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**Spoonfeed Your News to the Media**

**By Rusty Cawley**

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Always remember: A journalist is nothing more than a professional undergraduate.

He (or she) is always cramming for an upcoming exam. That "exam" is the next story he must produce for his newspaper, his TV station or his radio show.

It is the job of the reporter to become an expert in your subject just long enough to produce the story.

The reporter is, by trade, a generalist. With rare exceptions, he has no specialized knowledge, other than the training that allows him to transform a set of facts into a news story that will captivate his audience for a few second or a few minutes.

Thus the reporter is highly dependent upon real experts — just like you — to provide the information that will become his story.

The flack will toss information at the reporter in a careless fashion, often overwhelming the journalist with trivia that obscures the story.

But PR Rainmakers understand the reporter's plight. We use it to our advantage.

We spoonfeed the story to the reporter. We make it easy for the reporter to see the story, to gather the facts, to digest the information, to organize the information, to structure the story and to execute the story.

How?

1. Offer as many news "elements" as possible. If you've read my book "PR Rainmaker," you know that there are four elements in news. These are change, conflict, problem and aberration. All news is composed of these elements. You want to make certain that your story touches on at least one, and if at all possible all four. Without at least one, you simply do not have news to offer.

## Spoonfeed Your News to the Media

2. Craft a story line. Stories have heroes. They have villains. They have conflicts that are as yet unresolved. You want to position your company as the hero in a conflict that has real meaning for the reader, and thus for the reporter.

3. Identify the news peg. The "peg" is the reporter's excuse for telling the story. This is usually an overt act of some kind. For example, if the space shuttle explodes, this gives the news media a reason to talk about space exploration, astronauts, NASA and the like. If the White House issues a study on unemployment, this gives the news media a reason to discuss economics, the business climate, labor unions and so on. In the same way, if you commit an overt act (a study, a survey, a conference, an event) that attracts the media's interest, you give the reporter a "peg" on which to hang your story. Don't expect for the reporter to find the peg. Clearly identify that peg. (If the notion of "pegs" still

confuses you, as it confuses many outside the news business, then start studying news stories. Notice that every one of them is built around a "reason" to tell the story. That reason is the peg.)

4. Develop background information specific to the reporter's needs. Don't hand the reporter a brochure and an annual report, then expect the reporter to dig out the facts. The reporter is a generalist. He has neither the time nor the training. Identify the pertinent facts and reduce them to a one-page fact sheet or a two-page background. Keep it simple. The reporter has no time for complexity.

5. Recommend a list of third party experts. The reporter will need someone outside your company to give a third-party analysis of the situation. Why leave this to chance? Prepare a list of at least three third-party experts for the reporter to call. Include phone numbers and email addresses. If possible, include a brief bio on each expert. Just make certain that each of these experts agrees with your position, at least in general. Don't hand over an expert who will lambast you.

6. Understand the medium. Print is different from broadcast. TV is different from radio, and newspapers are different from magazines. And the Web? That's something else entirely. The reporters working in these media are all journalists, but their needs vary wildly. A PR Rainmaker takes the time to study those differences and to fulfill those needs.

7. Move quickly. Journalists don't have time to wait for you to clear your schedule. When the media call, respond immediately. Make it a priority to satisfy the reporter's needs. Remember, a PR Rainmaker considers the reporter to be a customer. Do what you must to help the reporter tell the story you want told.

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### **Two Questions You Must Answer to Make News**

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## Spoonfeed Your News to the Media

When considering whether to write a story, a journalist always begins with two questions:

1. What's new?
2. Who cares?

The first point is obvious. If something isn't new, then it can't be news. Most folks understand this instinctively.

It is the second point that most people have trouble understanding. It isn't enough for your item to be new. To qualify as news, your story must appeal to a broad audience. It must have significance for other people, and lot of them.

For example, consider the Taliban, the former rulers of Afghanistan.

Before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, few news media paid any attention whatsoever to the Taliban. After Sept. 11 and through the fall of the Afghan regime, the media couldn't get enough stories about the Taliban.

What changed to make this happen? It wasn't the Taliban. What changed were the media's attitudes toward the Taliban:

1. What's new? Terrorists have attacked the United States and they are being harbored by the Taliban in Afghanistan.
2. Who cares? Virtually everyone.

Those two questions pushed the Taliban to the forefront of every mainstream newspaper, magazine, TV news program, radio news program and Web news site in the world.

This is an extreme example, but it makes the point.

If you want a story in the mainstream media, your story idea must appeal to a well-defined audience. If you want your story to appear in a trade magazine for nanotech engineers, then your story idea must appeal to nanotech engineers. If you want your story to appear in a suburban weekly, then your idea must appeal to the geographical, provincial interests of that weekly's subscribers.

The PR Rainmaker knows: If you want the news media to write about you or your company, you must clearly and concisely answer the questions "What's new?" and "Who cares?"

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