

# INSIDE BIZ®

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## YOUR AVERAGE BEAR cont'd...

Calyx & Corolla, an upscale catalog and Internet flower company positioned in the flower market as "The Flower Lover's Flower Company." Together, the two entities have merged seamlessly under the common principles of quality and service. According to President Andy Williams, it is the human touch that makes



Calyx & Corolla so successful in its public relations. "Our telephone representatives are encouraged to strike up a conversation with our customers," Williams explains. "It's different from any other flower company." Using the reps as ambassadors of public relations has been a tremendous benefit to the company, which sees most of its sales from repeat customers.

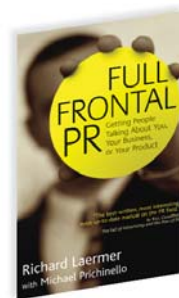
Although the Vermont Teddy Bear Company has been featured on such programs as "Good Morning America" and counts celebrities among its fan base, both L'Huillier and Williams agree that positive publicity is rooted in selling great products. "Value, brand awareness and recognition... lead to financial success," L'Huillier says. And what about the fantastic PR that seems to fall into Vermont Teddy Bear's lap? "It's because we've had a great reputation as a company for years."

## CHECK IT OUT

Want to make your business a hot ticket with the press and customers? Learn the secrets of public relations from one of the industry's top pros in *Full Frontal PR*. This book shows you how to generate buzz—quickly and inexpensively.

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words from the wise:

## SMARTER THAN YOUR AVERAGE BEAR

PR Tactics at Vermont Teddy Bear Company

Interview with Nicole L'Huillier, Manager of Public Relations for Vermont Teddy Bear Co., and Andy Williams, President of Calyx & Corolla

Be credible, honest and upfront. These seemingly simple directives are the guiding principles behind successful public relations at the Vermont Teddy Bear Company—a publicly traded corporation that prides itself on hard work, top quality products and traditional Vermont values.

Just ask Nicole L'Huillier, who manages public relations for Vermont Teddy Bear (VTB) and its three sister companies—Calyx & Corolla, PajamaGram® and TastyGram™. "We work so hard to gain our customers' trust through good service," she says. For L'Huillier, that means using company values to drive public relations efforts.

There is no "spin" at VTB—even when the news isn't always positive. Fortunately the news is usually good, especially when it comes to their philanthropic efforts. VTB donates thousands (?) of teddy bears a year to charitable organizations for fundraising efforts. The company also sponsors the Friend for Life™ program, which enables fire department workers, EMTs and law enforcement officers across the country to share VTB bears with children coping with traumatic situations. Just recently, a United States Army soldier familiar with the company's "messengers of goodwill" (a.k.a. teddy bears) requested that a supply be sent and distributed to children in Iraq. The result: a perfect way for a company, rooted in its Vermont community, to show its commitment to international goodwill, not to mention a remarkable public relations story.

But it takes more than great stories to gain positive public opinion—it takes extraordinary products, impeccable service and a positive customer experience. This past summer, the Vermont Teddy Bear Company acquired

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**DISCOVER**  
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in the spotlight:  
**PR 101, A QUICK REVIEW**



All too often public relations is viewed simply as product publicity and an adjunct to marketing. But PR can also bolster your revenue either by adding directly to the coffers or helping avert major losses. Here are 10 ways you can put public relations to work for your organization:

**1 Cultivate Third-Party Endorsement**

Public relations has the power to create positive word of mouth and influence referrals and recommendations. This “good buzz” can increase sales, encourage acceptance of change and attract investors.

**2 Foster Awareness**

Whether your focus is a new product rollout, fundraising effort or stock offering, PR tactics inform, educate and, in turn, increase awareness of your organization or products.

**3 Encourage Employee Enthusiasm**

Properly encouraged and informed employees, regardless of job function, can and should be the best PR ambassadors for your organization. As an added bonus, employee enthusiasm bolsters morale and increases productivity.

**4 Provide a Heads Up!**

Public relations looks at all the target groups—often called “publics”—who influence the success of your company or organization, including your customers and the media. Examples of other publics are employees, stockholders, community neighbors, legislators, people or organizations who like/dislike you strongly, industry analysts and bankers or venture capitalists who fund you. It’s important to research the thoughts and behavior of all your target publics (e.g., through competitive intelligence and Internet searches) to help you anticipate important issues and concerns. The sooner you are aware of dissatisfaction or threat of any kind, the better you can respond to and mitigate negative effects.

**5 Improve Things Overall**

The feedback you gain from your PR research also lends insight into new markets, highlights new product trends and desired features and generates suggestions to improve existing products, services or methods.

**6 Minimize Damage**

When an unexpected event occurs, such as a disaster or attack of any kind, taking a proactive stance through PR efforts protects your organization’s position, retains support of key publics and averts company downtime and negative impact.

**7 Provide Executive Perspective**

Public relations helps senior management maintain a fresh, enlightened viewpoint about their organization, as well as understand key marketplace issues to make informed decisions.

**8 Create Positive Change**

PR tools offer ways to overcome natural resistance to change, promote a smooth transition and provide information and reassurance to affected publics.

**9 Do Good Deeds**

Your public reputation often depends on your interest and involvement in key issues of social concern. PR can help identify these issues and create a successful strategy of response through sponsorship, volunteerism and contributions.

**10 Eliminate Political Barriers**

By influencing public policy among special interest groups in the community through coalition building, lobbying and grassroots campaigns, PR can win approval to enhance your organization’s mission and continued success.



*Maggie Chamberlin Holben, the author of this article and owner of Absolutely Public Relations and [www.online-presskit.com](http://www.online-presskit.com), is accredited by the Public Relations Society of America and is a member of the PRSA Counselors Academy. A Denver native, Holben relocated from Wichita, Kansas in 1997 where she was vice president of client services for The Lida Groups. Recent national placements include More, Redbook and Entrepreneur magazines and USA TODAY.*

**DID YOU KNOW?**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 136,000 public relations specialists were employed in the United States in 2002. The role of a public relations professional can involve counsel, research, media relations, employee/member relations, community relations, crisis communications, public affairs, government affairs and issues management.

The Public Relations Society of America ([www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org)) is the World’s largest professional organization for public relations professionals. Headquartered in New York City, it has nearly 20,000 members who, organized into 116 nationwide chapters and 17 Professional Interest Sections, represent business and industry, counseling firms, sole practitioners, military, government, associations, hospitals, schools, professional services firms and nonprofit organizations.

*Statistics courtesy of PRSA*

