

Public Relations for the Independent Designer

Prepared by Grace Bonney of Design*Sponge (designsponge.blogspot.com)

When approaching public relations it's important to remember that simpler is always better. Writers, editors and stylists are approached with so much material on a daily basis that they often get lost in a sea of fancy press kits and multi-page press releases. What follows is my 4-pronged attack to running your own PR campaign as an independent designer.

1. Know your Product: Most people think they know what their work looks like, but in fact, your product may look very differently to the general audience. To avoid the dreaded "Her work looks *nothing* like she said it would" take some basic pictures of your product and send it around to 20 people. Not your mom or best friend, but people who will give you the most un-biased opinion you can find. Once you have an idea of what people think it actually looks like (maybe you think your work looks retro but everyone else thinks it's actually traditional) ask people where you think people would see your work. Does it look like something they'd see in *Domino*? *Martha Stewart*? *Real Simple*? Once you have an idea of what your work looks like and where it might fit you're ready to move on to step 2.

2. Know your Publications: Before you contact a magazine, blog or television program be sure you know what types of work they cover and who covers it on the staff. Walk to your local Barnes and Noble (or crack open your laptop) and start checking out publications. Familiarize yourself with what they actually write about and who's writing the articles where you'd like to see your work. For example, if you make baby clothing don't send to a magazine that's never done a feature on baby clothing. There's a chance they'll cover you but it's best to save those contacts for the last tier of your outreach. Your safest bet is always the best one. Once you have an idea of who you'd like to contact make a list of your top 10 publications and work your way from top to bottom. If *Elle Décor* is your dream publication, start with them. Then work your way down to smaller niche publications. (A general rule is that magazines won't care if you've been featured on blogs or TV, but they will care if you've been featured in another magazine that is similar to their publication)

***Mastheads.org is a great resource for finding contacts at your favorite magazines.**

3. Make your Press Kit: Now that you know who to contact you need to send them something, right? Before you spend hundreds of dollars on press kits remember that most people are doing business via email these days. The paper press kit is gradually dying out and being replaced by the digital press kit. It's cheaper, faster and easier. And you won't have to spend hours stuffing envelopes.

The key to a good press kit is good photography. If you spend money on nothing else (besides producing your product) spend money to have **FOUR KEY PHOTOS TAKEN**

in high resolution and low resolution form (72 dpi and 300 dpi). You can do this with most modern digital cameras or you can hire a local photog do to a quick shoot with you.

You'll want:

1. A close up shot (to show texture, pattern and material)
2. A full shot (to show the product in a straight forward way)
3. A situation shot (ie: if you make vases set them up on a table with flowers, etc.)
4. A shot that shows why your product is unique (ie: it's reversible! It bends! Etc)

Once you have your photos ready to go you can send those along with your basic product info (pricing, colors, materials, availability) and a simple bio (please keep these to 2 paragraphs or less) to your press contacts.

4. Make Contact: When contacting any press person it's best to keep things simple. In the design world you're really selling the product first and then the story second. Most editors I talk to said that the picture grabs them in the first few seconds and will tell them whether or not to read on. So, when you contact someone attach a few low-res photos of your product (in Jpeg form- no big TIFFS or large files) and your basic product info. If they're interested and want more they'll *always* ask you for more. Here is a sample email or letter you can send to someone. This is meant to be a guideline, not a cut and paste:

Dear Jane Smith,

My name is Grace Bonney and I'm a Brooklyn based textile designer. I recently launched my debut collection of handmade pillows and wanted to send them along in case they might be of interest for (NAME OF MAGAZINE)

My pillow collection is handmade using (MATERIALS) and features (NAME IMAGERY OR ANY SPECIAL MATERIALS, ETC). The collection is currently available at (NAME STORES OR YOUR WEBSITE) and prices range from (PRICE-PRICE).

Thank you so much for your time. I've attached a few pictures of my work but would be more than happy to send additional information and high res imagery if they are of interest.

Sincerely,

Grace Bonney

Once you've contacted someone give them two weeks to respond. If you don't hear from them send a polite follow-up (using the same method of content- email if you emailed, write a letter if you wrote a letter first. never call someone out of the blue...) reminding them of who you are and what your work is. If you don't hear from them in another week feel free to move down your list to the next publication. If you do hear from them and it's a yes (yay!) you can send them your photos or samples of work. But if it's a NO, the best

way to handle it is to politely thank them for their time and ask if perhaps they know of another publication that might be a better fit. Often editors will suggest their friends at other magazines or publications you might not be familiar with. It's always good to take advantage of having an editor's attention- more often than not they'll be happy to help you if they have time.

Things to remember:

1. Magazines work on a 3-4 month lead time so if you have seasonal material always send it to editors as soon as possible (August or Sept at the latest to make the Dec issues).
2. If you don't receive a response from any of the magazines you contacted consider contacting blogs. Most editors read several design blogs during the week and will often pick up their new stories from blogs.
3. Even if you stumble upon a snippy editor, always keep your cool. It's always bad to burn a bridge at a magazine, even if your contact there is being less than cool. You never know who they talk to...
4. Not all magazines like to hear that you've been published in 12 major publications already. So you may want to leave that out of your email to them. If you've been in 5 other major shelter magazines an editor might feel like they're getting you after everyone else and won't feel the need to repeat content.

How to find press contacts:

1. Mastheads.org is a fantastic resource with up-to-date contact info for most magazines. Try contacting an associate editor or features editor- executive editors aren't often the ones who work on day-to-day pitches. And of course, contact the appropriate editor for your project. (If you make clothes contact the fashion editor, etc...)
 2. Websites- most magazines have online presences now so look for web editors or links to the magazine's staff online. Their article credits often link to email addresses.
-