



NO SPA HOPPING wed!

By L. Brooks Baldwin

On Courting and Casanovas

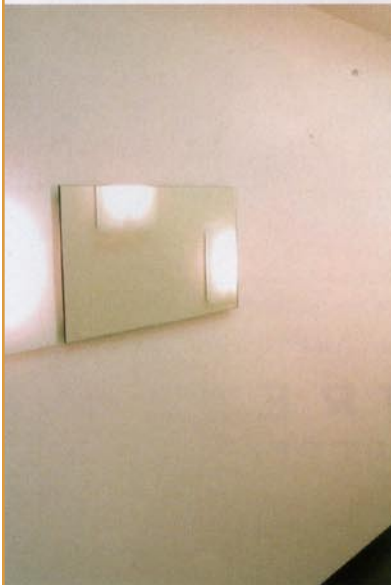
Romancing the media requires patience, delicacy and commitment.

AS A JOURNALIST I'M REGULARLY ASKED FOR TIPS and suggestions about how to garner media attention and publicity. Most of the inquiries come from small-business owners with no marketing experience. I applaud these individuals for their inquiries, since there really are no dumb questions when it comes to promoting your business.

The truth is, I can relate. I came into my journalism career with no marketing, journalism or media relations experience. I was, at the time, a criminal defense attorney. The fact that there was no discernible link between practicing criminal law and writing about spas did not dissuade me from making the career shift. Let me assure you though, that the transition took years of plugging along, asking questions (many of which I'm sure seemed dumb), attempting new practices and seeking feedback from my colleagues and mentors.

So, if your goal is to win over media attention for your business, then by all means go for it, regardless of your level of experience. But be sure to stay the course because success takes time and consistency. Ask questions, read books, take courses, and above all, observe and learn from others.

To that end, I'm about to give you two examples of publicity seekers (with and without previous experience) who operate with great finesse. I say finesse because effective publicity really does rely on cultivating and courting media markets. Finesse is also demonstrated by the ability to "deliver the goods"; for the media, that means unique and compelling information—not your standard boilerplate material. Unlike many who've gone before them, the individuals in these examples don't treat their publicity efforts like one-night stands.



Forever Laser Institute has attracted the media with a compelling back-story.



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Drs. Luigi and Barbara Polla capture spa journalists' attention with their family-based health- and beauty-care businesses that include two medical spas in Geneva, Switzerland.

Boldness and a Back-Story

Our first successful publicity seeker isn't afraid to go after what she wants—and with a clever measure of zest! Ada Polla is a 28-year-old Washington, D.C.-based entrepreneur who, in addition to managing the development and North American distribution of her family's Swiss skincare line, *Alchimie Forever* (www.alchimie-forever.com), in 2003 created her own company, Alchimie Forever LLC, to further promote sales and distribution of the product line within the United States.

I first met Polla in 2002, immediately following a spa publicity presentation

I gave during that year's annual ISPA conference in Anaheim, California. She came up to me to ask how she could learn more about promoting her product line. I recall that she had a voracious appetite for tips and suggestions, as well as a boat-load of gritty determination, both of which she has consistently demonstrated to me over the ensuing years of our collegial friendship.

After our initial meeting, I thought I'd probably never hear from Polla again; in an infant industry that has suddenly burst into a billion-dollar business, there's no shortage of fly-by-night entrepreneurs popping onto my radar one day and disappearing the next. But Polla, I soon learned, is a great one for follow-up. In fact, in the three-

plus years following that first meeting, I've received a consistent flow of phone calls and personal e-mail messages notifying me of late-breaking news and seeking suggestions or feedback on various publicity-related issues.

Most recently, Polla called to arrange a meeting to discuss the latest happenings and ask me to drop by the Alchimie Forever booth at the recent ISPA Expo (it was the company's first year exhibiting) to view and sample some products. Now, while I'd

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happily alert you to the comprehensive and growing list of products in the Alchimie Forever line, Polla understands that what she needs to deliver is the *back-story*. The back-story is what personalizes Polla's whole product line and distinguishes it from the swamp of its worthy competitors. Unlike most entrepreneurs seeking publicity, she has taken the time to develop and communicate the personal story behind the products, winning her my attention (and now yours):

Polla is the eldest daughter of two Swiss doctors: Dr. Luigi Polla, a prominent dermatologist and European laser expert, and Dr. Barbara Polla, an antiaging specialist and leader in biomedical

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COURTESY ALCHIMIE FOREVER

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research on antioxidants and stress proteins. In 1997, Polla's parents transformed her father's dermatology practice into the **Forever Laser Institut Rhon** in Geneva, Switzerland. The 385-square-meter, fully integrated European medical spa focuses heavily on cosmetic procedures performed under Luigi's strict medical supervision. The business was so successful that a second Geneva location, the 360-square-meter **Forever Laser Institut Lac**, was opened in 2003.

In 2000, the Alchimie Forever face and body line was created to further promote and extend the healing and preventative benefits of treatments received at the Forever Laser Institut.

That's the story—straightforward, personal and unique. Now, I know there are likely dozens of intriguing stories belonging to other entrepreneurs, but I don't know them like I do Polla's, and the reasons are three-fold: One, she established and nurtured a relationship with me; two, she had a unique and personal story to share; and three, while it has taken years

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to finally get her story into my column, Polla has patiently bided her time, quietly pursuing without hounding me. She understands the fine art that lies between tactful persistence and clumsy bombardment. When you think about it, it's very much like the difference between being wooed by an honorable suitor and being cruised by an artless Casanova.