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## Engaging the Media: Perfecting the Pitch

Your organization is experiencing tremendous momentum. Profits are up. You have penetrated new markets and hired an additional 50 employees over the past few months. What's your secret? What's your story? You are now a bona fide newsmaker, a mover/shaker within your industry. The choice before you is whether to rest on your laurels or take advantage of this great opportunity to share the secrets of your success with a broader audience. Such audiences include potential, existing and former clients, shareholders and future employees.

Can you persuade a journalist, blogger, editor or producer to use your company as a source in a story like public relations professionals do? Sure you can. Media outlets are hungry for new material, for better angles, for stories that inspire and capture the imagination. You can be that resource for the media.

A good starting point for your media outreach efforts is defining your audiences. Obviously, your client or customer base composes one audience group. A second target may be the experts and product analysts covering your industry. Find out what publications, websites or blogs your clients like to read. Odds are they enjoy reading the latest news and trends in their industry. For instance, if your clients provide software for the banking industry, chances are they read *American Banker* and *Credit Union Journal*.

Once you identify your media targets, drill down a little further to find the individual journalist or editorial department covering your business specialty. Analyze each target reporter's coverage on a case-by-case basis, and then create a story map that illustrates the "essential ingredients" needed to build a convincing and complete story for that reporter. Once you have completed that process, work with the experts and delegated spokespeople within your company to identify the content needed to bring each story to life – it can make all the difference between an unread email and a feature story.

Now you are ready to make your pitch. Basically, the media pitch has five components: the eye-catcher, pitch foundation, pitch elements, pitch logistics and next steps.

- As the name implies, the **eye-catcher** must grab the journalist's attention. Resist the temptation to oversell the story. One or two relevant sentences that describe the competitive advantage your product or service brings to the market should do the trick. Don't give the journalist a white paper in your pitch, just the facts. If the journalist is interested in the story, there will be follow-up questions.

Example: We have developed a new technology that allows doctors to access up-to-date patient information online in a matter of minutes. Our technology bests the industry average by

more than 45 minutes.

- The next component is the **pitch foundation**. These are the details that support the claims made in the eye-catcher.

Example: Several local hospitals have been using this technology, and they each report quicker access times. We are gathering similar data from other hospitals using this technology.

- The **pitch elements** are the enticing visual/human components of the story that will make it worthwhile for the reporter. In developing the pitch, go beyond what your product or service means to your company or its bottom line and focus on its positive impact on consumers or the environment. The best stories are about people.

Example: This improvement in record access benefits the patients and the medical professionals. Doctors can now use that information to immediately address issues surrounding new patients. This is especially true for patients visiting medical facilities outside of their network.

- The **pitch logistics** focus on how you propose to deliver the story to the journalist or outlet. You may suggest, for instance, that you will be available for an interview at a specific date and time. For an

in-person interview or site visit, you can share the directions, parking considerations and meeting location with the journalist. Make it as convenient as possible for the media.

Example: If you are interested in finding out more information about this new technology, we can arrange a phone conversation between you and our head physician next week. If you would like to come out and see the technology in action, we can arrange a site visit to include a conversation with patients who have benefited from this new technology.

- The **next steps** components are not always needed but are a great tool to maintain some measure of control of the process. Next steps allow you to gauge journalist interest in your story.

Example: If you are interested, please let me know. I will work to clear our head physician's schedule and will coordinate with our patient representative to make sure we have a patient for you to interview.

Those are the basic components and steps to follow to engage your targeted media. You will not always be successful in placing stories. To use a baseball comparison, try to bat .300. The most skilled public relations professional cannot guarantee you media coverage. However,

your chances for success will increase if you understand your media and only contact them with fresh and relevant news.

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