

Understanding Publicity with Heather Allard

AUDIO SEMINAR TRANSCRIPT

Tara: Welcome to today's Creative Empire seminar with Heather Allard who is The Mogul Mom. Before Heather was The Mogul Mom she successfully ran another business where she found great success in garnering publicity and media coverage for her brand. Now she works with other companies helping them to find the best kind of advertising, the free kind.

Welcome, Heather. Thanks so much for joining us for this Creative Empire seminar.

Heather: Thank you, Tara. Thanks for having me here. I'm really excited to share what I know about publicity and helping your peeps get some.

Tara: Awesome. Why don't you tell everyone a little bit about your previous business and now what you do with The Mogul Mom?

Heather: Sure. After my second daughter was born she had a really strong startle reflex. I just could not keep her swaddled. She broke free of every swaddling blanket known to man. So I decided to invent one myself. I designed one and I brought it to market. I had it produced, packaged and I started selling it on my website. It was called Swaddleaze. Then when she got a little bit older she would break free from her pajamas. So I invented another blanket called Blankease which was almost like a sleep sack, but with leg holes.

I now had two products that I sold and I initially spent a ton of money on advertizing. I spent over \$17,000.00 on advertising and got such a poor return on that. I thought, "How am I going to get the word out there about my product?" So I started noticing other baby products written up in magazines and websites and everything. I thought, "I'm going to try to do it up myself."

Initially I hired a publicist and spent about another \$12,000.00 having a publicist do it for me. Again, I'm still in the hole now. So I had a publicist do it for me. She got some good placements for me, but I started kind of trying to do it myself. The magazines that I would read I'd look at who was writing the articles. I'd hunt around online to try to find their email addresses and start pitching media people on my own. I got a pretty good response.

I got some great placements, which really, really helped the sales so much. With advertising, when we see an ad we know it's the company that places the ad. So of course they're going to describe their product or business as being the greatest thing out there. When you have a media placement that's an unbiased review of your product, so buyers are more inclined to hit the buy now button. I just noticed how much better for sales and brand building publicity was versus advertising.

About three years ago I sold my company to a big baby products company. I founded The Mogul Mom because I got email after email after email from other mom entrepreneurs who were bringing products to market and they wanted to know how I did it, if I could help them, how I got the publicity. So I decided the best way for me to reach that many people was through The Mogul Mom.

I've been doing my gig over at The Mogul Mom for about four years now. I provide blog content, consulting. I have some great info products. Basically what I try to do at The Mogul Mom is help moms who are running a business, raising a family and trying to balance both. That's what I'm doing now.

Tara: Awesome. That's such a great story and a really powerful example. It's so much easier even though the dollars are flowing out when you buy advertising that can see like the easy way to do things, but I just love your example of spending that much money and getting so much better results from the free publicity.

Heather: That's right.

Tara: You and I both love social media for all of it's faults and all of it's distractions. It's still a pretty awesome thing.

Heather: It is.

Tara: It's such a powerful way to build a business. With this golden age of social media upon us it's kind of easy to think that traditional media is dead. You see the headlines and you hear about the publishing industry is dead and magazines are dead and newspapers are dying. In perspective I doubt that this is actually true. What's your experience with the "death" of tradition media and how can it be relevant to a creative entrepreneur today?

Heather: Certainly the last couple of years have seen a decline in traditional media. Magazines are closing, newspapers are shutting down and all that stuff. I think that it is far from dead. There are always going to people, and I'm one of them, who love a printed publication. I love magazines. I love newspapers and I think that they're never going to go away totally.

I think that the decline in traditional media brings a unique opportunity for people in that most of these magazines and newspapers they are now working a kind of skeleton crew. Like most other big companies they've laid off a ton of people. So they're getting by with as few people as possible. That creates a great opportunity for us as entrepreneurs to help them do their job faster and easier.

Basically, if you can provide them with great story ideas, great angles, just be a great source for them, make their job so much easier by providing them with the images and the head shots and the samples, all that stuff that they need it's just such a great way to help them do their job. You get to be the good guy. You're helping them do their job and you're getting something big out of it. You're getting some publicity or you're just making great connections with these media folks who sometime down the road may say, "hey, we want to do a story about entrepreneurs or about baby blankets or whatever it is like making crocheted bags or whatever." There you are.

I think traditional media is not dead. We have some great opportunities right now and I also think that traditional media has now combined with social media. All these traditional publications are now also on Twitter or on Facebook. They have blogs. They have websites. So it's almost like your opportunities have doubled because you can try to get into the pages of *InStyle* magazine or you can get on InStyle.com. I think that traditional media combined with social media is a fabulous opportunity for anyone who is trying to get publicity.

Tara: It seems to me that it almost magnifies the power of your publicity mention to or your media mention to. Now instead of someone reading about you in the pages of the magazine and maybe forgetting to find you later or not knowing how to find you all you have to do is click that magic little link.

Heather: Exactly.

Tara: I think that's a really cool thing about traditional media coming into this social media age.

Heather: It's evergreen. Once you're out there on the internet it's not going to go away from the search engines.

Tara: Amen.

Heather: It's awesome.

Tara: So you're talking about the skeleton crews and media folks. How can you use social media, which we are all familiar with to connect with these people? How do you find them? How do you get on their radar using the social media tools we're already familiar with?

Heather: Social media is really such an awesomely easy way to learn about and connect with media professionals. Many of them not only tweet from their publication or like say the Today Show on Twitter and you have some of the people working on the Today Show tweeting. Many media professionals also have their own personal Twitter accounts or Facebook pages.

I think if you're trying to get to know the media social media makes it so easy to kind of follow their tweets. You can read their blog posts. You can see what they're looking for. A lot of them will post queries right on Twitter.

They'll say, "Hey, we're looking for women ages 30 to 40 who have started a business from home." Then you just reply back to them. It just makes it so much easier for you to get to know them before you make any kind of contact with them. It helps you know what they're looking for, what type of person they are.

You can see what they had for breakfast and say, "I love that, too or oh, that's so gross. My kids hate that." It's just a really fun way to get to know them and familiarize yourself with them and whoever they work for. It's just really awesome. Before, you would almost be pitching blind. You wouldn't know what they like and don't like. You wouldn't know their email address and stuff like that. Whereas now a lot of that information is right there for you to find easily on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, any of those social media sites.

Tara: This might seem like a no brainer follow up to that, but I think it's something that people struggle with. Do recommend that people ask or start conversations or reply to the personal information that these people post? Like you said what they had for breakfast.

Heather: Yes, I do. You can't be like, "oh, I make this particular product and I had that same thing for breakfast this morning." So if you can do it in a very, cool kind of casual way and get to know them on a personal level before you do any type of, "hey, I'd love to be in your publication."

Tara: Sort of warm them up.

Heather: Definitely. What you want to do is not just be out there shouting with every single media person you can find. You want to think about the media context that is going to be most meaningful for you, the ones that make the most sense for your product or your company or whatever. Definitely you want to target them and just start that relationship.

Tara: Excellent. A lot of people in the Creative Empire are do-it-yourselfers. They're used to building their own websites. They're used to creating their own product, their own packaging, their own graphic design. Anything we need done we try to do it ourselves. So when we're faced with an obstacle, the first thing we try to do is figure it out for ourselves. Where does a do-it-yourself business owner start finding some good publicity and where should they draw the line between DIY and hiring a professional?

Heather: That's a great question. As far as starting off trying to get some of your own publicity kind of DIY the whole thing there are so many great, free resources for getting publicity now. Probably the most well known is HARO, which is Peter Shankman's HelpaReporterOut.com. Basically, it's a free service that kind of links up media professionals who are looking for sources.

What happens is you subscribe to HARO and three times daily you receive an email with media queries. You can kind of browse through those and see if there are any media people looking for your story. They might be looking for Valentine's Day gifts. They might be looking for women who have just had a baby. They might be looking for entrepreneurs who started their business with \$100.00 or less.

They're looking for all kinds of things for TV shows, magazines, newspapers, books, websites and all kinds of stuff. It's super easy. I recommend HARO as your entry point. It's your gateway drug to publicity. You definitely can find it through HARO. There is another site called PitchRate. There is another one called Instantly Famous Products, which is Sarah Shaw's service. She matches up set designers for TV shows and movies with products. That's another great one.

Then also, like I said, just the media on Twitter. On Twitter if you go to any of the magazines on Twitter, newspapers on Twitter and you can find those people; if you go to Listorious.com they have lists of people on Twitter. They have whole categories of newspapers on Twitter, TV shows on Twitter, magazines on Twitter. So then if you go look at those you'd be amazed on how many of them are looking for sources for their stories right on Twitter.

It's the same thing with Facebook. If you like the Today Show on Facebook you'll see them looking for sources, people to come on the show and quotes and all that stuff. It's super easy to find publicity opportunities.

Tara: Can I stop you there for just a second?

Heather: Yes.

Tara: You mentioned HARO kind of being like a gateway drug. I think once you initially take that gateway drug it's very easy to get overwhelmed with the opportunities that are out there. Before you kind of step into that arena it's like, "oh, I didn't even know where to find these things." Then

once you kind of step into it you realize just how many opportunities are out there. Do you have a top tip or two about how to organize or how to avoid getting overwhelmed with the opportunities that are out there? How can you pin point what's going to work for you and ignore the rest?

Heather: Well, with HARO I find it's easy because you can subscribe to all the daily HARO's and they include business opportunities, fitness and lifestyle opportunities, healthcare. They are all categorized. What you can do it just subscribe to the category that fits you best whether it's business or lifestyle or education and healthcare.

Personally, I usually just look at the business and the lifestyle. Those are usually the two that apply to me. For many entrepreneurs, particularly those that have a product based business the lifestyle is the way to go. That's usually who are looking for products specifically in their queries.

You can narrow things down for yourself that way really simply. Then one thing that I found when I first started to subscribing to HARO, I was kind of getting overwhelmed by all those emails sitting in my inbox. I panic if I have anything over 20 emails in my box. I created a Gmail filter so all my HARO emails go into a folder called HARO. That makes it easy for me at the end of the day or every couple of days I just go into that folder and look at the queries. If there is nothing I delete them. If there is something I star them and reply right there.

Another really good way to take advantage of those HARO opportunities without feeling overwhelmed, like you have to start from square one every time is to create what I call skeleton pitch. It's just like maybe three little paragraphs telling first of all who you are and what you do. Second is why your product is a great fit for this or why your business is a great fit for this. Third is how to contact you for more information or samples or high resolution images.

If you just kind of keep that in your drafts folder or even on your desktop in a text file then when you do find those media queries you don't have to start fresh with the whole thing again. You just copy and paste it right into an email. You obviously tailor it to the pitch, but then just send it off. It's so easy.

Tara: Brilliant. It's those little things.

Heather: I know. It's those little things that make it so much easier for you and more likely to do it.

Tara: Awesome. Now back to the other question that I had asked. Where do you draw the line between DIY and hiring a professional? I know I had tweeted yesterday about talking to you and then also Megan really wanted to know what you thought was a good way to judge whether this is still should be a priority for you or whether it's time to find someone who can do it better.

Heather: I think it's one of those things where you said with DIY'ers that we tend to do everything ourselves. My whole thing is just because we can doesn't mean we should. So you have to look at, as far as getting your own publicity, do you have the time for it? It does take time looking for the queries, responding to the queries, following up on the queries.

Do you have the personality for it? Are you kind of outgoing by nature? Can you promote yourself easily by nature? Do you have the patience for it? Do you get easily frustrated? You

need to think about those things. If you are feeling uncomfortable about doing it or you're feeling like you don't have the time to do this and do the rest of the business then maybe it's time to consider hiring a PR professional. Be prepared to spend some cash.

Tara: You have to spend cash to make cash.

Heather: You do.

Tara: Where would you go about finding a PR professional? That is also Megan's question.

Heather: Most publicist and PR firms obviously have websites now and they're also on Twitter. What you want to do really is maybe spend some time on Google. There are publicists who specialize just in baby products. There are ones that specialize in art. It's like there are so many different types of publicists.

You can put a tweet out there, "I'm looking for a publicist. This is what type of business I have. Do you have any recommendations?" You'd be amazed at the response that you get. You can Google say, "PR firm for small entrepreneur." You'll come up with a huge list and it's a matter of kind of checking them out. You always want to look at certainly their clients. See if their clients are similar to you.

Then the most important thing is the result that they've gotten. See what type of media placements they've gotten for their clients. Then you definitely want to see what their response time is. You want to be in good touch with them. I always felt that I wanted to be in the loop. I wanted to know if I was going to email them they will reply quickly. A lot of times with these publicity opportunities time is of the essence. So it's good to be in close touch with a publicist.

I do want to mention one other thing. There is kind of a big span between DIY and your publicity and hiring a full service publicist. I just wanted to mention that you can get really great results by combining all the free publicity resources like HARO and Instantly Famous Products along with some paid resources whether it's a targeted media list, a book about doing PR, hiring a copywriter to do some press releases or quick pitches for you. That's something that's important too. You can get some really great results by combining those free and paid for resources.

Tara: That's really great advice. I think that really resonates with people. I think it's also great that the web has kind of facilitated on so many different fronts. It's not all or nothing. You can find something that really fits for you. Another question from Twitter was is there value in cold calling or cold emailing someone in the media? Where else would a business owner start if cold calling is uncomfortable?

Heather: As in most areas of business I find that cold calling or cold emailing isn't usually the most effective way to do things. I just find it's really hard to be personal and convincing if you don't really even know who you're calling or emailing. So personally, I think that cold calling should be an absolute last resort. As we talked about before, it's super easy to familiarize yourself with a publication or a media professional now whether you check out a years worth of the magazine at the library. You know what I mean?

Tara: Yes.

Heather: If you want to get into *Self* magazine you go to the library and look at the past six issues of *Self* magazine to see how they lay things out, what features do they always have, who is writing for them. Whether you check out past issues of a publication or you go on their website and kind of scope around or follow their tweets it's just really easy to familiarize yourself before you dive in with the pitching.

Tara: Fantastic. I think that will make a lot of people very happy.

Heather: I don't like cold calling. It's icky.

Tara: Nobody likes that. I guess some people like that, but they're not the people we're talking to. Another question from Twitter, and I was just asked this myself recently so I know this is on a lot of people's minds. Sometimes getting publicity isn't just all about the immediate sale. In fact, I think rarely it's about the immediate sale. There is a certain momentum to getting mentioned and getting leads. How do you advise the business owners that you work with to make the most of the exposure that they do get?

Heather: First of all, going into it knowing that getting publicity isn't a sure fire way to get sales. Your placement in the media doesn't always translate to sales. You might get fewer sales than you thought you would. If you go into it knowing, "I'm going to try to get some publicity." It may not result in \$100,000.00 of sales, but if you look at it as exposure, brand recognition, authority, building a platform, just getting the word out there about yourself and really gaining that momentum for your business or your product then you are miles ahead of everybody else.

If you look at it as a chance to kind of attract more media coverage from the coverage that you're getting and improving your sales then you are off to the right start. Then once you have gotten some media placements you can totally take advantage of them in so many ways. You can put, "as seen on DailyCandy.com" at the top of your website. You can put, "as quoted in the New York Times." You can put media logos on your packaging. You can create a press page on your site that shows all the media placements that you've gotten. You can put media logo thumbnails on your sales brochures and your trade show collateral. You can use it every where. You can put it on a business card. You can put it on your book.

It just really helps buyers, customers, subscribers, whatever it is that you're trying to get, it just increases your authority and makes you more believable. Most people think, "oh gosh, if this person was featured in *Vogue* magazine then that must mean they're a great company or it's a great product or they're a fabulous designer." It's just a great way overall to build your brand and like I said, increase your authority.

It can eventually improve your sales. I don't want you to think that publicity doesn't result in sales at all because it certainly does especially if you're mentioned on one of the bigger websites or daily emails or whatever. It's just so much more than that.

Tara: I think a lot of people don't realize that there are more ways to capture exposure than just through sales. You have to make sure that you're asking people to subscribe to your newsletter and asking them to connect with you on Facebook or Twitter or wherever you hang out most so you can get them to come back. I think the media exposure works great for getting them there once, but it takes repeated interaction with your brand to actually get a sale.

Heather: It does. I think they say that people have to see your product or your brand like 15 or 25 times before they act on it. I think that's the thing with advertising. They see one ad and they're like, "whatever." If they keep seeing you mentioned in the media, they see you in magazines and daily emails and on TV and in the newspaper then they're like, "wow, this person is all over the place. I'm going to check out what they have to offer."

Like I said, I spent \$17,000.00 on a half page ad for Swaddlease, my first product. As a result of it I had 27 sales, which is for me a little under \$700.00. Then at the same time I pitched the editor of Hot Daily and back then it was called Urban Baby. I pitched the editor and looking back it was kind of a pathetic pitch. I just told him way too much about my product. It took me about 30 minutes to get my pitch together. I sent it off and never even heard back from them.

A month later they featured my product and over two days I got 218 orders. So it was like over \$5,000.00 of sales. It's just so much better to do it by publicity and to try to get it even if the first placement doesn't result in sales just keep going for them. As we talked about it can increase sales. It can result in subscribers, clients or whatever it is that you happen to be looking for with your business.

Tara: Awesome. I think that's great advice. Transitioning a little bit, before we started recording we started talking a little bit about how creative entrepreneurs have a difficult time detaching themselves from their business to figuring out what about their brand and their product and what they do is actually news worthy. Do you have any tips or techniques that you use to help people understand about what they do is actually news worthy, it's worthy of getting mentioned on a daily email or in a magazine?

Heather: I think you're totally right. I think it's hard for most business owners to think about their business or their product as news worthy. Like, "gosh, who would want to write about my product?" It's like not a big deal. I think what you have to do is take those blinders off and start looking and thinking about the bigger picture of who you are, how you started your business, how you decided to create the products that you created. When you think about the bigger picture then you can begin to see how your product fits in to the media.

If you look at yourself and your story of who you are, how you started it, where you work from those are all interesting things. Those are all kind of back stories to your main gig. If you look at yourself, and I'll use myself as an example, I was making baby blankets, but I was doing it from home. I was a mom starting a business. So it was like there were many different angles to my story. Your product may not land on the front page of the *New York Times*, but that would be cool and it is possible.

If you think about it your product might be perfect for a review on Daily Candy, your business story. How you started your business might be perfect for Entrepreneur.com. Maybe you can provide a quote about being a mom who works from home and how you juggle that for *Working Mother* magazine. Maybe your studio or office is so cool that HGTV wants to showcase it. You have to see you and your story and your business and your product and how it fits in to so many different outlets.

You have to maybe stop thinking of publicity as just your product being featured. You have to start looking at it as they might quote you. They might feature your product. They might tell your story. They might show a picture of you and your office. They might have you modeling the

latest clothes or whatever for 20 year olds or whatever it is. There are just a million different things that you can be part of.

Tara: I would think that it would help to kind of utilize your friends, your network of other business owners to help each other see the bigger picture of your business.

Heather: I think another way to do it is if you're still having such trouble imaging yourself being news worthy look around at some competitive products, some competitive businesses, some other entrepreneurs and check out their press page to see what they're doing. Then you can see the possibilities.

Tara: Try not to feel jealous. Use it to empower yourself.

Heather: Exactly. Use it to motivate you.

Tara: Exactly. One last question, and again this was something that was on Twitter. It was something Megan wanted me to ask. It was definitely a question I have for myself. It's media kits. You can't live without them. You can't live with them. Are they still relevant? What do you put in a media kit if they are? Can you talk a little bit about media kits?

Heather: For me and for anyone who wants to get some great publicity you cannot live without a media kit. Years ago you had printed media kits. You had a nice little folder and slopped a sticker with your logo on it. You put in press release bio and maybe a couple of images. When media requested it you mailed it to them. Now it's preferable to have a digital media kit. It's actually really easy and more affordable than having a bunch of them all printed out sitting in your basement.

What you want to do is have this digital media kit available on your website or at the very least have it available on your desktop so you can just email it to somebody. What you want to have in it is your bio. It should be short. No one wants to read a three page bio. Keep it to one page. You could have a press release if you have one. It's not absolutely necessary, but if you have a press release that's awesome.

You want to have head shots of yourself and if you have a product you want to have high and low resolution images of your product. With print you use high resolution if it's going to be shown in a magazine because they're need high resolution. Online we use low resolution. That's basically it. That's the bare minimum for a media kit.

Now if you want to kind of stand out in the crowd you can go a little bit further and have what's called a sell sheet. That's kind of just providing some ideas for angles or interviews. Again, keep it to one page. If you want to stand out from the crowd you definitely want to have your head shots and your products shots and your press release and maybe even your bio professionally done. Don't be snapping pictures from your cell phone and slapping them up there.

You want this to be professional. You want them to be able to use this stuff and not have to come back to you and say, "You know what? The lighting was really bad in that image. Can you get me another one?" You'll miss out. If you want to get some great publicity and be able to take advantage of every single publicity opportunity you have to have that media kit.

A great example that I always show people of a media kit is actually Pam Slim, EscapeFromCubicleNation.com. If you look at her page she has a link up at the top called press.

Tara: I'll make sure these links get put under the interview, too.

Heather: She's awesome. She has a couple of her clips. She has some videos and all of her press mentions which are extensive. Then if you notice, she has story angles and she just lists like four story angles. Then she lists interview questions. She's basically making these media folk's lives easy.

Tara: Cool. I'm so inspired.

Heather: Definitely check that out because it's very well done.

Tara: Nice. I love that. Awesome. I got very distracted and inspired by that.

Heather: I always love to just go about what other people are doing because it is inspiring. Then you can see what's possible what you can do and it's just an awesome free way to get ideas for yourself.

Tara: Fantastic. I really appreciate you taking the time today to talk with us about PR and publicity. I know you have a product called Get Famous Fast. Can you just tell us just real quick a little bit about that? I know you have a special offer for Creative Empire members as well.

Heather: I do. I created the product called Get Famous. I used to call it Get Famous Fast, but now I just call it Get Famous. Basically, over the past four years I found with most of the moms that I have been working with that getting your own publicity is the hottest topic out there. I decided to create a product for people that teaches you all about how to going about doing it yourself. Then I have also compiled some awesome media contacts for people.

So basically with Get Famous I call it the power of the publicist on a DIY budget. I normally sell that for \$197.00, but for your folks I'm going to take \$100.00 off so they can get it for \$97.00.

Tara: Thank you very much for that.

Heather: You're welcome. It's my pleasure.

Tara: Thanks again for talking with us today. Like you said, this really is a hot topic. I know that there are countless threads in the Empire about getting publicity and finding people, connecting with the media. I know that this interview is going to help people immensely and probably really going to motivate a lot of people to try some things that maybe they were a little unsure of before.

Heather: I'm glad and I hope that it does. Like I said, it's very easy these days to DIY for publicity. These will give you some great steps, beginner steps and just make it easy and manageable for you.

Tara: Well, this has been Tara Gentile for The Creative Empire along with Heather Allard from TheMogulMom.com. Thanks so much for listening in on the seminar.

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Heather: Thanks Tara.