

## Insider: Hotel Public Relations: Your Fifteen Minutes

By Andrew Freeman, President, Andrew Freeman & Company



Mr. Andrew Freeman

One of my first experiences with public relations taught me the value of making it a priority and the value of having a well-crafted plan that has stayed with me since. Armed with a focused message and a solid story, we were able to stand out, promote the brand and ultimately drive business during some difficult times. Back in the day, the Russian Tea Room was the quintessential New York restaurant, very popular with celebrities, locals and tourists alike. The joke was that the restaurant's marketing plan was to simply unlock the doors and watch the people come in all day long. And so it was.

Until the stock market crashed and there weren't as many people flocking to the restaurant. The owner recognized this and hired me to develop new programs and remind everyone what a destination the Russian Tea Room was.

The biggest dilemma we faced was that the private dining and banquet business the Russian Tea Room enjoyed was seriously affected by the fact that people were no longer throwing parties.

To combat the sluggish private dining business, we looked at ways to utilize the private dining room to build revenue and keep the Russian Tea Room in the limelight.

And so the Russian Tea Room Cabaret was born. Our cabaret programs started with two shows on Sunday night in the beautiful New York Room. Guests were encouraged to dine from a lower-priced menu and enjoy cocktails with the show. We worked with a top entertainment producer to secure acts ranging from legends to rising stars. Within six weeks, we were the talk of the town.

There were two primary elements that contributed to our success. First, we were ready for the press and for the crowds. We thought through the operations aspects to make for a successful show, securing acts people wanted to see, playing up our landmark setting, creating an inviting menu, and offering the experience during a relatively uncompetitive time frame.

Second, we implemented a public relations plan that took into account all the story angles. We did minimal advertising (calendar listings) but launched a significant media relations campaign around the resurgence of cabaret and the latest "room" on the scene. We took advantage of promoting the entertainers (and thus our show) by getting them interviews in print and on radio. With new entertainment every week, we had a reason to go back to the press every week. Because it became such the place to be on Sunday nights in New York, the people who experienced the Russian Tea Room Cabaret spread the word for us (think of a million new PR people). As part of our PR campaign, we also spread the word in our own main dining room and offered our regular guests VIP reservations and special seating.

The Russian Tea Room Cabaret had a successful run of over three years until the restaurant was sold. It was the star of a well-executed public relations plan in a very well integrated marketing plan, and still reminds me of the power that public relations holds in bringing business through the doors.

Sincerely,  
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