

Sales & Marketing

Hot off the press

Java logs blaze a trail to major American media outlets

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Java logs are hot. The Canadian-invented fireplace logs, made from used coffee grinds, have garnered press coverage around the world including a write-up in *The New York Times*, a listing as one of *Time* magazine's "Coolest Inventions" of 2003, and an appearance on Ellen DeGeneres's talk show. Not bad for a product invented by a mechanical engineer puttering around in his kitchen.

So how did a tiny company with only 20 employees shared between its head office in Montreal and a manufacturing facility in Ottawa land such big fish? Marcel Sbrollini, president and CEO of Robustion Products Inc. shares the secrets to his company's media relations.

"Fundamentally, it starts with the product. You have to clearly identify key attributes of your product that have compelling reasons for [the media] to cover," says Sbrollini. "If you can define the 'passion' elements or benefits of your product you have a greater chance of getting media coverage."

In the case of Java-Log, early consumer feedback and press coverage indicated that media outlets were interested in the coffee angle. "Traditional firelogs [made of sawdust] are not exciting whereas people feel passionate about coffee. So we positioned it as 'The Coffee Firelog.'"

When preparing to move into the northeast United States last year, they targeted specific media outlets with press releases highlighting the "coffee connection." They followed up all of those releases with a phone call, ostensibly to "make sure they got it," which, more often than not, led to a request for a sample.

Once the ball is rolling, "there's a domino effect." *Time* writer Anita Hamilton read about the Java-Log in *The New York Times*. "We chose to include the Java-Log because it was an original, creative and intelligent idea," says Hamilton, adding, "The idea that coffee grounds are a better source of heat than wood fascinated me."

In turn, the *Time* article led to the appearance on *Ellen*. And while it's currently only available in North America, Java-Logs have been written up in places as far-flung as Israel, Taiwan, and Japan.

Robustion hasn't done after-sales research to determine the exact number of sales directly attributable to all this free publicity but it's been substantial. One website carrying the product sold out of 240 cases of logs in two days after the cameo on *Ellen*.