

Be a Newsmaker, Spread the Word and Reap the Benefits

By David Gould, Staff Editor

There is a verse in the gospel of Matthew about charitable giving that says, “Do not sound a trumpet” when you donate to the poor. This passage is the source of the phrase, “toot your own horn.” And while it’s generally good to heed Scriptural advice on humility, don’t go overboard about it. You’ve got a duty to promote your golf instruction business by getting it mentioned in news

reports, market listings and feature stories. Which means that yes, you will need to toot your own horn.

If nobody else thinks you ought to, rest assured, the media fully expects it. When reporters and TV news producers arrive at work each day, they find press releases from many and sundry sources awaiting them. Many of these get tossed, but a substantial number are kept, circulated, scribbled on and eventually used in reporting. And so, with the good-luck year of 2013 about to begin, and resolution time approaching, here are 10 items on the to-do list for all you news-making instructors out there.

1) Use Missed Opportunities as Motivation Going Forward: A great way to recognize the value of your operation as a news source is to look back on unique occurrences in the past that you made no hay from. A high school team with three of your students went to the state finals, for example. Perhaps the region’s largest-ever First Tee event, with 150-plus participants, took place at your range. Or, maybe it was something off-the-wall: You and your assistant nearly broke the Guinness Book record for most golf shots over 100 meters caught, by a single person with a baseball glove, in 60 seconds. (That record is seven, by the way—seemingly beatable.) You’re surely doing news-worthy things. Most likely you haven’t blown your trumpet effectively.

2) Sketch Out a Spectrum, from Low-Value but Easy to High-Value but Elusive: It helps to frame the publicity challenge on paper—consider using a large sketch pad, turned sideways and set up as a continuum. On the far left would be a simple notice in the town newspaper list-



ing you as one of many teaching professionals participating in Get Golf Ready. On the far right would be a Golf Digest cover story proclaiming you as the greatest golf instructor of modern times. In the middle would be exposure that is of moderate value and somewhat difficult to attain. One simple press release could, in theory, make everything on that spectrum come to be. Go for the low-hanging fruit but aim high as well.

3) Don’t Miss the Easy and Standard News “Hooks”: Did you begin teaching in 1993 at XYZ Golf Club, which originally opened in 1963? If so, you can put out press releases all season that have two built-in hooks—your 15th anniversary as an on-site instructor and the golf club’s 50th anniversary year of operation. For some reason, round-number anniversaries are catnip to news editors and producers. Don’t ever waste a good anniversary when they come around.

4) More Specific News Hooks Include Personnel, Investment, Opportunities and Achievement: As you put together press releases, don’t ask “Will they publish this information?” That’s a case of trying to do the media’s job for them. Instead ask, “Is this legitimate enough to bother announcing?” Remember, sending out press releases is a cumulative process. Three or four get ignored, but when the fifth one gets used, it’s partly because the earlier announcements created name-recognition and a growing respect on the media’s part. If you bring in two new clubfitting systems, put that in a news release and include a paragraph saying how important clubfitting has become. If you hire a new staff instructor from a PGM program, say what a big deal PGM programs are. Use other trends and developments to add weight to what you are announcing.

5) Create a Release Template and Use it Consistently: If your template looks good, with a neatly organized top section, a color logo and very clear copy for the headline and sub-head, plus some timeliness, it will be taken seriously. Most likely you will be circulating it as a digital file, via email, but it could also be printed on paper and

mailed, depending on the news outlet. Remember, if an editor sees your release, judges it to be well-done and logical, you've made some progress even when he or she tosses it aside. They will keep looking at future releases you send, with at least a vague sense that at some point what you share will deserve print space or air time.



your special guest. It's great to invite reporters and broadcasters, but pair the invitation with a news release, so they can say yes and feel legitimate about experiencing what you have to offer without paying for it.

8) Figure out (Media-wise) Where Your Fish Are Biting: Businesses are always asking "How Did You Find Us,"

6) Build Your Template with 7 Standard Elements: When editors and producers receive your emailed news releases, their trained eyes will seek a pattern used by nearly all public relations firms. It starts with a logo up top, then a bold-face headline that fully explains what the release is about. Under that is your sub-head, a why-this-matters blurb of text that is usually styled in italics. The logo, headline and sub-head should be centered. Next comes a "dateline," which actually starts (flush left) with the city and state you're located in, followed by the calendar date in parentheses. Then come two long dashes and your announcement. When the announcement is complete, type in three pound signs (center them) to signify that it's done. Flush left under that is an "About" paragraph with basic facts about your business, and then contact information. These last two elements are boilerplate on every release you send.

7) Check Lists of Media Attendees at Charity Tournaments: Whether it's a celebrity pro-am or a simply a high-profile charity golf tournament in your area, there will tend to be media people invited who end up in the field. Pay attention to the ones who participate regularly. They are the avid golfers within the local media contingent, and worth contacting. Send them a press release to say you've added new technology and made one other move, for example, teaming up with a sports kinesiologist. In the email subject line add "VIP Invitation," then invite this media personality to sample what the new technology offers as

with good reason. As you proceed to publicize your instruction practice, pay attention to what current students say about what media they value. Be it print, radio or TV, their preferences will help you decide what outlets to have on your "send" list.

9) Write with an Upbeat but Serious Tone: Exactly what you say in your three or four paragraphs is of course important. Just be careful not to over-hype what you're reporting. If you've added cutting-edge technology, you can rightly say that no other learning centers in the county or region have it—if that's true. Sound professional and fact-based, but explain your uniqueness and how you stand out.

10) Chat up the Course Raters: Many of the people who arrive to play free rounds and fill out reports for the golf course rankings are low-profile types with faint connection to the editors of the big magazine. Some of them, however, are influential with editors and could potentially help you get some recognition for teaching excellence. If you know they are on-property it doesn't hurt to engage in brief casual conversation as you try to assess their influence.

One final point: The great benefit of sending out press announcements can often be unrelated to any of the information you include in these releases. Instead it can be a matter that you have established yourself as a leader in your field. On that basis, you are the one who gets contacted when an idea they come up with on their own needs golf-instruction expertise.

