz> to get such consulting help for your firm. Go to <http://www.makesureyougetpaid.com> for her materials to help small businesses be more successful. Copyright 2009. This article may be reprinted only in its entirety, with full attribution.

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