



CLIVE SIMPKINS



- Marketing and Communication Strategist
- Author of:

- *Presenting, Speaking and Facilitating Secrets*
- *Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life*
- *Media Appearance Secrets*

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PUBLICISE YOUR BUSINESS (PART 1)

A quotation attributed to car mogul Henry Ford reads: "I know that 50 per cent of my advertising works – I just don't know which 50 per cent." That dilemma has not changed. Straight above-the-line (print, radio and TV) advertising is also not necessarily the best or most cost-efficient way to go; particularly if you're in a small- to medium-sized business. Below-the-line as it used to be called – brochures, billboards, posters, events, promotions and today Internet or website – may prove to be a better option for you.

On a continuum of advertising (you pay) to advertorial (you pay but it looks a bit like editorial) to editorial (you don't pay anything), editorial has the highest credibility. It's perceived to be an impartial endorsement of your service or products by the publication, website, radio station, TV channel or social media outlet. That's powerful. So particularly when you haven't got the budget to spend on ads but you urgently need to raise the profile of your service or product offering, how do you do so?

The biggest challenge in publicising your business is to rise above the clutter. Clutter refers to competing material or other advertisements in the same environment in which you wish to promote your offering. If you don't have large budgets to be able to make the proverbial 'splash' – a regular print ad may be eclipsed, remain unnoticed or be rendered functionally invisible because of other information dominating and obscuring

it. So is conventional advertising for you? It may well be part of your mix but you might wish to include some other options.

Disproportionate visibility is usually the happy consequence of engaging in a community-based or benefitting project. It used to be called corporate social responsibility. Today, it's become corporate social investment. The title is an explicit acknowledgement that some return is expected from it. Not a monetary one, but an image or profile-building one. Whilst that shouldn't be the sole objective, it's a desirable and legitimate expectation for a business. For an individual, that same expectation might be distasteful but that doesn't seem to stop actors and celebrities from milking such opportunities for their own ends.

What works really well is to get involved with a project or initiative in your own area. This is a bit of a problem if your business has a national footprint. However, if you operate in a more specific geographic location, it's to your advantage. Your local Caxton tabloid format newspaper – in my case, the Rosebank-Killarney Gazette – has phenomenal pull. These 'local rags' as they're called, are anything but rags. They have high-interest community information in them and are often read by several people in a household in contrast to broadsheet newspapers which may be read by just one or two people. The good old 'Sefricanism' of 'local is lekker' applies. The editors of these tabloid newspapers also have an

interest in showcasing what's happening in their specific distribution area – so they're significantly more receptive to what you're doing than a more commercial advertising revenues-driven publication.

Pick a cause that's close to your heart and which has some relevance or 'fit' (if possible) with your business and which will benefit the local community. Think of topical issues. Some of them are education, environmental, HIV/Aids, road conditions (potholes), safety, neighbourhood aesthetics, etc. Is there a roadway island that you can adopt (speak to the local authorities) and on which you can plant trees, plants or create a neat gravel layout? If yes, it's a nice way of being able to have a legitimate, appropriate and aesthetically appealing sign advertising you as the maintainer or custodian of that particular feature. Please don't do what a local nursery in Gauteng did. They adopted a traffic island and then left it to become overgrown with weeds and littered with plastic bags and discarded sweet wrappings. That was negative publicity of the worst order.

Get hold of the community radio stations in your area and talk with their marketing or promotions manager, share some thoughts around how you might meaningfully and cost-efficiently engage with them.

In the second portion of this article, I'll give you some more, simple, practical suggestions for leveraging your media visibility with little or no money.