

## Best Marketing Practices Can Be Inexpensive

When it comes to marketing, many people miss the mark, says Jimmy Warren, president of TotalCom Marketing Communications (Tuscaloosa, AL) and creator of the Marketing Your Hospital blog (<http://marketingyourhospital.com>).

“Knowing your audience is of utmost importance, allowing you to craft a message specifically for them,” says Warren. “To know your audience is to be able to describe the person who most benefits from the services your organization offers — demographically, geographically, psychographically — and know their behaviors and motivations. If you know this, you can fashion your message to speak specifically to them as if it is a single person. That helps your message to be on-target and effective.”

To determine your target audience and get the best possible results from your marketing efforts, Warren offers these inexpensive or free steps:

1. **Identify areas where you have previously been successful.** Who has responded to your message? Why did they respond positively? Describe them. What do they have in common? This should help you determine who your target audience should be.
2. **Examine similar nonprofits and determine who is responding to their message and why.** This may help determine audiences that would also be receptive to your message.
3. **If you are associated with a national organization, ask them for help.** They can help you identify your primary target audience(s). Having discussions with other local affiliates of that national organization in similar markets can also help.

Warren says one of the most important things to remember, once you determine your audience, is to stay the course. “It’s so easy to be distracted and end up chasing rabbits. You must do the hard work up front to determine your target audience(s) and what the appropriate message is for them. The temptation is to get involved in many good activities but which are not core to your audience or your message.”

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## Which News and Information Distribution Services Fit You Best?

There are numerous options for distributing press releases to media outlets, including paid services with a variety of agreement possibilities. So how do you choose which option is right for you?

For starters, match the news and information distribution service with your target industry, says Kamy Akhavan, president and managing editor at ProCon.org (Santa Monica, CA), an organization that promotes critical thinking, education and informed citizenship by presenting controversial issues in a straightforward, nonpartisan, primarily pro-con format. ProCon.org currently uses PR Newswire ([www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com)) and has used PRWeb ([www.prweb.com](http://www.prweb.com)) and self-distribution.

Akhavan offers suggestions for getting started with a news and information distribution service:

“If you are a publicly traded business, then perhaps you want Business Wire. If you have a tiny marketing budget, perhaps PRWeb is an affordable starting option. If you want national exposure and don’t have a target market, then maybe try one of the less expensive competitors like Vocus ([www.vocus.com](http://www.vocus.com)) or Cision ([us.cision.com](http://us.cision.com)). If you want to target specific journalists, think about purchasing access to media lists or media databases and doing it yourself. If you don’t know how to write great press releases, then you may want to use a PR firm instead of a distribution service.”

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### Press Release Distribution Companies

If you’re just getting started and want to research which company may be right for you, here is a list to consider:

- 24-7 [pressrelease.com](http://pressrelease.com) ([www.24-7pressrelease.com](http://www.24-7pressrelease.com))
- Business Wire ([www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com))
- Free Press Release Service ([www.freepressrelease.com](http://www.freepressrelease.com))
- MarketWire ([www.marketwire.com](http://www.marketwire.com))
- PR.com ([www.pr.com](http://www.pr.com))
- PR Newswire ([www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com))
- PRWeb ([www.prweb.com](http://www.prweb.com))

### One Company’s Experience With a Distribution Service

When it comes to a news and distribution service, officials at ProCon.org (Santa Monica, CA) continue to rely on PR Newswire ([prnewswire.com](http://prnewswire.com)). And they do so even after receiving lower cost offers from competitors, says Kamy Akhavan, ProCon.org’s president and managing editor.

Why? Results, Akhavan says.

With PRNewswire, he says ProCon.org’s press releases have been reprinted at least 40 times per release and usually over 80 times. Their record was more than 400 media mentions from a single release about the Big Three auto bailout.

Additional reasons they choose PR Newswire, Akhavan says, are that journalists notice PR Newswire releases, the releases are automatically optimized for search engines and allow for unlimited hyperlinks. PRNewswire also offers an online nonprofit toolkit, including sample news releases, educational articles, tips and advice.

“We started using PRNewswire in 2007 after researching the biggest players in the PR world, getting quotes and selecting what we thought was the best fit for our goals and our budget,” says Akhavan.

“Signing up took about 20 minutes. The membership fee was waived and we received a discount on all services — both benefits resulting from our 501(c)(3) nonprofit status,” he says. “We started with the service of paying for individual releases (about \$600 per national press release), and then after a year of familiarizing ourselves with their services we signed a one-year agreement to get 10 press releases distributed to their Washington, D.C. region for \$150 each.

“The press release submission process is all done online at the PR Newswire website and requires no maintenance on our part,” Akhavan says. “When we want to send a release, we visit the site, fill in some fields, upload our press release and click submit. 10-20 minutes later a PR Newswire editor calls to confirm the headline, word count, origin city, method of distribution, etc.”