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# Effectively using the media

Print professionals tell chamber members how to better use media

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Small and minority-owned companies should make better use of the media to promote their businesses, according to print media members who participated in a panel discussion convened by the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania.

The Aug. 15 event, held at the chamber's offices in the Regional Asset Towers, Downtown, was designed to help chamber members understand how the media works, and how it can work for them.

"Our mission is to promote access and opportunity for Black business owners and professionals," said chamber President Doris Carson Williams. "We've learned our members want to know how to effectively use the media."

About 35 chamber members attended the event. Panel moderator and New Pittsburgh Courier Publisher Rod Doss guided the panelists through topics such as how publications select stories; how business can increase coverage; and how to make friends with the media.

Panel members included Courier Managing Editor Ulish Carter; Pittsburgh Tribune-Review business writer Lou Ransom; Pittsburgh Business Times Editor Betsy Benson; Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Assistant to the Publisher Lorraine Branham; Small Business News Editor Dan Bates; and Renaissance News Publisher Connie Portis.

During the session, panelists described problems associated with covering small or minority-owned businesses.

Several told stories about receiving press releases from small businesses that left out crucial information on an



PHOTO BY VENETIA PALM

**LEARNING FROM MEDIA PROS**—African American Chamber of Commerce members listen intently as Renaissance Publications Publisher Connie Portis, left, and Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Assistant to the Publisher Lorraine Branham, right, provide insight to their publications.

event, such as a contact phone number. Others mentioned releases that were sent to people who no longer worked at the newspaper.

They all agreed that small businesses, in general, do not get as much coverage as they should. Because Black-owned businesses are generally small, they often receive less coverage than white-owned businesses, panelists said.

"Large businesses have huge PR (public relations) departments sending things constantly," said Branham. "Small businesses are harder to cover because reporters have to dig for stories."

Although they admitted the lack of small business coverage is partly the media's fault, Ransom and Carter said Black businesses should be more proactive in soliciting coverage.

Ransom, a former Jet magazine editor, said the problem also affects other cities.

"Getting not just Black businesses, but small businesses to contact us is tough. It's a problem everywhere," he said.

Carter, who previously worked in sales and retail management, told the audience Black business owners must do a better job at promoting their businesses.

"We don't get enough from Black businesses," he said. "If you send a photograph (to the

Courier), it is almost always guaranteed to get a story on the business page."

Portis agreed, but added space limitations may ultimately dictate whether a story is covered or not.

Because the media outlets represented by the panelists have different limitations on the amount of coverage they give business, Doss asked them to summarize the amount and type of coverage their publications provide.

Bates said the Small Business News likes "pain and suffering" stories about the ups and downs of growing a business, and will often look at transactions months later to see what worked and what didn't.

Benson said the weekly Business Times has to be more analytical than daily papers, although it does cover breaking news online. Its sections focus on stock market news, specific industries, people, real estate and "how-to" strategies for small business.

Branham said the Post-Gazette looks at different business topics on a daily basis, including personal finance and workplace life. The Post-Gazette includes essays from people in business in its private sector section.

Carter said the biweekly Courier considers business the "new frontier" for the Black community.

The Courier devotes the front of its mid-week edition's B section to business coverage on new entrepreneurial ventures, executive features, hires and promotions and local small business portraits.

Finally, the panelists addressed the issue of whether advertising with a given publication will lead to feature coverage.

Most said advertising does not influence editorial content.

Carter, however, told a different story. "A lot of people look at the newspaper as a social service agency," he said. "But if it's a choice between covering someone who advertises and someone who doesn't, I'm sorry but I'm going with the advertiser."

## Media Savvy Pointers

### Establish relationships

Introduce yourself and company to editors and writers at various publications. Offer yourself to writers as an "expert voice" for stories on your industry. It will get you and your company's name into multiple stories and may lead to a feature story.

### Consider lead-time

Don't leave media relations for the last minute. Begin planning event coverage when you begin planning the event.

### Remember the five Ws

Who are you? What is happening? When? Where is it happening? and Why is it important or unusual enough to warrant coverage?

### Call the correct people

Larger publications have more than one business editor; call to find out who covers your industry. Contacting the wrong editor shows a lack of care. So why should that publication care about you?

### Include contact numbers

If a publication cannot get back to you, your press release will end up in the trash.

### Be honest

Tell reporters about struggles and setbacks that make success sweeter and interesting reading. If you lie, reporters will kill the story.

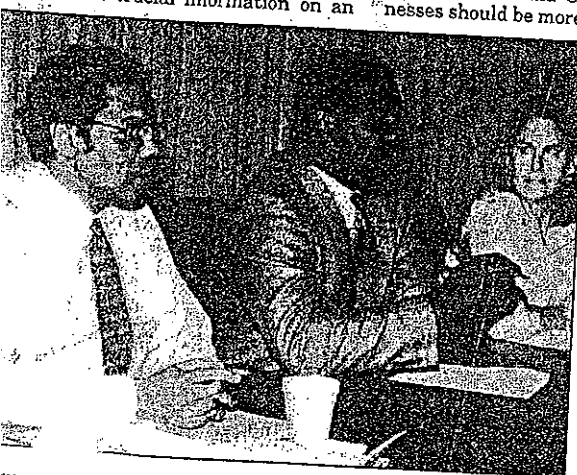


PHOTO BY VENETIA PALM

**KEEPING THE POINT**—Pittsburgh Tribune-Review business writer Lou Ransom, center, tells the audience Black business owners must do a better job of promoting their businesses. Pittsburgh Business Times Editor Betsy Benson, right, and New Pittsburgh Courier Managing Editor Ulish Carter wait to respond.

**Distribution is the question**

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