

PRESS GUIDE

#SMALLBIZSTUDIO

little
word
studio



OVERVIEW

now is the time to share your story

One of the best mechanisms at the disposal of every small business right now is the press. In this guide, we'll outline the specific steps you should take (broadly applicable to a range of small businesses) when crafting the story you'll share with the press, conducting media outreach and finally, publishing the story on your own "press" outlets. The old adage "control the narrative, don't let the narrative control you" is absolutely correct. The good news is, nobody but you can tell the most accurate story of your business because you're on the inside, you are boots on the ground every day, (and late night) and you understand better than anyone else the intricacies involved in making your business a success. That's the good news. You have all the tools you need for obtaining media coverage right now. The (slightly) bad news is that the methodology we're about to go over takes a lot of work. You have to properly package your business-specific knowledge so it's attractive and newsworthy for the media outlets your target customers are reading. This exercise might sound simple but it'll take some thought and planning to execute properly. Still, the payoff will make it all worth your time and effort. Ready? Let's get started ...



YOUR STORY

In real estate, the difference between a house and a home is often a great story.

- *Melissa Kandel* for Forbes

Your story can be anything. If, for instance you manufacture N95 surgical masks, the press will probably be reaching out to you, in which case you won't even need to go through this process because your story is already compelling, important and newsworthy. For the rest of us, our "story" is going to take a bit more work.

When you think about your central story, think about ways your brand can uniquely benefit the community, medical professionals or consumers. If you're a meditation app, maybe you discount your services or provide one month free. "Benefit" is a pretty loose term. It can mean an actual additive measure that will improve the health and wellness of a given individual. It can also mean a spiritual benefit, an emotional benefit, a respite from the doomsday headlines and gloom of quarantined life at home. Here are two types of stories that are resonating right now:

Free or at-cost services. One of our clients just offered at-cost relief structures to the medical community, providing temporary hospitals and testing sites for as low a price tag as possible. If you sell beer, skinny your margins. The benefits are twofold as a small biz survival tactic and a way to help a financially stunted society heal.

Social responsibility. If you can't do free, carve out a percentage of sales to donate. Find a reputable charity (food banks are always a good start) and create an execution plan to donate X% of all sales from now until DATE. Incentivize consumers with the authentic allure of altruism. To get you started, here are some national charities (many with local chapters) to consider:



Tip for agents:

More than ever, buyers and sellers are wondering: "How's the market?" But just pitching your point of view to reporters won't get you coverage. Use Canva, PhotoShop or even Excel and Microsoft Word to create a custom infographic showing a current market snapshot or providing valuable information. If you have MLS data, use that to create a graph then add commentary below. If you're more of a right-brain thinker, put together a pointed infographic with advice, e.g. "How sellers can help buyers experience their home without stepping foot through door," or "five ways you can 'tour' properties if you're looking to purchase a home during COVID-19."



Invisible Hands



PLAN

Now that you've got your story, the next step is to create a plan to share this story with as many people as possible, especially if they can potentially convert to sales. Here's a sample communications strategy you can adapt to your own business. Be sure you have all pieces in place BEFORE you execute.

STEP 1 - BREAK THE NEWS

The first step is to decide where you're going to "break" the news. You could start with a press release (see more information on the next page) or, you could start with a blog post or even a long Instagram caption. (If you're breaking it on your own platform, use the platform with the highest engagement.) Long-form content is in. Over-communication is in. Don't worry about going long on your story; people are paying attention and reading because well, there's not much else to do. If you decide on the formal route of a press release, we've got a template on the next page. If you publish with a blog post, make sure you start with the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and WHY in your very first paragraph. This means whatever benefit you're providing to the community, to your customers or to medical professionals, it'll need to be placed upfront in your story. Add insights from key team members and before you publish anything, make sure everyone on your team has seen the draft and knows exactly when it's going "live."

STEP 2 - PITCH THE STORY

Next comes media outreach. If you're organizing a virtual charity event, you should definitely include the details in your pitch and make sure you've given yourself at least one week between the start date of the event and the release of your news to generate press. Create 2-3 pitch email templates (we'll have a sample on the Pitch page) for different types of media you can target (e.g. entertainment media, Business 2 Business [B2B] industry media, local media, etc. Next, reach out to any media contacts you know. If you don't know any, visit the media outlet, search for the reporter whose beat is as close to your story as possible (e.g. if you're a wine company, the food & wine reporter) and send a personalized email using your pitch template. Another approach to pitching the media is using a simple internet search to find reporters covering stories similar to yours. For example, if you were a jewelry vendor at Coachella and now you're donating a portion of your online jewelry sales to a local charity, look up reporters covering lifestyle aspects of Coachella (or event fashion) and when you pitch them, reference the story they wrote.

STEP 3 - ENGAGE YOUR TRIBE

Send a dedicated e-Blast to your contacts, provide employees with sample text to share the news and leverage all internal platforms you have to create your own buzz separate from traditional media exposure. Every business is its own media company, so now is the time to double down on that long-accepted dictum. This of course also means sharing on all your social media platforms, perhaps with a dedicated hashtag so you can track re-shares and posts. (E.g. for this small business series, we're using #SmallBizStudio.) It's also a way for followers to find YOUR content.

STEP 4 - CREATE SHAREABLE CONTENT

Everyone's searching for positive news, so if you've got it, they'll want to hear it. If you have a graphic designer, create a simple graphic (your "story" logo) you can send with your eBlast that's representative of your initiative. You should also create story-sized images (1080x1920 px) and LinkedIn sized images (1200x628 px). Post the story-sized images to (where else?) your Instagram story and tag any relevant accounts that might re-share. Make sure the image has your handle and hashtag on it!

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

[LOGO IN HEADER]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[COMPANY NAME] to [ACTION YOU ARE TAKING E.G. DONATE 10% OF PROFITS TO ABC CHARITY] in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

[SUBHEAD EXPLAINING MORE ABOUT THE INITIATIVE E.G. Award-winning winery aims to help feed the community in partnership with No Kid Hungry]

[CITY, STATE] (MONTH DAY, YEAR) - [NAME OF COMPANY], [DESCRIPTION OF COMPANY e.g. "winner of Orange County Foodie Award for "Best Burgers"'] has announced it will [INITIATIVE YOU ARE ANNOUNCING, e.g. "Donate 10% of all delivery sales to Feeding America."] The initiative is aimed directly at [THING IT WILL DO e.g. "providing health professionals and government officials with at-cost disaster relief structures amid the COVID-19 pandemic.'].]

[QUOTE FROM COMPANY LEADERSHIP/TEAM LEADER ABOUT INITIATIVE, e.g. "Even during these uncertain times, buyers still need homes and sellers still need to sell," said [NAME OF TEAM LEADER], [POSITION AT COMPANY]. "We're here to ensure those activities can safely continue - practicing social distancing and using digital tools - while also donating a portion of our commission from each sale to support the medical community.

[1-2 MORE SENTENCES DESCRIBING THE INITIATIVE, YOUR COMPANY, YOUR PAST INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO ADD EDITORIAL COLOR TO THE STORY AND CREATE A DEEPER NARRATIVE THAT RESONATES. YOU CAN ALSO USE THIS SPACE TO ADD ANY RELEVANT STATISTICS OR CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION.]

[QUOTE FROM CHARITY LEADER IF YOU CAN GET IT OR WRAP-UP QUOTE FROM SAME TEAM LEADER OR ANOTHER MEMBER OF LEADERSHIP TEAM. E.g. "We are thrilled to partner with ABC Eatery to benefit the recipients of our meal delivery service," said Patricia Commlock, president of Feeding Hands for Good. "This initiative will help bring comfort to those who aren't sure how to safely put food on the table."

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[COMPANY NAME]

[COMPANY BOILERPLATE INCLUDING CONTACT INFORMATION, WEBSITE, PHONE, ETC.]

Media Contact

[NAME OF MEDIA CONTACT], [TITLE OF MEDIA CONTACT], [EMAIL], [PHONE NUMBER]

services to consider for distribution



\$1,100 for 1 national release



Annual fee of \$195 + \$350+ per release



\$460 per release (400 word limit)

OUTREACH

Don't pitch the media a fastball; pitch them a nice, slow ball they can catch and release.

Best Practices

CREATE SEVERAL PITCH TEMPLATES

Identify the 2-3 (no more) types of media you'd like to pitch. For instance, if you're a coffee shop you can pitch: Industry publications, consumer coffee publications and local publications in the city/town where your shop is based. Think like a reporter at that outlet: How can you re-frame and re-structure to story to make it enticing for the writer to cover? (Media outlets are businesses just like yours; reporters work for editors who approve and edit the quality and editorial value of their work. Here's a sample pitch:

Hi [NAME OF REPORTER],

I want to bring to your attention to [THE PRESS RELEASE/INITIATIVE] [NAME OF COMPANY] [JUST DISTRIBUTED ACROSS THE WIRES/JUST ANNOUNCED]. [NOTE ABOUT IMPACT, e.g. "With thousands of events canceled to flatten the curve of coronavirus contagion, ABS Studio based in [CITY] is taking a proactive approach to help our society amid the COVID-19 crisis. We are [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVE]. This will [BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF POSITIVE IMPACT OF INITIATIVE ON INDUSTRY/COMMUNITY, ETC. - BASE THIS ON THE TYPE OF REPORTER YOU ARE PITCHING E.G. IF IT IS A COMMUNITY PUBLICATION STRESS THE BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY.]

To learn more, please see the attached document [EITHER ATTACH A PDF OF YOUR RELEASE OR A PDF VERSION OF YOUR BLOG POST] or visit [WWW.WEBSITE.COM/URLofINITIATIVE]. Our [TITLE AND NAME OF PERSON AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT E.G. CEO ANNE SMITH] is available for comment, and we're happy to share more details about our new initiative.

Thank you,

[NAME OF PERSON WHO SENT PITCH]

DO YOUR RESEARCH

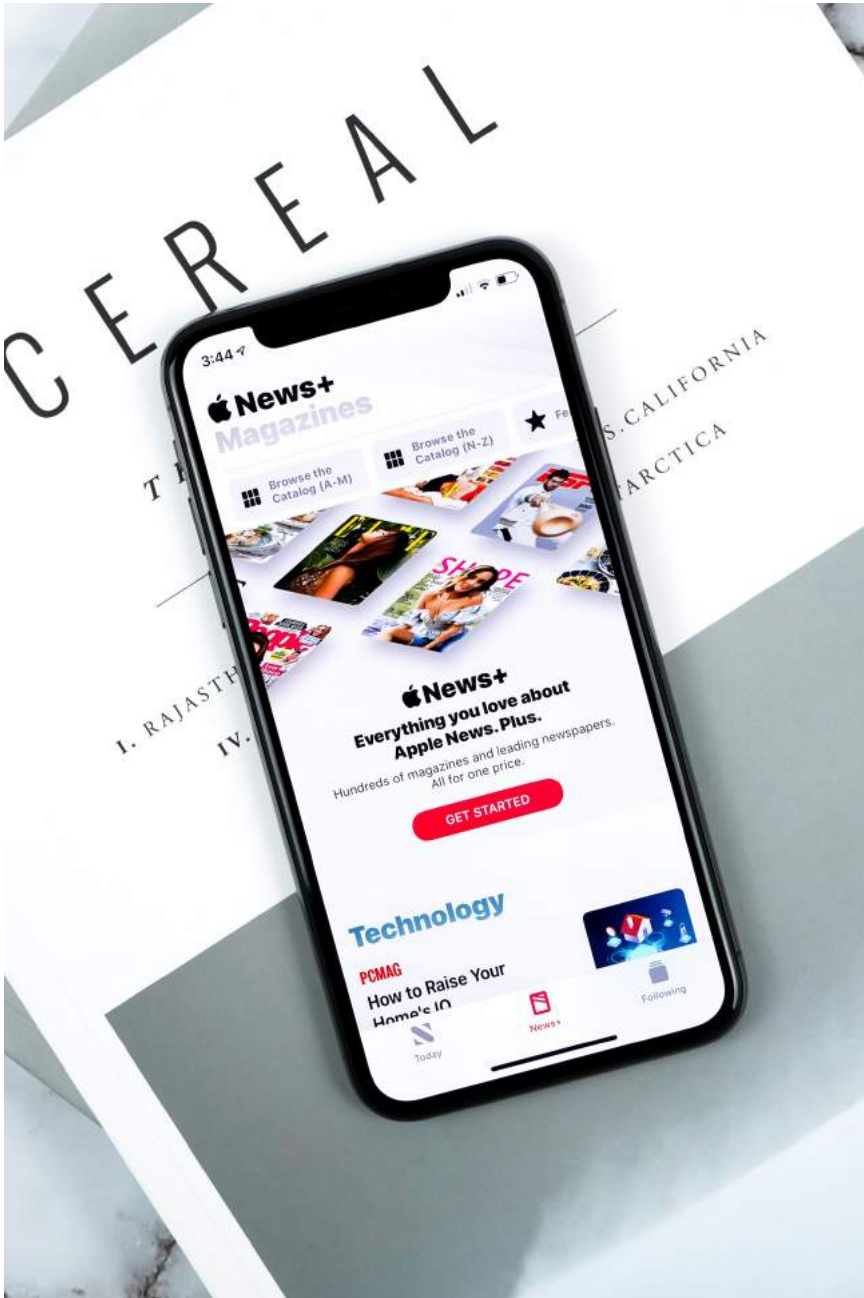
You might have an entire list of media contacts, you might even be friends with Anna Wintour, in which case this section is irrelevant. If you don't (and that's OK), you'll just have some work to do. The first step is to google stories related to your industry or initiative and find contact information for reporters covering similar topics. (See Coachella jewelry example on Plan page.) Next, create a spreadsheet with the following columns at the top: REPORTER NAME / WEBSITE (could also be URL of related story you found via google search) / PITCH TYPE (e.g. Industry, B2B, etc. so you know what template to use) / DATE PITCHED / RESPONSE DATE / FOLLOW UP / NOTES

TRACK SUCCESS AND FOLLOW UP

Now it's time to track your progress. On the spreadsheet, note the date you reach out to reporter (DATE PITCHED) and if/when you get a response, note that date too (it's important to keep track of when they responded so you can follow up if you don't hear back from them or don't see a published story in the next few days). If you hear crickets (and for many outlets you will), you can send a brief follow-up email 1-2 days later and note the date of that outreach, too. Use the notes section for any additional information you gather or, for instance, if the reporter requests high-res image and you need to send those or schedule the interview.

SELF-PUBLISH

As a reminder, post your news story on your own platforms to "self-publish" the release ...



BLOG

Post the release text on your blog or use your blog to release the story

FACEBOOK

Link to release/blog post, follow up with branded graphic (square) with link in caption

LINKEDIN

Link to release/blog post with 3-4 sentence commentary and hashtags

INSTAGRAM

Consider a 2-slide post; one with your "story" graphic, one with text about your initiative

INSTAGRAM STORY

Post your branded graphic, tagging accounts & share all posts that tag you

TWITTER

Tweet a link to your release/blog post - the next day, tweet your graphic with a link in the tweet (use your hashtag)

PINTEREST

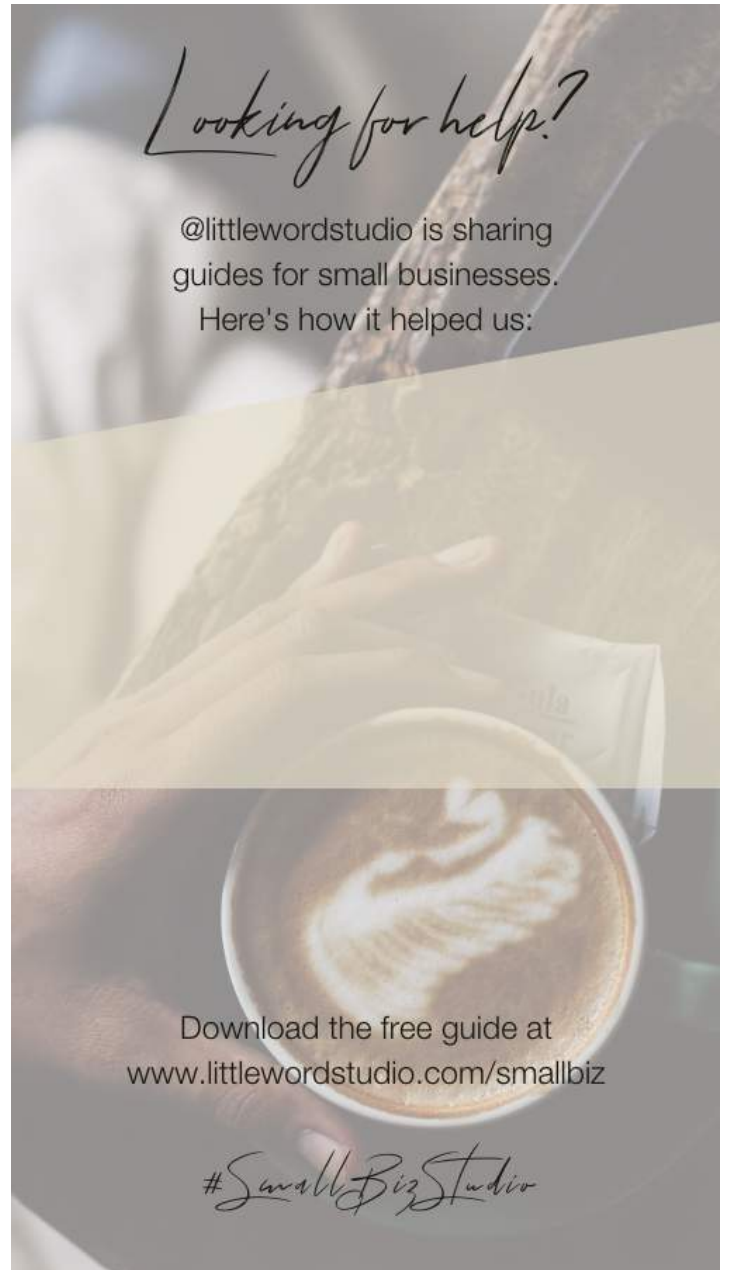
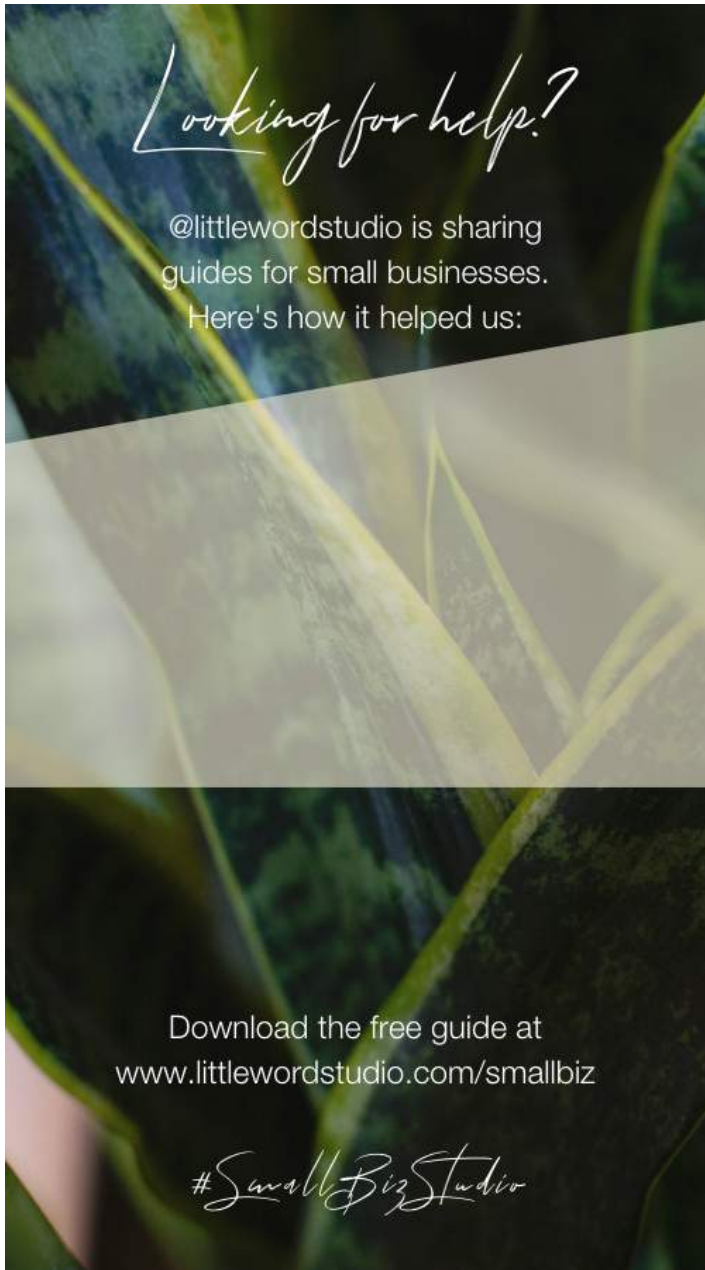
Pin whatever image you used in your blog post to your Pinterest page with a description of the initiative

E-BLAST

Send an e-Blast to your contacts with a link to the story and shareable graphics

SHARE THIS!

If you liked this guide, you can share one of these images to your Instagram story to help other small businesses just like yours.



Questions? Get in touch:

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