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Five Ways to Get (Almost) Free PR

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By Patrick Egan, BusinessNewsDaily Contributor



In a world where the headlines are dominated by companies such as [Goldman Sachs](#), BP and General Motors, it's no small matter for small businesses to snag a sliver of media attention. Even 15 seconds of fame can go a long way toward jump-starting a business to success.

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The first budgets for many [small businesses](#) can't accommodate pricey PR strategies. But the evolution of the [Internet](#) has brought a host of tools for those who have a do-it-yourself mind-set.

Advice from a PR pro

If business owners ask the right questions, they'll find there's far more to a successful [public relations campaign](#) than meets the eye.

"You have to do a lot of homework before you pitch your story and then you have to follow up, too," said Margie Zable Fisher, who has run her [public relations](#) firm for 10 years in Boca Raton, Fla. She specializes in

helping [small businesses](#). The follow-up, she said, remains the most crucial public relations task, and often the most ignored.

This homework won't necessarily require a trip to the library, but it does require diligence and research. First, businesses should identify local publications as well as trade magazines that cover their market. Second, they should find writers at those media outlets most likely to be writing a story that might touch upon their business.

Now, you'll need a story. What sets you apart from competitors? How does your personal story figure into the business? It also pays dividends to keep an eye on the calendar and identify important events or dates that might give writers a news hook. When making your pitch, make it tight. Get to the point quickly. Writers will want to know readily what the story is. Otherwise you'll lose them.

These endeavors cost a business nothing more than time, which is important to note because public-relations expenditures reside in the discretionary budgetary column. When the bottom line gets thin, PR often fails to make the cut.

"People don't want to spend money, I get it," said Zable Fisher.

Luckily for those with tight budgets, there are a number of DIY PR services available on the web. While a PR firm can cost as little as \$1,000 per month, many of these services cost almost nothing at all.

- [PRWeb](#) – This website helps companies create press releases and then pumps out the releases to search engines, news sites, subscribers, journalists and more. Press releases start at \$80, which PRWeb distributes to all major search engines, various news sites plus five industries and two geographic regions. Distribution expands as prices ramp up. At the top end, for \$360, PRWeb says your release will go to the New York Times, USA Today and other premium outlets, and you can include pictures, videos and other bells and whistles.
- [1888 Press Release](#) – Similar to PRWeb, this site offers more a la carte pricing, arguably giving businesses more control. It does mention that its editors will review press releases to make sure they have appropriate content while checking for grammar. A bare-bones release costs \$15. A few options can be added on, such as search engine optimization, at \$50 a pop. Interested businesses should sample the different offerings.
- [MediaSync](#) offers its users access to millions of pieces of content that it aggregates according to markets or subject matter. It allows users to identify and contact the writers and bloggers who have paid the most attention to a user's business. And MediaSync does this for free. "Who is writing articles that have influence over my market?" is how Gary Lee, CEO of mBlast, the parent of MediaSync, described the site's overriding mission. He said several companies offer a similar service at a steep price—upwards of \$7,000. MBlast saw an opportunity to provide basic information about writers and their beats for free. MBlast will soon launch two refined services that charge subscription fees in exchange for "going deeper in measuring influence" of writers.
- [Help a Reporter Out](#), commonly known as HARO. Businesses register as sources, identifying their specialties. Journalists make queries—on average over 200 per day. If a source can help out, he or she e-mails the journalist. If a journalist is interested, he or she will contact the source and conduct an interview. The service is free.
- [Handle Your Own PR](#) is a do-it-yourself PR service specializing in serving entrepreneurs and small, medium and home-based businesses. The website offers free PR tips, low-cost media lists, and press release writing services. Media lists cost, on average, \$100 each.

"I've learned the hard way that reporters don't just write about how fabulous you are or how wonderful your company is," Handle Your Own PR's Jenny Finke told BusinessNewsDaily.

"That's called advertising. Editorial departments want to know your story. Journalists want to learn about what makes you tick and what obstacles you've had to overcome to get where you are today. Sure, they cover basic product stuff, too, but they love telling stories. Stories are the heart and soul of PR."

- [Get Your Business Noticed: Promotion on a Shoestring](#)
- [Can Bad Buzz Be Good?](#)
- [Six Questions for...Jenny Finke, PR Expert](#)

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