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Advertising through case studies in trade magazines: Do's and Don'ts

By Steve Campbell

Looking for an excellent, low-cost way to publicize and promote your products, IP and company to thousands of people in your key markets worldwide? Consider preparing case studies and technical articles for publication as editorial content in industry trade magazines. The reasons are numerous and straightforward.

For one, magazine editors are always on the lookout for well-written and informative project profiles, how-to technical information, or case studies that will inform and attract their readers. Memorable case studies are in high demand, and editors are willing to devote editorial space worth \$30,000–\$40,000 to a good article — at no charge.

Second, they're cost-effective to prepare. Typically based on information that has been gathered previously through hard work by your R&D, engineering and sales/marketing staffs, these articles capitalize on your existing corporate knowledge.

Not to be overlooked are the multiple purposes these articles can serve in today's web-based world. For instance, once packaged they can be published on your own or industry vertical-market websites, or emailed to potential customers as PDFs. In these days of advertising overload and marketing "noise," case studies and project profiles have more value than ever before in getting the market to pay attention to your company.

Given their value, here are some of the top do's and don'ts for getting your case studies and articles published in trade magazines.

The article must be well written and engaging. You must first attract the attention of the editor reviewing your case study for publication. The less work needed to edit the article and make it print-ready, the better the chance it will be run ahead of someone else's.

Put it in context. Why is this topic so important to this magazine's readership? The article must give the editor a compelling reason to publish it and the reader a compelling reason to take time out of a busy day to read it.

Too much technical content is too much. Authors immersed in their own technology often don't know when to stop writing. The result is overwhelmed editors and articles that never make it to print. Learning when to stop writing and how to perform triage (deciding what's really essential and cutting the rest) is critical.

Not enough technical content. Some companies are understandably concerned about protecting their IP and know-how. However, in order to have an article published, you must present new knowledge and innovative concepts. You have to give up something valuable to appease the editor's need to impress readers with interesting editorial content. The upside is an opportunity to educate the audience to follow your path in the marketplace, moving them closer toward purchasing or licensing your products.

Don't be self-serving. Keep the corporate mentions and product comments to a minimum. Avoid the overuse of quotations by your company president. Instead, include quotes from customers and third parties who can independently vouch for a product's value. Quotations from independent utilities or other governmental agencies are invaluable.

Quality photography or graphics go a long way toward moving your case study to the top of the editor's in-box. If a photo is intriguing, it can become a cover shot. Well-designed graphs and graphics can be just the clout you need to get published.

While paid advertising has its value, many smaller companies simply do not have the budget available to make an impact in this way. For these companies, PR — in the form of customer case studies, trade magazine articles, white papers, speaking opportunities at trade shows and conferences, news releases, new-product announcements and the like — can stretch a thin budget and lend corporate credibility in the process.

And for potential customers inundated with marketing “noise,” a quiet read may be just the thing to get them to stop and listen.

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