

# Securing Coverage Takes Smart Storytelling and Careful Follow Up

By Kelly Kass

**P**itching the media includes one part building relationships, one part crafting a killer pitch and two parts walking the fine line of patience and persistence.

Sound challenging?

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It's no secret that the media landscape is evolving daily, with shrinking budgets, high reporter turnover and extreme time constraints in a 24/7 news cycle. With the media's decreased ability to attend press conferences, events and in-person interviews, PR professionals now have a tremendous opportunity to act as a resource for the media, providing interviews, visuals and anything the reporter needs to develop a great story.

Relationship building is one of the most essential parts of pitching the media. While networking at industry events is an obvious way to make a connection, personal relationships often help the professional ones. Take advantage of your existing social and professional network and mine for media that could be beneficial to you and your clients.

After the introduction is made, ask the

reporter what beats he/she covers and for details on their favorite recent piece. This shows an interest in his/her work but also stimulates an enjoyable dialogue. That trip to Thailand you just took or the marathon you are training for can also be fodder for a personal connection. Exchange contact information if appropriate and follow up within a week, giving a more in-depth scope of businesses you work with while offering to be a resource on any upcoming coverage.

If you don't know the reporter, start by inviting him/her to coffee in a convenient location, either in his/her building or close by. Be respectful of his/her time and make it brief. Come prepared with at least three appropriate story ideas but also be willing to simply listen to what the reporter is working on. Connecting via social media such as **Twitter**, **Facebook**, **Instagram** and **LinkedIn** are good ways to stay in touch and aware of what a reporter is covering. Those networks also allow for a glimpse into a reporter's personal life, which can be a nice conversation starter.

Once you are starting to build a relationship with the media, outreach and securing interest is the next step. Always strive to keep up consistent conversations with targeted reporters, asking them what they are working on and offering story ideas. Make sure you are not going to them only when you have a specific story in mind. The goal is for the reporter to view you as a resource and not someone simply hawking story ideas. Referencing a recent story they have covered also goes a long

way in showing that you are up-to-date on their work and can offer relevant ideas.

Knowing personal information about the reporter, including interests, charities he/she supports and his/her hometown can help target your pitches. For example, if the reporter has a brother serving in the military, she might be more apt to cover your client hosting a 5K walk benefiting members of the military. A reporter who is originally from Boston and graduated from Harvard University might be more apt to show interest in your client partnering with the University on a new project. Finding this information can be as easy as reading the reporter's bio online.

Smart storytelling is essential to maintaining reporter relationships and securing media interest. We all know that a strong, creative subject line will increase the chances of a reporter opening your pitch, but once he/she starts reading, there are a few things to keep in mind. Turning a client or product into a pitch that reporters want to cover is crucial. Make sure the lead and overall pitch is short and sweet. Reporters receive hundreds of emails a day. They should know what the story idea is from the first line. A paragraph or two outlining the problem and solution your client is offering, along with who can be interviewed, is sufficient.

Oftentimes, looking for a trend in the news that can be tied to your client or demonstrating how they are starting a trend is the way to do it. Print, online and broadcast reporters always want the “scoop,” so offering them the exclusive story is a great way to entice them. Be sure that the particular organization you are working with honors exclusives and that the reporter won't to break the news early.

Follow-up and securing coverage is the most challenging and rewarding step of cultivating journalist relationships. Depending on the timeliness of the news, follow-up a day or two after the initial pitch via email. This gives

### Tips for Pitching the Media

- Build a relationship with the media. Personal relationships oftentimes help the professional ones.
- Network beyond traditional industry events—think sports clubs and book club.
- Connect via social media to learn more about the reporter both personally and professionally.
- Make your pitch short and sweet and tell a good story.
- Hustle when media interest is secured. Time is always of the essence.

the reporter a reminder of the story idea and an easy way to respond. If you still don't hear from the reporter, give them a call before 3 p.m. to avoid reaching them on deadline.

Patience and persistence are a must, along with having established relationships with the media. Some reporters only respond to stories they are interested in covering, while others always respond. Having an ongoing relationship and dialogue with the reporter will allow you to understand how he/she communicates, especially when he/she is not communicating.

When the reporter does express interest in your pitch, send them the components to the story they request quickly. Time is usually of the essence, so be available even after you leave the office. Reporters will appreciate the hustle and will be more willing to work with you in the future.

Pitching the media and securing coverage involves relationship building, smart storytelling and careful follow up—not to mention research, creativity and a lot of patience. Remember these tips before the next pitch you write. Whether it's a day or a year in the making, scoring the big hit is achievable and well worth the effort. **PRN**

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