

IMAGE AND PUBLICITY — ALMOST FREE ADVERTISING¹

by Bruce G. Wilhelm

Abstract. Before considering an elaborate advertising campaign commercial arborists should consider their company image. Both a positive and professional company image is worth thousands of dollars in "free" advertising. If you want to receive maximum benefit from your "paid" advertising dollars, let company image form the base of a good promotional program that will pay dividends in all aspects of your business.

Advertising and promotion often take a back seat to the day to day running of a tree care business. We are all faced with employee, client, and operational decisions each day. It is difficult to develop, much less implement, a quality advertising program. This coupled with the fact that most of us are arborists and have neither the background nor the time to become advertising experts means that our promotional efforts can be a frustrating hit or miss proposition or something that never gets done.

Each tree service company is different. Whether your company is large or small, full service or specializes, it can benefit from a good public relations and image program. Advertising and promotion are key ways to communicate your company services to existing clients, prospective clients, and the general public.

Company Image

Every company has an image. Generally it will come across as professional and positive or as negative and somewhat less than professional. Image is what your company communicates to the public non-verbally. Image is not *what* you say -but *how* you say it. You can spend thousands of dollars on advertising with little results if your clients are turned off by your company's attitudes, appearance, or poor client service. Quality work is of course important, but will your clients be able to see the quality through the sloppy clean up, the rude employee, or the beat up, unpainted equipment.

A survey conducted in New York found these reasons for clients not returning to a business.

- 68% gave "discourteous treatment" as their prime reason
- 14% said that their problems or complaints were not dealt with satisfactorily
- 9% said that lower prices elsewhere were the cause
- 5% were persuaded to change by talking to other people
- 3% moved away from the area

The results pointed out by this survey clearly show that 82% (4 out of 5 people) discontinued using a company for image rather than economic reasons. Projecting a professional image is not costly. What is required is that you take pride in your business and let others see that you care.

Here is a simple test you can use to see how your image measures up.

1. How are clients or prospective clients treated on the phone?
2. How does your equipment look driving down the road or on the job?
3. Have your field employees been trained in customer relation techniques?
4. How do your sales and field employees appear? Are uniforms provided and worn?
5. Are billings, and other written communications professional looking?
6. Do you have a company logo? Is it consistently used on equipment and in company communications?
7. Are all employees aware of how company goals and objectives relate to your image and how they should be communicated.
8. Are the handling of problems and complaints given top priority.

One of the key points to image is your first im-

1. Presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture in Milwaukee in August of 1985.

pression. With tree care companies this usually means how clients or prospective clients are treated on the phone. If your phone answering is done politely, *courteously*, professionally, and with a smile; it will go a long way toward promoting your image. This needs to be followed up with proper attitudes of sales and field personnel.

Employees - part of the team

You might do the best work in town and have the best looking equipment but without your employees communicating and a good image, it's probably all for naught. When hiring, look for employees with the right attitude, and aptitude to work with your clients. Teach your employees not only the technical skills of being an arborist but also the public relations skills to deal with clients. Many problems can be avoided if the field arborist just takes the time to talk to the client.

During safety meetings take the time to give some client relations training as well. Some field people, while excellent trimmers, are actually afraid to talk to the client. Some tips you can use to help employees realize the importance of a good image are the following:

Appearance

1. Are you properly dressed for your job?
2. Do you take pride in your appearance?
3. Is your hair clean and neat?
4. Are your clothes and/or uniform in good repair and clean?
5. Do you smile frequently when talking to clients?
6. Do you look clients in the eye when talking to them?

Attitude

1. Do you acknowledge clients promptly when they have a question?
2. Do you make an effort to be helpful to the client?
3. Do you go out of your way to get things "just right" for the client?
4. Do you contact the client before and after the work is done?

Telephone

1. Are the phones answered promptly?

2. Do you speak clearly and identify yourself and the company?
3. How long do people have to wait on hold before you return their call?
4. Do you relay messages to others clearly?
5. And most important—do you smile when you talk on the phone?

Other

1. Do you understand company policies regarding extra work?
2. Do you complete paper work neatly, completely and accurately?
3. Do you react calmly to irate clients?
4. Do you feel like you are part of the team and try to help other employees whenever possible?

If you have employees that can answer yes to all or most of these questions they are doing a good job in promoting your company image. Your employees need recognition too. A little praise goes a long way to encourage people to continue to build a positive professional image.

Promoting Your Image Through Publicity

Nothing does a better job of advertising than word of mouth referrals. Don't you seek the advice of friends about attorneys, doctors, accountants, and other professionals? People want to do business with someone they know or have heard good things about.

Many companies have seen the benefit of memberships in organizations like the Jaycees, the local chamber of commerce, rotary club, or other civic organizations. Memberships in these organizations increase the exposure of your company to other members and in addition you provide a valuable service to the community. Even if you don't belong, offering to speak on arboriculture at their luncheon or business meetings can be a valuable way to get exposure. Also, you can speak at garden clubs where many members have an interest in topics in which you are considered to be an expert.

Don't forget to join trade associations like the ISA. Contacts and ideas generated from these meetings have made more than one successful business. Your community is vital to your success

and it is constantly changing. To be truly successful it is your responsibility to be a part of it.

We all get telephone calls to buy a ticket to a dance or to donate to charity. That can be annoying. You may want to use the form included in the appendix as a way to weed out the organizations you don't want to support. Whenever you get a request for a donation, ask the organization to fill out one of these forms. It should stop some of the routine calls and provide you with information on worthwhile organizations who do deserve your support.

A little creative thinking can not only benefit the organization you are donating to, but also can increase your business and promote your image. For example, if landscaping the new downtown mall is a local worthy cause supported by the public, consider donating \$5.00 to the Mall Plant Fund in the name of your client for each new trimming order you receive between January 1st and March 15th. In this way you have increased your sales and helped the organization at the same time.

Free Media Exposure

Media advertising is expensive! And sometimes it's not very effective. There is a good way to get free exposure in the papers and on television and radio. If there is something interesting happening in your business, let the media know. You might be doing a difficult removal, or testing a new aphid treatment; its news if its something that is of general interest to the community or a story that has broad human interest appeal. A press release like the sample in the appendix is the proper way to get information to the media.

Make a list of the local media and trade association publications including newspapers, radio and television stations. Then every time you are doing something that is newsworthy, type up a press release on your own letterhead and send it to everyone on your list. Include 2x3 or 5x7 black and white photographs if you have them. For scheduled events send the press release out at least a week in advance of the event and then follow it up with a phone call 24 hours before the event is scheduled. Do not ask if they're coming!

Ask only if your press release has been received and if they have any questions. Let the editor or the program manager make their own decision on whether to cover the event or not.

If you are publicizing an event that has already happened get the press release out as soon as you can following the event. Be sure to include a contact person in the press release, just in case they need more information or want to do a follow up.

Local papers, weekly and biweekly papers, are excellent sources to use in promoting your image. They are hungry for quality information and they don't have a large staff to provide it. In many cases if you can write an article now and then on proper tree care they will be more than happy to publish it. Some companies have been successful in writing a weekly "aid" column giving advice on proper tree care. Every time someone reads the article, they are exposed to you and your company, and it's free.

Radio and television stations, especially in smaller cities, often have gardening shows where experts discuss landscape care or handle phone-in questions. If you have the courage to get in front of a radio microphone or television camera, let them know that you are available. You might find yourself with some publicity that money just can't buy.

Conclusion

Having a well defined company image that is communicated through the actions of your company personnel is the basis for any good advertising program. It will help structure the goals and objectives of your organization and will reinforce any advertising that you do. There is tremendous value to be gained from up front planning and *perseverance* in gaining free publicity for your company. Communication is the name of the game in advertising. If you can communicate a positive professional image you'll be miles ahead of the company that can't or won't.

*B. D. Wilhelm Co.
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Appendix I

ADVERTISEMENT AND/OR DONATION REQUEST

Please complete and return this form to our office at least seven days before you need to have your request filled. This will enable us to properly evaluate it. Because we can only afford to contribute to a selected number of causes annually, we want to be as fair to each as possible. The information you provide will help us do that.

ORGANIZATION NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____
 CONTACT PERSON _____
 ORGANIZATION PURPOSE _____
 HOW WILL DONATION BE USED? _____
 WHO WILL IT BENEFIT? _____
 WHAT WILL AD COST? _____ PRESS DATE _____
 DESCRIPTION OR SIZE OF AD _____
 HAVE WE DONATED TO YOU GROUP BEFORE _____ OF SO, WHEN? _____
 IS YOUR GROUP A CLIENT OF OUR BUSINESS? _____
 DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION HAVE NONPROFIT STATUS? _____ TAX NUMBER _____
 ARE YOU PERSONALLY A CLIENT OF OUR BUSINESS? _____
 FOR HOW LONG? _____ WHEN WAS YOUR LAST PURCHASE? _____
 IF NOT A CLIENT, WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO MAKE THIS REQUEST? _____
 ARE OTHER BUSINESSES BEING CONTACTED? _____
 OTHER COMMENTS _____

For office use only			
Date Rec.	Ok'd By	If not, reason	Cost Information

Appendix II

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

XYZ Tree Service
 123 West Main Street
 Everytown, CO 80200

Contact: Joe Jones
 (303) 765-4321

RELEASE: Immediate

XYZ Tree Service will be removing a large cottonwood tree for the Park and Recreation District on March 25, 1985. The tree is located near in City Park on the west side of the tennis courts.

This cottonwood tree has been classified as a hazardous tree by the Everytown Park and Recreation District, due to the large size of the tree and amount of dead wood in the crown. It is being removed to eliminate the chance for the tree to cause injury or property damage.

XYZ Tree Service was selected by the city council because of its experience in large tree removal. The cross section of this tree measures 65 inches at the base and it is one of the oldest trees in the city. A large crane will be necessary to lower the massive limb and trunk section to the ground safely.

The city park tennis courts will be closed March 25, 1985 to accommodate the removal operations. Removal should be completed in one day. For more information please call Joe Jones at 7865-4321.

ABSTRACT

KOCH, JERRY. 1984. **Watering trees: when, how, and how much?** Am. Forests 90(7): 13-16.

Trees need water, especially during the first three to four years after planting when they are most susceptible to drought conditions. Water is one of the most important factors needed for proper tree growth and the one most often neglected when it is in short supply. A large shade tree is capable of transpiring several hundred gallons of water through its leaves on a hot day. Determining when to water, the best method to use, and how much water to give a tree is not always easy. To get an indication of water stress, examine the soil around the tree. Since the majority of the tree's roots are in the upper 12 inches of soil, taking a sample of the soil in the area will tell the story. By squeezing a handful of the soil sample, you will be able to tell whether the soil needs additional water. No matter what soil type you have, it is far better to give the soil around the tree a good soaking at less frequent intervals than to water just a little every few days. There are two common methods of watering trees. One is surface watering. Another method—subsurface watering—can be done with a root feeder. In areas of the country where rainfall is generally common in the summer months, watering trees is not an expensive maintenance item since it has to be performed only periodically during occasional dry spells.