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10 Tips on Reaching Out to the Media

You're busy building your product or service and don't have the time to add media outreach to your to-do list. However, the companies that build it into their strategy will benefit from it nearly 100 percent of the time.

But before you blast out a press release to your favorite columnist, make sure you review the tips below for distribution and follow-up to help ensure success.

- 1. Homework. Oh, homework! Know your target.** Research reporters' coverage when developing your media list. The biggest mistake I see is that people sending out communications on a company or product do not do their homework. Instead, they blast out press releases to a list of reporters who may or may not cover the topic. Why would a sports reporter, for example, be interested in a medical device? When you send reporters information that is not relevant to their beat, you lose credibility instantly.
- 2. Customize.** Send individual emails to your targeted list of reporters. In your email, reference why a story the reporter wrote in the past was the reason you thought he or she might be interested in your story. This demonstrates that you've done your homework and understand the reporter's beat.

- 3. Don't send attachments.** Do not attach anything in the email to a reporter (unless specifically requested by the reporter).
Reporters are less likely to open an initial email with an attachment. If it's a press release, copy and paste the text and headline (but not the logo, because that can appear as an attachment in the email) into the body of the email.
- 4. Early bird gets the worm.** Send releases by 9 a.m. This allows the reporter time to receive and review your release and puts enough time in between your release and your phone follow-up.
- 5. Create relationships by using antiquated technology (AKA the phone):** Phone follow-up should begin at 10 a.m. and not go past 3 p.m. Some would say I'm an old-school PR professional, but in the age of ubiquitous technology, I still find the phone the most effective way of cultivating relationships. You may also want to secure an answer regarding interest/coverage – yes or no – and that is what you can get when you call a reporter.
- 6. Busy as a one-armed paperhanger.** Understand that reporters are busy – they receive hundreds (sometimes thousands) of emails per day. Please respect the fact that they may take more than a day to get back to you, and when you call, don't be surprised if they haven't seen your email.

- 7. Elevator pitch.** When you follow up by phone, ask the reporter if he or she has two minutes to speak with you, and be prepared to deliver a high-level 15-second pitch. If the reporter says no, ask when a better time would be, and call back then.
- 8. Don't leave a voicemail.** I know – it's counterintuitive to getting your message out. But it takes the power out of your hands and leaves it in someone else's hands. The only reason you should leave a voicemail for a reporter is if he or she called you and you are returning the call. I've done it three times in my career and regretted it each time. When you leave a voicemail, you give up the opportunity to call the person back. Keep the ball in your court.
- 9. Plan B.** Reporters who say no probably mean it, but just in case, have a back-up angle to pitch while you have them on the phone.
- 10. The power of storytelling.** When developing a pitch, think about how your story affects readers. Include a human-interest element. For example, if you have a great new water tube that you're trying to sell, rather than share facts about its durability and smooth ride, share a story about a child who went tubing for the first time on an active river and made it to the other side – tube and pride inflated.

There are no guarantees in public relations. It's a combination of a well-told story, data to support your pitch, a sprinkle of human interest and impeccable timing. That's why it is so rewarding when it works.

About the Author



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