

The Four Seasons of Publicity

Essentially, a yearlong approach consists of two strategies:

- Timing your existing stories (new product introductions, oddball promotions, business page features, etc.) to fit the needs of the media during particular times of the year.
- Crafting new stories to take advantage of events, holidays and seasonal activities.
- Make sure you allow yourself and the media enough lead time to follow through on a story lead
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lead time simply refers to the amount of time needed for a journalist to complete a story for a particular issue of a magazine or episode of a TV news program. For example, a freelancer for an entertainment magazine may need to turn in a story on Christmas movies by September 15. That's a lead time of three months, time needed for the editor to review and change the piece, the issue to be typeset and printed and distributors to place the issues on newsstands before December. Lead time can range from a day (for hard news pieces in newspapers) to a few days (newspaper features) to a few weeks (weekly magazines) to many months.

First Quarter: January - March

What the Media's Covering: Early in the year, the media is looking ahead. It's a great time to pitch trend stories, marketplace predictions, previews of things to expect in the year ahead, etc. If a new President is being inaugurated, you'll see lots of "Will the new administration be good for the (textile/film/cattle ranching/Internet/...or any other) industry?" types of pieces. This is a good time to have something provocative, or even controversial, to say about your industry.

The media also likes this time of year to run "get your personal house in order" sorts of pieces. Tax planning, home organizing, weight loss, etc. Anything that's geared toward helping people keep their New Year's resolutions can work here.

Key Dates and Events: Can you come up with a story angle to tie your business into an event that typically generates lots of coverage? Put on your thinking cap -- I bet you can! Here are some key events during the First Quarter: Super Bowl, NCAA Tournament, Easter, The Academy Awards. Second Quarter: April - June

What the Media's Covering: An "anything goes" time of year. With no major holidays or huge events, April is a good time to try some of your general stories (business features, new product stuff, etc.) Light, fun stories work here, as a sense of "spring fever" takes hold of newsrooms (journalists are human, you know. They're just as happy winter is over as you are and it's often reflected in the kind of stories they choose to run.). As May rolls around, thoughts turn to summer. Now they're looking for summer vacation pieces, outdoor toys and gadgets, stories about safety (whether automotive or recreational), leisure activities, things to do for kids and so on.

Key Dates and Events: Baseball opening day, tax day (April 15), spring gardening season, Memorial Day, end of school, summer vacation. Third Quarter: July - September

What the Media's Covering: The dog days of summer are when smart publicity seekers really make hay. Folks at PR firms are on vacation, marketing budgets are being conserved for the holidays and reporters are suddenly accessible and open to all sorts of things. Get to work here, with creative, fun angles. Entertainment-themed pieces do well in the summer, anything with celebrities works, lighter business stories, new products, trend pieces, technology news, back to school education-themed articles, you name it. Reporters are about to get deluged once again come September, so use this window of opportunity wisely.

Key Dates and Events: July 4th, summer movies, summer travel, back to school. Fourth Quarter: October - December

What the Media's Covering: The busiest time of the media calendar, the Fourth Quarter is when the business media turns serious and the lifestyle media thinks Holidays, Holidays, Holidays. Business angles need to be hard news. Fluffy trend pieces won't cut it, as business editors begin to take stock of the state of the economy and the market. It's a tough time to put out a new product release. For the non-business media, think Christmas. Christmas travel, Christmas gifts, Christmas cooking, whatever. If you have a product or service that can be given as a holiday gift, get on the stick early.

Nail down lead times for the publications you're targeting, call to find out who's handling the holiday gift review article and get your product in the right person's hands in plenty of time -- along with a pitch letter or release that makes a strong case about how what a novel, unusual or essential gift your product makes. After Christmas, you have a brief window for "Best of the Year", "Worst of the Year" and "Year in Review" pieces. Be creative -- the media loves these things.

Key Dates and Events: Labor Day, World Series, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year's Eve.

