

## **Publicity Versus Advertising -- What's the Difference?**

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Many people have the misconception that publicity and advertising are the same things. While both publicity and advertising can play important roles in an organization's overall marketing plan, they are very different. The three primary differences between publicity and advertising are (1) control, (2) cost, and (3) credibility.

### **Control**

Advertising is a controlled form of communication, whereas public relations is uncontrolled. When you run an advertisement in a print publication, you purchase a specific amount of space on a page to run in a particular issue of the publication. You may even be able to specify that your ad be placed on the top left corner of the sports page. You control the content of the ad as well.

With publicity, you don't dictate when, where, or if your promotional messages ever see the light of day. You can send a news release to a print publication, and the editor or journalist who receives it might see value in it and print it in the next issue. He or she might really find the information appealing and interview you for a cover story. However, your news release might just as easily end up in the garbage can, depending on its relevance, timing, or a number of other factors.

### **Cost**

The control that you get with advertising doesn't come without a price. The reason that you can specify when and where your advertisement will run is that you pay for the space, airtime, or bandwidth that it occupies. You are able to control the content because you also pay to have the advertisement itself created. Some advertisements can be produced inexpensively, and others are very costly.

When you are trying to generate publicity for your business through public relations efforts, the only cost is the manpower that it takes to create the documents that you send out to the news media and the costs of delivering or shipping. It is much less expensive to send a photograph and a news release to a magazine editor than it is to create a 4-color, camera-ready magazine ad.

### **Credibility**

With advertising, you are able to make sure that the exact message that you want appears in the media exactly as you have specified. When consumers see an advertisement, most of them are aware that it is a paid promotion. Some consumers tend to be a little bit suspicious of advertising messages for this reason.

However, when your local newspaper runs a feature article about your business as a result of a news release that you sent to the editor, consumers generally don't stop and think that the story started with a promotional message from the company. A story in the newspaper is generally considered to be much more credible than an advertisement in the newspaper. The reason for this is the third party endorsement effect associated with having someone outside your company saying good things about it.

The best marketing plans include a mixture of advertising and publicity. It's important that you understand the differences between these two forms of communication so that you can make sound decisions about the ideal mix for your organization.

**About the Author:**

Mary Gormandy White is Director of Continuing Education and Corporate Training at Mobile Technical Institute <http://www.mobiletechwebsite.com>. She teaches seminars, classes, and makes conference presentations on public relations, marketing and a number of additional management, customer service, and communication topics. Visit <http://www.dailycareerconnection.com> regularly for useful professional development tips and career advice.

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