

Ten silly season stories that score for PR

Peter Bartram explores the ways PR pros can help fill up those wide open column inches during the most popular holiday months

August is the “silly season” – time to dust off those stories about crop circles, “holidays from hell”, and the Loch Ness monster. Or, perhaps, not. August, when hard news about politics and the economy is usually in short supply (although perhaps not so much this year), is a time when PR people can score with the right ideas. Here are 10 suggestions to get your creative juices flowing.

- 1. Great day out.* Many newspapers and magazines have already run features about places to go. But watch for another batch of these articles just before August Bank holiday (on the 31st). *Tip:* too late for monthlies, but not to catch weeklies and dailies - and websites.
- 2. Time to pack.* Sun glasses, swimsuit, beach towels, haemorrhoid cream... eh? Yes, it's surprising what press releases recommend should go in the holiday luggage. With thousands still waiting for their break, there's still time to rush out a late release. *Tip:* time-to-pack stories work best when they have a credible topical edge – such as antiseptic hand gel to ward off swine flu.
- 3. Clothes peg.* If fashion PR is your bag, it's not difficult to hang stories on what people will be wearing in the summer. Too late now for the big fashion mags summer spreads, but look out for topical ideas such as “what to wear at...” (insert the forthcoming summer event of your choice). *Tip:* consider a picture driven piece and make sure the picture is something worth publishing.
- 4. English country garden.* There are gardening stories for all seasons. But it's summer when the part-time gardens get most use. “Kids reveal their perfect garden for the summer holidays” was one effective release this year. *Tip:* Focus on what people might want to do in their garden as much as what they grow.
- 5. Silly money.* Popular silly season financial stories focus around holiday cash. How to get the best deal, use travellers' cheques wisely, avoid foreign exchange rip-offs are all good stand-bys if you can find an original twist. *Tip:* personal finance and travel pages love stories about real people's financial experiences.
- 6. Seasonal hazards.* Summer is full of special hazards from wasp stings to sunburn. Stories on how to avoid the more common often find a home. Two unusual examples: (1) beware! droughts cause house subsidence and (2) watch out amateur builders! – that concrete you're laying could injure you. *Tip:* provide statistics about the number of people affected by the problem to add weight to your story.
- 7. Travellers' tales.* PR people often overlook the fact that hundreds of newspapers and magazines – even local rags and some trade and tech mags - run diary columns and they're always looking for light anecdotes about people to fill them. If you've got clients (or colleagues) who've got a traveller's tale to tell, it could make column inches. *Tip:* contact the

diary writer direct rather than trying to issue your story through a press release.

8. *Save the planet*. How can people enjoy the summer and save the planet? Give it some thought and you may find you've got a story to tell. Perhaps it's about eco-holidays or eco-picnics or eco-anything. *Tip*: focus on the facts and throttle back on the green rhetoric to make your stand story stand up (and out).

9. *Brought to book*. Many newspapers and magazines feature a summer books supplement – but most have already been published this year. Even so, there could still be mileage in books about places people might want to visit or people (think sport, entertainers) associated with summer. *Tip*: don't overlook the mileage for book coverage in local and regional newspapers and magazines.

10. *Working holiday*. Can't give up? With laptops, mobiles and Blackberries, workaholics take it all with them. There are plenty of stories about the latest technologies that enable harassed managers to keep in touch with the office. *Tip*: business magazines plus trade and tech titles may be more interested in case studies of executives who pull off big deals on holiday rather than technical backgrounders on the kit they use.

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