



PITCHING THE MEDIA

Strategic forethought helps you stand out in the crowd.

Journalists are not in the business of providing free publicity. Their role is to produce articles of interest to their readers. So, provide relevant information. Remember too, different journalists write in different ways for different audiences, and it is essential to develop an understanding of their requirements.

When pitching...

Be Strategic. Efforts to secure publicity need to form part of a strategy, which supports your broader commercial objectives.

Know your Market. Develop a realistic understanding of your target audiences: Who are the decision-makers? What are their interests? Where are they based? How are they influenced? What publications do they read? Know what makes them tick.

Research of the media, know what they write about and for whom. Style your messages to be most easily used by the press. For instance, before submitting to AARP magazine, read some issues, so your pitch fits their style. The less an editor needs to edit materials, the greater chance of them using your news.

Focus on the Message. Once you've established what you want to create 'noise' about and you've prioritized your target audiences, consider how you want to be positioned. By consistently describing your company in the same way and communicating two, three or four unique selling points, you are more likely to get your message across.

Spread the Word. Pitches and press releases are a useful means of providing journalists with information. However, they're bombarded with hundreds daily. So that yours stands out, a powerful headline and first paragraph that clearly identifying the news angle are fundamental. Avoid jargon and remember KISS: Keep It Short, Simple. Press releases are by no means the only way. Pick up the

telephone and don't lose heart if you get an indifferent response: think of the discussion as an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the type of commentary most likely to impress.

PITCHING 101

Editors don't need me or any other publicist to write their stories. But they need you and me to point them in the direction of a good story, succinctly give them the facts and the sources to write their own stories. Here are some tips for writing pitch letters that get read:

SAY WHY YOU ARE WRITING, i.e. "I am writing to suggest a story about (*stretching summer vacation dollars*)..." "I'd like to recommend an interview with..." Too many times, the reason for the letter is hidden several paragraphs into the letter.

EXPLAIN YOUR PREMISE IN NO MORE THAN TWO SENTENCES. Explain what makes your idea newsworthy, or a good person to interview or a good story to cover. Describe your idea's relevance to current events... its connection to or beginning of a trend... its likelihood to interest a broad cross section of the audience. Be brief as if you were in the elevator needing to make your point before the door opens.

EXPLAIN YOUR STORY IDEA IN ONE OR TWO PARAGRAPHS. Explain how the story would work, what it involves, what role you will play in assisting the reporter. This is more important than citing boring but exemplary credentials.

TIMING CAN BE EVERYTHING. Your chances improve when you can say, "This is a hot topic and I have a great source." Your pitch stands to become a story if it is likely to make a lot of people stop and read or listen.

WATCH YOUR SUPERLATIVES. Don't make the company or person you are pitching sound hard to believe. Be very careful with hype words like "first, only, greatest, biggest." Reporters are trained to look for conflict, lies and exaggerations.

LIST TOPICS THE SPOKESPERSON CAN ADDRESS. Give the top three areas of expertise your resource can address. Do it in bullet form.

GET IT ALL INTO 350 WORDS OR LESS. Edit. Edit again. When you are done, edit again.

Here's another tip. Once a reporter is interested, they will ask you for more information... then you can give mountains of background you've researched. (Most reporters hate to do research.) Whether or not your letter is going via e-mail,

include a URL where a company fact sheet, management bios, relevant photos and other articles that have been written about the company can be found.

(Follow up article for June)

TIPS ON UNDERSTANDING THE REPORTER'S MINDSET

Reporters are always looking for news -- that is, something "new" or "different." So are their editors. Ideas that make it into the news are said to be "newsworthy."

Your information can be newsworthy if:

1. Is it truly new -- or a "new" way of thinking about an old issue? Reporters are interested in breakthroughs that affect the lives of many people -- the proverbial "everyman." If the finding will only affect a few, do so in a startling way that's also newsworthy.

2. Is it timely? Sometimes "news" is timed to coincide with a related event so that it is staged to be "happening now."

3. Can what you're working on be related to something that's currently in the news? A just-released government report? New research? A new trend? Maybe it's a hot new movie? These are called "news hooks."

WANT TO KNOW WHAT REPORTERS ARE LOOKING FOR?

Reporters are almost always on deadline. And they are deluged with information, news tips and ideas from people wanting to get their story in the news. How can you make your "news" stand out?

- Be simple and direct. Reporters don't have a lot of time to sift through raw material in search of a story. The easier you can make their job, the more likely they will use your material.
- Reporters are drawn to news that readers can use, information that has implications for people's everyday lives.
- Reporters look for easily told stories, with compelling facts.
- They need clear and easily digested ideas. If they can't understand it they won't use it. It's best if you've done the "hard work" for them -- giving them "sound bite" material and a good quote from a reputable expert or consumer.
- In today's fast-paced information society, news must be very short. One central idea, 2 or 3 facts -- no more.

IT'S TIME TO START PITCHING THE MEDIA, you've got your fingers on the keyboard, now what...

Create template pitches. Why pitches not press releases? Personalized vs. perceived going to 100 journalists. A template pitch for one event or promotional offer can be easily modified to suit another.

Studies show you have **5 seconds to grab a reader's attention.** Be brief, concise and snappy.

Humor works, everyone has a sense of humor, appeal to it in appropriate ways.

SAMPLE HUMOROUS PITCH:

Dear :

Traveling with luggage is an ever-increasing pain in the neck. First there's security screening. Next, you can't lock your luggage and protect your belongings. Then, the overhead compartments never seem quite large enough for all you want to cram in. And if your luggage is checked, the airline charges for that, and where's the guarantee it will arrive with you?

How to avoid this stress as you embark upon a vacation whose purpose is to de-stress and rejuvenate you? Plan a Nakation vacation to an AANR-affiliated nudist resort! 30,000 card-carrying nudists can't be wrong!

Besides individual members, the American Association of Nude Recreation (www.AANR.com) has over 180 member clubs, resorts, campgrounds and RV parks from which to choose. And all you'll need for the week (sunscreen, cap, sunglasses, shoes and toiletries) can fit in your under-the-seat carry on.

PITCHING ACCORDING TO LEAD TIME / EDITORIAL CALENDARS

When pitching or placing an article idea, there's always a **lead time**, from a few weeks for quick-moving weekly community newspapers, to several months or more for long-lead monthly and quarterly magazines. Even daily newspapers' weekly travel sections are scheduled four months to a year out, stories are assigned to writers months out, the articles written weeks out, before it actually appears in the Sunday paper.

Following is a general guideline as to what lead times to expect when working with various forms of media. *Note: These indicate the writer's deadlines, so be sure to pitch your story well in advance to give them enough time to consider!*

Media Type	Average Lead Time
Internet	As little as one day, but can be up to two weeks
Daily Newspaper	One to Eight Weeks

Weekly Newspaper / Magazine	Two to Four Weeks
Monthly Magazine	Three to Six Months
Large Scale, High Readership Magazine	Four to Twelve Months

Many magazines/emagazines/websites publish an **Editorial Calendar** for the year. This lists roughly 70% of the publication's feature content on a month-by-month basis. "Ed Cals" are generally developed as a tool to assist the publication's sales reps generate advertising buys. But they are also a most useful tool for knowing what and when to pitch the editorial staff on a subject.

Editorial calendars (and corresponding lead times) can be found by checking a publication's website for their Advertising information. Here, you'll often be able to view each issue's closing date, as well, which lets you know your deadline.

Publications' closing dates often occur during the same time every month, so it's also important to be aware of this timeframe when pitching. During the close of an issue, writers are extremely busy, and can be unable to give considerable thought into a pitch due to their increased workload and tight deadlines. It's better to wait until the closing deadline has just passed, when a writer will be actively seeking new information for their next issue.

(Follow up article for July)

HOW TO WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

A well-written press release can generate news coverage and establish you as a knowledgeable and reliable resource.

Follow these steps to writing your release in the (Associated Press/AP) format:

1. Print the release on company letterhead.
2. In the upper left-hand corner, write "For Immediate Release," or, if the release has time value, "Hold Until XX/XX/XXXX."
3. Flush right (on the same line) tell the editors who they can contact for further information: "Contact: Mary Smith, 800-123-4567."

Your press release should...

- feature an easy-to-read typeface such as Arial, Helvetica, Verdana or Times New Roman in 11 or 12 points
- keep the news release to one page if possible -- and if it's not possible, end each running page with "--more--"
- provide a short paragraph about your company and more detailed contact information at the end (this is referred to as a "boilerplate")
- conclude with "###" centered at the bottom of the page (this signifies the end)

The headline is your first chance to hook the editor or producer and keep him or her reading. Make it newsy, clear and interesting. A short subhead below it in italics can also help to capture their interest.

Turn It Upside-Down

The body of the press release should take the format of an inverted pyramid: critical information goes in the first paragraph (who, what, when, where, why), information of next highest importance in the second paragraph, and so on. Spend 75 percent of your time writing the headline and first paragraph!

Do Target Practice

Slanting your release for your target audience can pay off; write as if composing a news article for the newspaper's targeted readers based on age, income, interests, etc.

Cut the Hype

Don't try to pass off a self-serving advertisement as news. Examples of real news items are:

- an event
- a new marketing campaign
- community service
- a contest
- the results of a study or survey
- a new product or service -- but *only* if it's truly new and unique

And don't forget: avoid jargon, use an active not passive voice, use spell check and grammar check for correct usage, secure permission for quotes or referencing other organization's information.

A template for future reference:

YOUR LOGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

or

Hold Until MM/DD/YYYY

Media Contact:

Name

Company

Phone

Email Address

Headline – Centered, Bold, 12 Pt. Verdana Font

Subhead – Centered, Italics, 12 Pt. Verdana font

CITY, State abbreviation (Date XX, 2009) – In your lead sentence, make sure your most important point is illustrated – don't be afraid to be creative, concrete and provocative to grab the reader's attention and tie in with relevant issues, trends or news. Use your second sentence, the 'nutshell' sentence, to get to the point – This will be your walkaway statement, or key message.

The second paragraph should be used to begin the 'body' of your story, offering further information to explain and illustrate the lead paragraph. Go into further detail here but

remember to keep the most important information up front.

The third paragraph is a good place to include a quote, if (and only if!) it offers some additional value or information to the release. Be sure to include information that isn't found anywhere else in the release to encourage reporters to quote your executive directly.

Lastly, wrap up your release with a quick conclusion – Be sure to revisit your key message, and provide any information that may be needed to supplement the topic, including the nuts and bolts that are necessary for readers to take action or follow up. It's also a nice place to include a tight, creative or provocative sound bite, or quote, that brings the release into a full circle.

About YOUR COMPANY

Here is where you'll include your company's standard boilerplate, or a short, descriptive paragraph that gives a brief history of the organization(s). It should always be located at the bottom of your press releases, and include a URL to your company's website.

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Three hash tags in succession signify the end of your statement.

Ready, Aim...

You don't need to spend a fortune to have someone distribute your release. You can compile your own list for nothing -- just be sure to make it targeted. Make sure it's going to the appropriate beat reporter or editor.

Don't have the faintest idea what media target your audience? Browse through *Bacon's Magazine & Newspaper Directory* or *Bacon's Publicity Checker* at your local library. Or pick up a copy of a magazine directory such as *Writer's Market* online.

In this shrinking media marketplace staffing is changing constantly. It's important to call and get the name -- proper spelling -- of the appropriate party. A personal note sure wouldn't hurt, either; especially if you reference something you read in their publication that spurred you to send them info on your activity or event.

(Follow up article for August)

MAKING A CONNECTION VIA MEDIA CONTACT LISTS

Message delivery is an essential part of any public relations or publicity program. What is the point of crafting pitches and drafting press releases if they do not reach the intended audience?

Determine the Purpose of Your Media List

The purpose of your media list will determine the type of media you use, as well as the "beat" reporter you contact. The following examples will help give you an understanding of how these tie together:

- Announcements about special events: Target calendar or events editors at local newspapers/TV stations and regional magazines read by your target audience (age, gender, etc).
- Feature story about a newsworthy event or person: Target "features or lifestyle editors" at newspapers and magazines and producers at radio and TV outlets.
- General list of reporters, editors, columnists, and photo editors who cover recreation, leisure, entertainment or travel in your region.
- General list of assignment desk editors at local television news stations
- General list of producers or hosts of drive time (7-9 a.m. or 4-6 p.m.) radio programs

Finding Media Outlets and Reporters/Editors

With the Internet, there are resources available to help you put together a media list. Here are some suggestions to help you get started, based on your comfort level and technology astuteness:

- Yellow Pages. Perhaps one of the most traditional methods is the telephone book. In the Yellow Pages (either the bound book or online version) you will find "newspapers," "radio stations," and "television stations." You can then contact each outlet and find out who the appropriate beat reporter is and what their e-mail address or phone number is.
- Search Engines. The Internet search engines such as Google and Yahoo can be used to search for "newspapers in the Harrisburg, PA area." In fact, some search engines, such as allow you to browse newspapers, magazines, radio

stations, television networks, and other news sources by subject, type, or region.

- Another method, which is probably easiest, but also comes with a fee, is to utilize an online media service to develop a database for you. These services often can be searched by region, type and the information you desire (e-mail address, phone number, etc). You may also have the option to request a profile of the outlet. These media services can also be found by using a search engine and entering "media list development" or a related phrase. One example is: www.easymedialist.com.

Ensure the Media Outlet Fits Your Target Market by going to their Web site. Generally, newspapers and magazines have a link to a page about advertising. On this page you should be able to find either a profile of the publication or a rate card that should provide key demographic data about the audience.

Keep It Up-to-Date.

Media lists need to be updated regularly, at least 3 times per year, to ensure the beat reporter is still the same and the contact information has not changed.

If you want to garner TV news coverage, **watch those news programs, take note of the rolling credits for the segment producer** and pitch them, referencing a recent and related segment – then segue into your pitch.

Contact magazines and request a review copy. Many times you can get these for free. Or go on-line and check out their electronic version. Or, make a trip to your local **library**, or even hang out at the **magazine rack at your supermarket**.

Get to know the media outlets you're pitching. If you don't, it will be very evident to the reporter receiving your pitch.

Go online and look up the publications, many will list their editorial staff in the Contact US section with contact info such as FB/Twitter handles and e-address. If not, pick up the phone and ask who covers the travel or whatever industry beat.

Once you've made contact, keep your own database of **Personal Media Contacts**. These are people who have responded to your pitches/releases, you've personally spoken to, been interviewed by or have published your information. In your next pitch you can reference the last story they wrote.

Also, don't forget the thank you note after a journalist has worked with you. Few people remember this courtesy and it will be well remembered.

Free / Reasonably Priced Press Release Distribution Services

Name: Express Press Release (\$59/each release)

Release Topics: Accounting, BioTech, Computers, Consumer Services, Environment, Food & Beverage, Internet & OnlineMedia, Real Estate. Ect.

Posting Format: Fill out online form with a few different fields. All Press Releases submitted on the site will be Syndicated across Express Press Release Network (EPR Network) for greater visibility.

Postings Page Site: <http://express-press-release.com/submit-free-press-release.php>

Name: 1888 Press Release

Release Topics: List as many as desired, as long as topics are separated by commas. Travel category.

Posting Format: Fill out online form with a few different fields.

Postings Page Site: <http://www.1888pressrelease.com/submit-free-press-release.html>

Name: Click Press

Release Topics: Business, Consumer, Environment, Real Estate, Technology, Travel & Tourism

Posting Format: TBD

Postings Page Site: <http://www.clickpress.com/releases/index.shtml>

Name: PR Compass

Release Topics: One topic per release (e.g. business, computers, Internet, technology, travel)

Posting Format: Fill out allotted fields, html is permitted for the summary section, uploading photos and embedded videos from YouTube or Google video

Postings Page Site: <http://www.prcompass.com/submit>

Name: PR.com

Release Topics: May choose up to 5 topics for free (telecommunication, computers, food & beverage)

Posting Format: Fill out online form with a few different fields.

Postings Page Site: https://www.pr.com/basic_categories.php

Name: PRLog

Release Topics: Include key search words.

Posting Format: Fill out allotted fields.

Postings Page Site: <http://www.prlog.org/submit-free-press-release.html>

Name: 24-7 Press Release

Release Topics: List as many keywords as desired.

Posting Format: Must sign in and select free press release on bottom right. You will then be directed to fill in allotted field.

Postings Page Site: <http://www.24-7pressrelease.com/login.php>

Name: Press Exposure

Release Topics: Select one appropriate category. Can include company signature and choose a release date.

Posting Format: Fill out allotted fields.

Postings Page Site: <http://pressexposure.com/submit/>

Name: PR-inside.com

Release Topics: Choose category from a drop down menu.

Posting Format: Fill in allotted fields.

Postings Page Site: http://www.pr-inside.com/release_new.htm

Name: openPR

Release Topics: May choose one category from a drop down menu.

Posting Format: Fill out allotted fields. Must fill out contact information for each release. No login needed.

Postings Page Site: <http://openpr.com/news/submit.html>

(Follow up article for Sept)

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

So you've written your pitch or release, distributed it, and the media have responded. Now they want an interview. Here's what to do next...

• **When preparing for TV/radio interviews:**

- Be authentic
- Be precise
- Be prepared

In the case of TV, remember the backdrop of your interview – it's important to not just tell, but also show a travel story

• **Be prepared:**

- What does the reporter want?
- What is the context of the story?
- Remember:
 - It's a dialogue, not an interrogation
 - You can ask for time to prepare
 - It's your message – you decide on how you want it to be conveyed

• **Techniques for preparation:**

- Anticipate questions (who, what, when, where, why)
- State conclusion first
- Picture your reply as the headline
- Pause before answering
- Listen to the whole question, and ask to repeat if needed
- *Bridge from questions to your key messages*
- Give complete answers
- Speak only about your actions
- Avoid answering hypothetical questions
- Avoid blunt refusals
- Tell interviewer why you can't respond, if you can't
- Take every opportunity to deliver key messages

• **Tips and insights:**

- Correct incorrect information

- Ask how long the interview will be
- Don't repeat negative information
- Your interview may still end up on the cutting room floor
- Remember the sound bite
- Treat as a conversation, not as an interview
- Have personality, be confident and enthusiastic

CONDUCTING THE RADIO INTERVIEW

- When a call comes in, make sure you get the "call numbers" (i.e. WABC-AM), location on the dial (103.5) and the name of the caller / interviewer (ask them to spell their name).
- Next, ask if you are on the air, live, now. If you are being cold called while on the air, know this tactic is frequently employed by "shock jocks." Do you really want this interview? If not, indicate you would like their phone number so you can have your spokesperson get back with them. This accomplishes three goals 1) it gets you off a call you are unprepared for; 2) gives you a chance to tune into the station or log onto it from the Internet (visit www.radio-locator.com) to get a feel for the program; 3) it is now your choice whether to call back and conduct the interview.
- If the call is not "live," ask for the angle of their interview and what some of their questions will be. If you determine their angle is not suitable, suggest topics you believe will be of interest to their listeners.
- Remember, AANR PR Committee members, Regional Board and Executive Board spokespersons can assist you with coaching or even conducting the interview on your behalf.

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS TIME

TIME IS MONEY, use it well. Invest in the right tools and resources.

Challenge yourself. Make it a game **to increase the number of media calls/e-pitches** each week.

If you need to host journalists for first-hand experience, create a **press trip application form** that outlines the story line, length of article planned, when it will run, and media contact info, ask for **reprint or usage rights**.

Invest in good photography and b-roll. Papers/mags kill great stories due to lack of good photography. Propose bartering rental usage in return for PR usage rights to use their work.

Return calls promptly, the same day. If leaving a voice mail let the media know when you will try back.

Work with travel writer organizations...Using their time, not yours. TIME IS MONEY. Organizations such as: SATW, BATW, NATJA, TMAC, Midwest Travel Writers Organization, IFW&TWA and more.

Got a **pre-packaged evergreen news story (Video News Release/VNR)? Re-release** it in early Dec. News programs are short staffed and short on material for the weeks surrounding Christmas and New Years.