

Contemporary Ceramic Studios Association 2002 Press Kit

Publicity 101

(Or "You won't get what you want in life, honey, if you don't ask for it!")

As a Contemporary Ceramics Studio owner, you have plenty of opportunities to use the media to tell the world about your business. In order to take advantage of those opportunities, you may want to develop a game plan, a strategy, in other words, a **media campaign**.

¶ Why develop a media campaign?

I guess my mother would say, "You won't get what you want in life, honey, if you don't ask for it." If you don't ask for media coverage, your chances of getting it are slim to none. Yes, some media coverage can and may have already dropped in your lap, but in order to use the media to work for you, a well-executed media plan is essential. You are a successful studio owner; you've proved you are resourceful, now apply that resourcefulness to your media campaign. Using common sense, persistence, and a good deal of patience, you can plan and execute a media plan in your community that will draw new and repeat customers to your studio.

¶ What is a media campaign, exactly?

Essentially, it's a plan of attack with a start date, an end date and a list of goals. For example, you may want to increase business in the first quarter of the year. You can raise awareness of your studio by informing the media about any special programs you might have. How do you go about it? Later in this presentation, we'll explore a mythical media plan for an imaginary studio, "The Hot Pot Spot".

¶ The basics of a good media campaign.

Three basic elements are essential to the success of any media campaign.

- ~ **A good story.** As a contemporary studio owner, you already have a great story to tell. There are almost no negative aspects to your business, it's relatively new and exciting and the media likes it. However, once your local paper has written one story about your studio, you'll have to work hard to create new stories, new hooks, new reasons why the media should cover you.
- ~ **Good connections.** These are the backbone of any media campaign. They are to be cultivated, nurtured and protected. If a media person knows that he or she can always count on you to give a good interview, provide a quick story in a pinch and respond quickly to his or her requests (with a smile), then you'll continually receive good coverage. However, if you pester, whine, cajole, bully or otherwise annoy a media contact, you can count on very little coverage over the long term.
- ~ **Gentle, productive persistence (emphasis on "gentle").** Persistence is not a bad thing, unless it goes over to the "dark side". How do you define "gentle, productive persistence"? Think about a bisque, brush or glaze supplier who tends

to call you too often, even though you told the salesperson that you weren't interested the last five times he or she called. Too persistent, right? Not productive for you or for the caller. It's too persistent for media, too. Now think about the supplier who checks in with you at reasonable intervals, not to chat, but to offer a new product, a new promotion or a special service targeted just for you. That's gentle, productive persistence.

¶ **"Thou Shalt Make Life Easier For the Media".**

When you embark on a media campaign, you should realize one important thing: your job is to make an editor's or reporter's job easier. If you want to forge a long-term relationship with a media contact or outlet, remember that your own agenda will be secondary to their needs.

BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY CONTACT THE MEDIA

You might think that the first step in a media campaign is writing a press release. Not true. First, you must prepare for the desired result of your press release—a media person who contacts you and wants to write a story about your studio. Here are the first steps you should do BEFORE you contact the media:

- ¶ **Get real.** Just because you send a 5-page press release to the editor-in-chief of your local paper doesn't mean you will see a front page, full-color story on your studio the following week. Often, releases or contacts you make today may not bear fruit until many months later, so adjust your expectations to match the typical response to a media campaign.
- ¶ **Prepare your studio.** Media folks are essentially hyper-consumers. They very quickly need to know how your business works so that they can explain it to their readers or viewers. It may be helpful (if you have not already done so) to set up a simple display shelf or cart that demonstrates the process of transforming plain bisque into a finished work of ceramic art. Try to make the space media-friendly, creating enough room for camera crews or journalists to move around and take pictures or tape. Include signs *indoors* that state the name of your studio. If a picture is worth a thousand words, wouldn't it be helpful if the photo that appears in your Sunday paper's lifestyle section include your studio's name big as life? Essentially, look at your studio with a critical eye and determine if it's media-friendly.
- ¶ **Become an expert.** The media will consider you an expert in your field. Make sure that whoever is going to talk to the press on a regular basis knows everything there is to know about your studio, ceramics, thermodynamics, and the three distinguishing marks of true Ming Dynasty Pottery (just kidding!). Remembering that your goal is to make the journalist's job easier and as an expert, you must learn to deliver good, concise answers to potential questions:
- How many studios exist nationwide?*
Good answer: Over 1,000
Bad answer: I don't know but I bet you could find out on the web.
- When was ceramics first invented?*
Good answer: I'm not sure, but I'll get back to you on that.
Bad answer: I don't know but I bet you could find out at the library.

How does a kiln work?

Good answer: It's like a very hot pizza oven that is computer programmed to fire bisque at just the right temperature.

Bad answer: Let me just photocopy my kiln manual for you and you can look up the answer yourself.

You get the idea.

Here are more potential questions, for which you might want to develop *concise* answers:

- ~ How long does an average piece take to complete? How many customers did you have last year?
- ~ How many parties did you host last year?
- ~ What types of parties?
- ~ What's the most popular piece in your studio?
- ~ How many different types of bisque do you offer? Funniest story?
- ~ Worst disaster?
- ~ Busiest season?
- ~ Any celebrities come in? (Remember, the local weatherman is a celebrity in his own town.)

Practice the art of the sound byte. Contrary to what you might think, your life story from birth to the grand opening of your studio is interesting only to you and your mother. Develop a concise answer to the question, "How did you get started?" Practice answering media-type questions in two or three sentences at best.

- ~ **Look for the "newsworthy".** Pretend you are a reporter who is looking for a unique story. Most folks don't know how to identify what is "newsworthy" about their businesses. Look at your studio, yourself, your employees, your location, your customers, your suppliers and find stories that you might find interesting to read. Here are some questions to ask yourself:
 - ~ "Are there any special circumstances about the owners? Interesting first career? Immigrants? Mother-daughter team? Handicaps overcome? Awards? Education? Conventions attended (hint, hint)?"
 - ~ "Is there something unexpected about your business flow? Unexpected popular holidays for ceramics?"
 - ~ "Do you have a charity or benefit program?"
 - ~ "Are you planning any special events other than the norm? Midnight Halloween studio hours? Valentine's Sweetheart Studio time complete with pizza and heart-shaped cake?"

You have to ask yourself the question: "If I were not a studio owner, and I found this story in the paper, would I find it interesting?"

You can overdo the "newsworthy" thing. Don't make things up. And don't try to turn a non-story into a story, for example: "First woman whose last name starts with the letter "C" to address ceramics convention on a Monday in Phoenix." Probably won't make it into print and, worse, will annoy editors.

- ¶ **Be ready with photos and project files.** Depending on the media outlet's needs, it pays to prepare a few essential photos or instructions. We recently had an editor ask for studio images with people. She did not have time to schedule a

photographer, but wanted to add visual interest to her story. The worst thing you can answer here is: "Sorry, I don't have any good photos." You might consider investing in:

- ~ Good, well-lit color photography of bright, high-contrast finished pieces;
- ~ Actual physical samples of projects that can be used in a newspaper or magazine;
- ~ Instructions for those projects;
- ~ Good, well-lit shots of your studio when it is empty;
- ~ Good, well-lit studio shots of smiling people busy at your painting tables; include all ages and genders.
- ~ A flattering photo of the studio owners.

¶ **Identify "extras".** Make a list of loyal customers or family members who can be asked to appear on camera at the drop of a hat looking well-dressed, enthusiastic and excited about ceramics at 6:00am. Optional: note bribery preferences, i.e. glazed doughnuts, blueberry muffins, iced triple non-fat latte with a shot of vanilla.

¶ **Maintain a healthy perspective.** Try to keep the media thing in perspective. If a small local homeschooler's newsletter misspells the name of your studio, while ironic, the error probably won't have a catastrophic effect on your business. On the other hand, a regular appearance on your local morning news & talk show, while time consuming and fraught with hassles, has the potential to reach a wide audience and deliver many customers. Only you can determine if the effort required by a media plan is worth it.

¶ **Identify local and outlying media.**

You can do this by scanning all the newsstands in your local supermarket, bookstore, convenience store and library. Note all the relevant contact information: editor's name; special editor's names (home, lifestyle, weekend) street address (for deliveries) and mailing address; phone, fax and e-mail.

If you live in a large metropolitan area, check your library for these directories;

- ~ Gales Publications
- ~ Bacon's Publications
- ~ Standard Rate and Data

They may help you find media outlets in your area that you did not know existed. These kinds of directories are usually organized by geographic region. Make a list of all media that service your market, including:

- ~ Tourist publications
- ~ Newspapers (daily)
- ~ Newspapers (weekly)
- ~ Regional parent publications (example. L.A. Parent)
- ~ Specialty publications (example, newsletters for local organizations)
- ~ City or regional web portals

Once you have created your master list, be sure to call each contact to confirm that he or she is the right person to receive press releases about lifestyle, entertainment or home decorating topics.

¶ **Organize media contact by "target" audience.**

Nothing irritates a media person more than being sent material that doesn't fit his or her publication. In other words, don't send a piece about your Valentine party to the local business journal.

¶ **Get creative.**

This shouldn't be hard for you. Simply apply the same principles you use to dream up ways to market your studio to the public. You might want to access the CCSA message board for good ideas. Here are a few events and ideas that may catch the attention of your local media:

- ~ Plan an annual benefit. A certain percentage of all proceeds on a given day will be donated to
- ~ Host a ceramics party for the local high school volleyball team that just won the state championship.
- ~ Watch local event planning and try to complement other pr efforts. For example, offer a free two-hour session to the Homecoming Queen and King.
- ~ Keep track and promote studio statistics. Anniversaries (and studio party to celebrate), 10,000th kiln firing (and studio party to celebrate),
- ~ Invite local celebs to paint a piece to be auctioned off in a local benefit auction. Ask the mayor, newscasters or (winning!) football coach to paint a piece and donate it to the biggest annual benefit auction in town.
- ~ Teach Your Teacher to Paint Day. Kids treat favorite teachers to a painting session.

SO YOU THINK YOU ARE READY TO CONTACT THE MEDIA

Once you've planned the compelling, fun, engaging, meaningful and photogenic event, send out a press release on it BEFORE it takes place. If the paper or local news show wants to cover it, they'll have time to plan or participate. Be sure to take good photos of the event, so that if the media isn't interested this year, you'll have great photos in hand to show the media when promoting next year's event.

¶ **Send a press release to the media.**

Make your press release short and to the point. Include contact information, and if applicable, times you can be reached at those phone numbers. (See attached sample releases from The Hot Pot Spot.) Most frequently, you will be mailing your releases, but it is acceptable to fax or e-mail your releases, if you don't overdo it.

¶ **What to do after you send your press release.**

- ~ First, wait. Usually about two to three weeks. The media is inundated with press releases, depending on the size of the outlet and often can't get through the in-box much quicker than a couple of weeks.

- ~ Second, call. Make it quick and just as a follow-up. Answer questions succinctly and offer additional information as needed. If the person says they've never received it, offer to send another copy. If the person to whom you addressed the release is no longer there, try to find out the replacement and send another copy.
- ~ Third, respond to all requests as soon as possible. Send photos, projects, whatever, right away.
- ~ If the media contact says they are not interested at all, don't try to talk them into a story. Hang up, keep them on your list and try again with the next press release. If the person sounds like they are on the fence about the story, (usually wondering if they can sell the story to their boss), keep talking. This is your chance to "pitch" the editor on why this would make such a charming, colorful, wonderful human interest piece and may earn the reporter a Pulitzer Prize.

¶ **What you can expect as a result of sending out publicity materials.**

- ~ **Short deadlines.** "Can I bring a camera crew there in about a half hour?" "Will you bring about 20 finished pieces to my downtown office this afternoon so my art director can look at them?" "The only day I have free is _____ ? Can I interview you then? (Fill in your only day off in the past three weeks.)"
- ~ **The PR Shuffle.** You got up at 4:00am, met a camera crew at 6:00 with a loyal group whom you bribed with doughnuts and coffee, alerted your sister-in-law to tape the show, returned home to watch the tape only to discover that the President made some earth-shattering announcement and your segment was bumped. Not always a disaster, since they might air the tape the following day (barring more presidential announcements), but disappointing nonetheless. Expect it. Happens all the time. Just gracefully accept it, contact the media person with whom you worked and try to schedule another time.
- ~ **Mistakes.** They are inevitable. Only you can determine if the mistake is one that will frustrate readers or viewers. Did they spell your middle name wrong? Probably not worth calling the reporter to complain. Did they get the address wrong? Best to call and politely point out that the address is wrong and readers won't be able to find your studio. Either way, pointing out a mistake should be done with caution and tact. Demanding a correction immediately won't win you any long-term friends in the media

¶ **What you CANNOT expect as a result of sending a press release.**

- ~ **An immediate response.** Yes, it happens, but it's rare. You can count on having to make follow-up phone calls to make sure your story made it to the right person.
- ~ **Long conversations with reporters and editors.** These folks are just as busy as you are. When you can get the right person on the phone, be brief, informative and helpful.

¶ **How to handle awkward questions from the media.**

Unless you accidentally fry someone's cat in your kiln, you can probably count on only positive publicity. In the normal course of a media campaign you probably won't receive too many tough questions, if any. However, journalists have been known to ask a tough question or two. It's in their nature. The best way to handle the awkward question is to answer it. Do not avoid answering. Make the most direct, clear and unflustered answer you can manage. Try not to let it rattle you, smile and keep going with the interview. *Under no circumstances* should you become hostile or combative with the interviewer. Be prepared. Brainstorm with your staff. Role play a little. Ask other studios on the CCSA message board if they can share any difficult or awkward publicity experiences.

Awkward questions you might receive:

- ~ "Isn't this kind of an expensive hobby?"
- ~ "Aren't some of the materials you use in your studio toxic? How are you disposing of these materials?"
- ~ "Isn't there a new ceramics studio opening across town? How do you think it will affect your business?"
- ~ "My neighbor came here once and brought her own bottle of wine. Do you have a liquor license? Is that legal?"

You can easily defuse a tough question by preparing a direct answer, delivering that answer with confidence and moving on.

The following is a set of sample media plan, schedule and press releases for the imaginary studio The Hot Pot Spot owned by Ima Jolica.

Media Plan for The Hot Pot Spot.

¶ Overall Goal: Increase awareness of studio and develop owner as local "expert".

General Release: Prepare and send general press release about The Hot Pot Spot (see sample). This release can be mailed on its own or mailed as a background release for all media materials mailed throughout the year.

Periodic trend release: Keep the studio in the media by releasing trend information on ceramics studios in general or on trends that relate. Source for this material can come from CCSA or other relevant sources

Newsworthy release: Plan to send one or two "newsworthy" releases to your local media each year. (see sample)

¶ Specific Goal: Increase business during the month of March based on a special event.

Event planned:

In honor of Read Across America Day (March 2), throughout the month of March, kids can pick up a reading log at your studio. They are to record all the books they read (or that parents read to them) and return the completed log for a discount at your studio. Awards given to top three readers.

Media contact planned:

December Contact local school districts, libraries, homeschool associations, preschools and book stores for cooperation.

January Identify usual media including outlets and media opportunities for each cooperating entity (newsletters, etc.).

February 1 Prepare and mail press release about the event, naming all participating organizations. Include schedule of events: for kick-off and awards day.

February 15 Work with schools to add a special flyer to "take home" packets for elementary school kids.

February 15 Follow up mailing to media with brief telephone calls.

March 1 Hold kick-off event. Take photos.

March 31 Hold awards event. Take photos.

April 1 Prepare and mail follow-up release detailing how many kids participated, how many books were read with quotes from local school administrators. Provide names of three top winners.

April 15 Follow-up with brief phone calls.

