



# THE ELECTRONIC COTTAGE

## Promoting Your Studio: Part 2

● In Part 1 of *Promoting Your Studio* (see the January/February 1991 issue of *db Magazine*), I discussed in a general way the two kinds of promotional avenues—advertising and public relations—and why both are necessary for promoting a service-oriented business such as a recording studio or production company. The article then turned its focus to just one of those avenues—advertising—and I developed some guidelines for using print ads (space ads, classified ads and direct mail) to help promote a studio business. That leaves us with one remaining avenue to examine: public relations.

As pointed out in the previous installment, while advertising has an inherent and definite cost, public relations (PR) is in the realm of things you can get, relatively speaking, for free. That factor alone should make this field worthy of some methodical study, especially for those studios running on a tight margin. Whoever has access to a word processor or typewriter, and has the budget for a sheet of paper, envelope and stamp can begin reaping the benefits of a public relations campaign. Of course, PR is not always so devoid of cost. Some techniques involve the staging of special events which can sometimes involve considerable out of pocket expenses, and unlike advertising (whose benefits often can be felt immediately), public relations may require a period of time before benefits begin to accrue. Hence, PR has to be seen as a long-term promotional policy.

### THE TOOLS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Like any other discipline, public relations has its arsenal of tools, and these tools were created to achieve

the espoused goals of the discipline. The goals of public relations are to mold the opinions and attitudes of a particular “public” relative to a particular person, business or organization so that a positive image might be attained and maintained over time. In plain English, this means you, as a studio business person, must educate your pool of potential clients to the quality and value of the services you provide. People form opinions based on available information which comes to them either through word of mouth or the media.

Good PR has the aura of genuine news. Unlike advertising with its obvious self-serving purposes, PR must at least have the appearance of providing information in the public interest. Quite often it is only a veneer which differentiates PR from advertising, but the point to remember is that PR must be received by the audience as news, rather than unmitigated hype. People must feel that they made their own decision about your service, based solely on the available information—without any coercion whatsoever. To attain this goal, public relations practitioners have developed several very effective tools, three of which will be examined in the course of this article: the news release, the publicity package and the promotional event.

### THE NEWS RELEASE

As previously mentioned, PR must be regarded as news in order to be effective. From the vast amount of events that occur during a period of time, only a few are selected for coverage by the press. Editors of newspapers, magazines and other publications are always on the lookout for relevant stories geared towards their readership. Many stories are pur-

sued solely on the basis of a news release that was sent to them from an outside source. A news release then, can be defined as a document designed to influence the media to write favorably about a particular subject—in this case, your recording studio.

There are many ways a news release can find its way into print. The simplest and most consistently available publicity can be had in the local music and entertainment journals—in the columns that are called something like “Studio Notes” or “What’s Happening,” and so on. Every city or region has a newspaper or magazine of this kind with a similar section reserved for studio hype. The publication usually won’t give you more than one paragraph per issue, but most successful and also wanna-be successful studios are consistently represented in these columns. The purpose is to tell in a news-like manner who is recording at your studio. You needn’t worry if it’s just a local act; it will probably get printed anyway. The bottom line here is simply getting your name in print—irrespective of your clientele’s importance.

The most desirable outcome of a news release is, of course, to have some sort of story written about your studio—ideally, a feature story replete with interview and photo essay. Obviously, your news release would have to be geared a little differently to attain this end. It might have to be almost a complete story in itself—or at least the outline of a story with a strong “hook” that would be interesting to both the editor and readership. To really make an impression, it should probably also contain a very attractive photograph. A story is often given preference because it

contains a great photo, so don't skimp on the film.

It is difficult to say what the content of a news release should be, since this might vary from journal to journal. What's best is simply to study the particular publication you are intending to pitch to and write down the essentials of a story appropriate to the editorial slant of that magazine. In other words, scope out the magazine; read back issues and find out what issues the magazine deals with and use this as a guideline for the content of your news release.

The form of a news release is much easier to specify; it follows a format that never changes—regardless of content. *Figure 1* shows the basic elements of a news release. At the top in large type is a banner stating boldly that the piece of paper is an official news release — not to be confused with any other papers on the editor's desk. Directly below, tight to the left margin, is the name and address of the company sending the release, and below that, the all-important name of the contact person at that company. Next follows the release date, which is usually stated as being *For Immediate Release* since you want to get across a sense of timeliness (or even urgency) in establishing a need to print the information. The actual story itself must start with a hook-laden headline: it must draw you into the text by arousing your interest. Next (since this is "news"), the city of origin must be identified.

Finally, we reach the body of the story itself. The first line is very important. In true journalistic fashion, it should give a summary statement of the entire article, — the story at a glance. Then, in the subsequent paragraphs, the story should be fleshed out in greater detail, being certain to answer the usual journalistic questions: who, what, where, when and how. Another important axiom to keep in mind is that "news makes news." This means that if a particular issue is currently in the public eye and you have something being recorded at your studio that will relate to it, there is a much greater chance it will be published.

A classic case might be if a peace activist were recording anti-war songs during the current Middle Eastern conflict; but the example does not always have to be that dramatic. Perhaps someone is recording

keyboard tracks using a hot new synthesizer or the artist was formerly lead vocalist for a popular band or the bald-headed keyboard player is really a brain surgeon by day; if you dig hard enough, you can find a newsworthy item about many of your clients, so start digging!

## THE PUBLICITY PACKAGE

While the news release is a more or less expendable tool of public relations (since it refers to a one-time

news event), we also have need of a relatively permanent tool—something we can use over and over to provide information and affect public opinion. Here is where a publicity package (also called a press kit) comes in handy. The elements found in a publicity package can be almost anything, but there are some important items that should be included.

First of all, the term "publicity package" implies that there is some sort of container to hold multiple pieces in place; — that's the essence



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The new RS220, Supreme projection from a 3 way system that has precise time alignment.

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Complementary products are the VBS210 subwoofer enclosure enabling powerful micro cluster arrays to be built, and the 220 System Controller providing electronic crossover at 100Hz and dynamic equalization using the unique *IntelliSense*<sup>TM</sup> circuitry.

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FAX (215) 874-0190

Circle 23 on Reader Service Card

**NEWS RELEASE**

Company Name  
Address

CONTACT: Individual's Name  
Telephone Number

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

HEADLINE .....

City of Origin. Body of text .....  
.....  
.....  
.....

*Figure 1. The news release.*

of a package or a kit. When someone wants to see the profile of your studio at a glance, he can reach for this package and skip to whatever documents he's interested in. Some studios photocopy or print whatever they feel is relevant on standard 8.5 in. by 11 in. paper and put all the sheets into a clear plastic binder. This looks very neat and assures that none of the sheets will get lost. Others prefer to use a pocket binder or portfolio because they are available in attractive colors and you can store lots of odd sized materials within.

One of the major items in a publicity package is usually a single page statement of purpose for your studio business detailing the kinds of services you provide. Also commonly included might be a short biographical sketch of the owner(s)/operator(s) of the studio telling of their education, previous experience and achievements. (If you've only been in business a short time, the above two items could be written as a single document.) Another good item to include is a list of client references. (Don't feel insecure if your list does not contain someone famous; even a list of unknown local clients will establish that you have a legitimate business). Additionally, you might consider including copies of any testimonial letters from satisfied clients, a good photograph of your facility and reprints of any previous press coverage you may have. A rate card

(detailing a range of prices for various services) is also a very desirable item to include. One other option might be to include a sample tape featuring short excerpts from your best projects.

By now you may be thinking that this could be a fairly expensive proposition on a large scale. When all is said and done, it might cost you a couple of bucks a package (or more if you include a tape). Obviously, don't use a publicity package as a tool for mass mailing; instead, reserve it for contacts who are potentially serious clients or for those highly visible media people (such as magazine editors) who might be able to give you some publicity. If you make even one such contact, the time, effort and money spent in putting together these packages will seem rather insignificant.

**THE PROMOTIONAL EVENT**

One of the most effective ways to gain publicity is by staging or becoming involved in a promotional event. A classic example of this is the production company that offers its services to a regional charity. The idea is that an original theme song will be written and produced by the company and released to radio stations as part of a campaign to increase support for the charitable organization. These special events are diffi-

cult, but not impossible to pull together; today it may be easier than ever to get involved in such special events, since all charitable and community organizations are suffering from a decline in funding. The offer of free audio production can seem very attractive to an organization seeking to shave budgetary corners, and the publicity a studio can glean from such an association can pay off big time.

An event that requires working with an outside organization also requires much planning and coordination. However, there is one event you can run without anybody's help: an open house. An open house is really a fun way to introduce your services to a new group of people and at the same time, show appreciation to your old clients for their patronage. It's simply a party you throw at your studio. Just provide an urbane selection of wines and cheeses, some mood lighting and, of course, a pre-programmed tape of all your best productions.

This can really help people get turned on to your studio. It's a great opportunity to schmooze with old friends and network out to some new clients. The open house is really a powerful public relations tool: your audience is handpicked and the mere fact that you are a gracious host makes them more receptive to using your services in the future