

# PR WEEK

## PUTTING YOUR PRODUCTS TO THE TEST



Service journalism's rise means that more types of items than ever are being reviewed. While high-profile reviews can make or break a product, for some categories getting that third-party validation used to be a challenge. Now, thanks to the growth of online product evaluation sites – as well as the commitment of traditional print and TV outlets to more service journalism – it's not just the latest tech product or cool, new car that gets a review. Every new product from mattresses to mascara can pretty well count on getting a grade, though it's often no longer in a single-product story.

“You're seeing a lot more roundups than before because there are more things in every category,” notes Julia Beck, president of Forty Weeks, a maternity and parenting marketing specialist. For that reason, M. Booth & Associates VP Josh Rosenberg suggests the PR groundwork for any media review process should be an ongoing practice. “You should already be a resource for them in a category, even before they do their reviews,” he says. “And, obviously, you must be proactive because there are certain times when outlets are likely to cover one category versus another.”

Jay Lemke, associate media relations director at Carmichael Lynch Spong, adds, “You're in a much stronger position if you have a really good relationship with the editor. You can explain to them that this is or isn't your client's top-of-the-line product, and should thus be reviewed accordingly.” But a relationship only gets you so far, he adds, noting that getting reviews in some categories simply requires more legwork.

For client Select Comfort and its Sleep Number beds, CLS increased its chances of getting media validation by delivering beds to the editor or reporter's home and storing their old beds for them for 30 days. “If you're not going to make it easy for them,” says Lemke, “they're not going to do it most of the time.” Getting a review is one thing – getting a good one is quite another. Beck notes that in most situations, reviews end up being one or two reporters' subjective opinions. She adds, however, that you can increase your client's chances by learning all you can about the criteria that will be considered in evaluation. “Most reporters will give you an idea of what they are looking for,” she says. Occasionally, great rapport with an editor can help tilt the process in your client's favor, though it's unlikely to turn a bad review into a good one.

“If the relationship is really strong between the editor and the PR firm, an editor who finds a product ineffective or displeasing may give the firm the courtesy of feedback and give the publicist the option to have that product review omitted,” says Katherine Rothman, CEO of New York-based KMR Communications, which specializes in beauty PR.