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## Ten Ways to Publicize Your Cotton Promotion Efforts

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**By Anne Martin**

The purpose of public relations is to create an image for you and your cotton promotion efforts. Used effectively, PR can raise awareness, create excitement, give you an edge over alternative products, and put cotton in the forefront of the minds of your target audience.

Public relations includes a variety of marketing tactics that strengthen credibility, enhance image, develop goodwill or influence public opinion. These tactics, such as speeches, special events, newsletters, annual reports and news releases, are targeted to an audience. PR involves communicating who you are, what you do, why you do it, and how you make a difference. By tapping into the tried-and-true techniques of PR, you can reach potential new customers, opinion leaders and decision-makers, and remind existing ones of how cotton will enhance their economies.

PR can be hard to define: Many don't truly know what it is, and some confuse it with advertising. Publicity, the result of good public relations, means your message appears in an editorial context (the editorial parts of a newspaper, magazine, or radio or television broadcast) rather than in an advertisement. With PR, the editor or producer determines whether your news gets covered and if so, from what angle. What people read, see and hear is what the publication or show's editor or producer thinks will interest his reader or viewer. This third-party messaging implies endorsement: Someone other than you is trumpeting the virtues of cotton, which adds powerful credibility to your message.

### Ten Effective Public Relations Tactics

Brochures and web sites are effective PR tools, but following are ten other effective PR tactics with which you may be less familiar, and which can elicit great results:

#### 1. Media Relations

Publicity (defined above) is often the result of media relations, such as news releases, press kits, media advisories, news conferences, press tours, and personal letters or phone calls to editors and reporters, all designed to communicate your message to the press. Get to know your press targets personally: PR is all about relationship-building, and a member of the press corps will be far likelier to take your call or read your press release if he or she knows your name.

## **2. Special Events**

Events draw attention to your cotton promotion efforts and bring people together to learn about them. Consider hosting an open house to special members of your constituency; promote your efforts at a trade show, hold receptions that target those who can help you raise awareness for cotton; and give speeches about your efforts. The more frequently your message is communicated in a public forum, the likelier it is to be remembered.

## **3. Newsletters**

Publications like this newsletter contain short articles intended to keep your constituents up-to-date on what your organization and its people are doing. Think about starting your own quarterly or bi-annual newsletter to share cotton information with your audience.

## **4. News Sheets and Action Alerts**

Action Alerts are one or two page communicating urgent or recent information. The intent is to motivate the reader to take a specific action, such as write a letter to a public official or change a purchasing habit. These can be effective tools in your arsenal as you build awareness for cotton.

## **5. Tip Sheets**

These one or two-sided sheets contain advice, instructions, or other information of particular use to your audience. The objective is to show off your expertise in the area of cotton, and share information in an altruistic yet promotional manner. These sheets are usually formatted as bulleted or numbered lists.

## **6. Letters to the Editor and Op Ed Pieces**

Promote your expertise by writing a letter to the editor or an Op Ed piece responding to relevant items in the news. Be ubiquitous as a spokesperson and outspoken advocate of cotton and cotton promotion.

## **7. Speakers Bureau**

Arrange to speak at meetings of professional and trade associations, service clubs, civic organizations, and community groups to raise awareness of cotton among your audience, and those who could potentially assist you in your efforts.

## **8. Sponsorships**

If you don't want to organize a special event, sponsor a relevant event that somebody else is organizing. Make sure your sponsorship is acknowledged on advertising, programs, posters, or other promotional materials.

## **9. Charitable Contributions**

Even though a donation generally has to be very large to make news, a consistent commitment to giving back to your community by supporting causes related to your cotton promotion efforts does much to enhance your image. Be sure your donation is acknowledged in the recipient's newsletter, annual report, or other promotional materials.

## **10. Thank You Notes and Letters**

Directly thanking opinion leaders and supporters for their help, customers for their business, and donors for their contribution will encourage repeat actions, and is good business practice. A small thank you can go a long way to being remembered the next time you reach out to the same individual or organization.

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