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[HOME](#) [FEATURED STORY](#) PUBLIC RELATIONS: "A LOT OF PATIENCE, A LOT OF PERSISTENCE AND A LOT OF PERSEVERANCE"

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Public Relations: "A Lot of Patience, A Lot of Persistence and A Lot of Perseverance"

New York City-based publicist Janet Appel talks with Opportunist's Managing Editor Leslie Stone about her career, some of the clients she has represented and how PR has changed through the years.



Clients call her “tenacious” and “determined” due to her untiring pursuit of media coverage on their behalf. For Manhattan-based publicist Janet Appel, who admits she doesn’t always take the word “no” seriously, there is no higher compliment. “I’ve even been told by the media that I’m extremely persistent—in a nice way. [Laughs] I prefer to say that I am ‘positively’ tenacious because I always try to go the extra mile to get results.”

Appel’s public relations career began quite by accident when, in the early ’90s, she was working on a charity auction for Big Apple Greeter—a nonprofit organization that pairs visitors with volunteer tour guides to help them get the most out of their stay in New York City. While cold-calling to ask for donated items, she spoke with a woman at the National Horse Show about tickets to the event (then held at Madison Square Garden). “She sounded really busy,” Appel recalls, “so I said, ‘It sounds like you could use an extra pair of hands.’” The woman subsequently invited Appel to volunteer at the National Horse Show, which she did, and was so impressed with her natural ability that she recommended her to



the PR person handling their account. “I put them right into *The New York Times* and the executive director called to tell me thank you,” Appel adds. “I was looking to get into public relations or advertising and it kind of fell into my lap. It was great because I spent many years of my life horseback riding. It was a dream come true to be able to work in an area where I had a passion.”

Today, Appel is sought after for her expertise in media relations, social media, new product launches and product promotion, event planning, developing community relations sponsored programs, new business development, strategic problem solving and crisis management. During a career spanning more than 20 years, she has worked in a broad range of industries including financial services, real estate, staffing/employment, food and beverage, fashion, healthcare, entertainment and the equestrian world. Clients have included book authors and entertainers, Harvard Health Publications (a division of Harvard Medical School), The Brain Music Therapy Center, Shopoff Group/Shopoff Realty Investments (REITS), Manhattan Mortgage, Puissance Enterprises (real estate), Diversity City Theater Co., DreamWorks and Snelling Personnel Services. She has also worked with strengthening her clients' image while enhancing their visibility through national, regional and local print/broadcast and web media within major markets around the country. Media obtained for her clients includes but is not limited to: *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *Huffington Post*, *Institutional Investor*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *The Washington Post*, *Barron's*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Smithsonian*, Associated Press, Reuter's TV, Fox, MSNBC, WCBS, CNBC, the "Today" show, "Good Morning America," "The Doctor Oz Show," *The Times of London*, *Harper's Bazaar UK*, Bloomberg Radio, Google Talk and Marketwatch.com.

She was one of three experts on the panel "Don't Forget Radio" at the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA) and was recently profiled in the article [*Book Publicity Inside Tips: An Interview with Publicist Janet Appel*](#). A graduate of Lehman College, she holds a B.A. in Speech Communication with a minor in English and German studies.

Opportunist: You have a job that many can only dream of having. Did you ever encounter any obstacles starting out?

Janet Appel: The biggest obstacle for me was not having been in the business and people telling me that I didn't have any contacts. But that was never a problem for me because I started out in the recruitment and employment agency industry. I spent about 15 years in that business, which, most people don't realize, is strictly sales. You learn how to get on the phone and get clients. If you don't get any clients—meaning companies to work with—you have no business.

Opportunist: What did it take to grow your business into what it is today?

Janet Appel: A lot of patience, a lot of persistence and a lot of perseverance.

Opportunist: Has the public relations industry changed much since you started out?

Janet Appel: Yes, in some ways. Just a few decades ago publicists had to rely on traditional TV, print and radio. Now there are websites pertaining to specific industries, along with podcasts about a vast array of topics, and social media has given us a lot more room to get our client's name out. The Internet has certainly made my job more efficient because there are many ways to find the information I need aside from the standard databases. I can email clients' press kits and video clips, and reporters can find out more about my clients from their website.

Opportunist: How do you differentiate yourself?

Janet Appel: By finding opportunities my clients would never know about. Most people assume you have to be famous to be in the newspaper but that isn't always true. One of



the things I've been able to do is get people who were not famous covered by major media outlets because they had something important to say. It wasn't that they were a celebrity but they had expertise that major media outlets were interested in. So I would say that one of my strengths is being able to get non-celebrity clients into national papers or media outlets or on TV and radio shows—both nationally and internationally. In addition, I also spend a lot of time talking to reporters, rather than just emailing the client's press material to them. I excel at media training and clients appreciate the amount of time I devote to it.

Opportunist: Can you tell us about a few campaigns that you're especially proud of?

Janet Appel: I made a cold call to DreamWorks when I read that Steven Spielberg was going to release the animated film "[Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron](#)." I was thrilled that my colleague and I were hired to handle the equine PR, and I am proud of the publicity work we did for them. In his editor's letter, Darrell Dodds, who was editor of *Paint Horse Journal* at the time, praised my ability to talk him into doing an article featuring an animated Paint Horse character. That resulted in a multipage spread in his magazine,



which I believe was a first for a publication dedicated to a living breed. I enjoyed working with the internationally acclaimed singer and actress [Ute](#)

Lemper a few years ago when she was preparing to release her album 'Between Yesterday and Tomorrow.' I have been involved in several new product launches where we threw parties around the country to introduce the product in the local area. I was able to get one of my author-client's books handed out at the 7 on Seventh Fashion Show during New York Fashion Week, as well as at Condé Nast's Valentine's Day event where people marry at the top of the Empire State Building. My work with an author-client whose memoir about how hearing a piece of unfamiliar music in a store triggered a long-blocked memory and resulted in her successful return to painting and triggered the writing of her memoir, got me a lot of praise. I brought my client, the founder of the Brain Music Therapy Center in New York City, into it and was able to get her and the author on some health radio shows. They were interested in the music-memory connection. Media people said that was a brilliant tie-in. I represented a nonprofit theater company whose play was about the creation of spider silk, and I came up with the idea for an auction. For the auction, I obtained a piece of Louise Bourgeois' artwork, her 2003 Untitled (Spider and Snake), which is an engraving and drypoint with red hand-coloring on paper. It was a limited edition artist's proof, No. 11 of 12. Once, again, I just picked up the phone and made that call!

Opportunist: Have you ever had any over-the-top requests from clients?

Janet Appel: I can't say that I have, but there has been a lot of going the extra mile. I don't know if others do this kind of thing or not. One client wanted tickets to "The Wiz" when it was sold out. I made a few phone calls and arranged for them to get the tickets. Another client's wallet was stolen and I helped straighten the situation out with the credit card companies and banks. Another client needed to change travel reservations made on Orbitz, who refused to change them. Guess who got on the phone and handled that? [Laughs] Sometimes clients have unexpected emergencies that normally do not fall within the PR context, but I do my best to help out when I can.



Opportunist: With this being an election year, what PR advice would you give the presidential candidates?

Janet Appel: Stop fighting with each other and stay with the message they're trying to get out to the public in a clear, concise manner. It's important not to waffle on the issues and give straightforward answers. The format for debates obviously requires that each candidate stand behind a podium, but I think they would do better without it. I think it makes them somewhat unnatural. They can lean on it and kind of use it as a crutch and hide behind it to a degree. I would like to see them get out from behind the podium because it would give the impression that they are more open and approachable.

Opportunist: There have been quite a few potential PR disasters through the years. How do you think Chipotle Mexican Grill handled its recent E.coli crisis?

Janet Appel: The best thing a company can do when a crisis occurs is to take responsibility for the situation early on and have an open line of communication with both the media and customers and suppliers. They have to prepare in advance for anything that can go wrong and define their message and know what they're going to do once the situation is there. Chipotle grabbed hold of that. They handled it very well. From what I read, their situation was an example of crisis management being handled well and a company taking the necessary steps. It seems they had a plan and they executed it. They were open about the situation. They didn't hide or deny anything.

Opportunist: Can you tell us about a typical day for you? What do you enjoy most about working in PR?

Janet Appel: I enjoy that every day is different. And, because I deal with so many different types of clients, I learn about new industries. Although each day is different, I spend a high percentage of my time working with the media. I prefer making calls instead of just sending emails. My strategy is to pick up the phone and talk with people because I believe it helps me develop stronger relationships with them. I also meet with clients or journalists in person, although it's not an everyday occasion. I have traveled numerous times to meet with non-New York City-based clients and the media wherever the interview took place.

Opportunist: Is there one technology that you simply cannot live without?

Janet Appel: Actually there are two: my smartphone and my computer.

Opportunist: Do you have any advice for young people desiring to enter the field?

Janet Appel: Pursue your passion, but don't let that get that in the way of accepting your first position—even if it's not necessarily in the same field your passion is in. You might not start out in precisely what you want to do but when you're young you can explore a little bit before you settle into something. It may lead to your dream job.

Also, most young people today are very savvy on social media but they should learn how to use their social media skills for business. I would recommend that they either volunteer or get an internship and really utilize those skills in the way a business would want to use them. I think that's an open field for anyone coming out of school now.

Opportunist: What is the best way for potential clients to find you?

Janet Appel: They can email at janetappel54@aol.com, call me directly at (212) 258-2413, or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#).

Cover Photo: Lewis H. Appel



Leslie Stone is an award-winning writer, editor and journalist with more than two decades of experience covering business, finance, real estate and lifestyle issues for newspapers, magazines and online publications. Originally from Virginia, she currently resides between Florida and Michigan. Follow Leslie on Twitter: [@lescstone](#).

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