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**To Make News, Solve a Reporter's Six Basic Problems**

**By Rusty Cawley**

**To Make News, Solve a Reporter's Six Basic Problems by Rusty Cawley**

Like anyone at any job, every journalist faces the same basic set of challenges every day. For the journalist, there are six of these fundamental problems.

They are:

1. Finding a Story - The reporter's job is to uncover stories, preferably ones that the competition is missing. Most reporters must meet an unwritten quota of stories within a given period.

At a daily newspaper, the reporter may be required to turn in one 800-word story, plus a handful of briefs, every day. At a business journal, the quota may be three 800-word stories per week, plus an industry column, plus a brief. At a television station, the quota may be five news segments per week, plus a weekend feature.

The formula changes from outlet to outlet, from medium to medium. But be assured, every reporter has to meet certain expectations to keep any job, and this includes producing a given number of stories during a certain period of time.

2. Gathering the Facts - It's not enough to have a story to tell. The reporter must also have the facts that support the story.

This is known as the 5W's and the H: who, what, when, where, why and how. Without the facts, it becomes impossible to tell the story.

By nature and by training, reporters are generalists. Few have specialized knowledge, other than how to convert a set of facts into an interesting, intriguing news story.

As a result, every reporter is like a graduate student who is cramming for a new exam every day. Reporters must learn the essential facts, arrange them into a coherent stream and master them long enough to sound as if they are experts.

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3. Choosing the Angle - Once reporters have the story and the facts, they must make a crucial decision. What is the angle they will take to writing the story?

The angle is simply the format that the reporter will use to arrange the story into something the audience can recognize and understand.

Is this a hard news story for the front page? Is it a feature for the Sunday family section? Is it a brief? Is it a six-part investigation?

These are just a few of the angles that the reporter might take to any story.

The most common angle is the hard news angle. Something important has happened and here are the facts, arranged in order of importance. The vast majority of stories you will read, see or hear are told with the hard news angle.

The hard news story is based in immediacy. It must be told now, or it will lose its value to audience.

The second most common angle is the feature, which tends to de-emphasize the timeliness of the story, preferring to focus on some other interesting aspect, such a human-interest angle. A feature is not based in immediacy. It can hold for a few days or even weeks without losing its impact.

Then there are the many, many minor angles, such as the interpretive piece or the consumer investigation. Don't worry about these. Just learn to recognize a hard news story from a feature story.

4. Identifying the Peg - A news story is different from an entry in an encyclopaedia. Both contain facts. But the news requires a reason for the facts to be told.

That reason is the peg.

Don't confuse the peg with the angle. The angle is the reporter's approach to the story. The peg is the reporter's excuse for telling the story.

For example, virtually any encyclopaedia contains an entry about tobacco. But the reporter can't pick up this entry and report it as news. The facts are there, but not the peg.

However, if this morning a star athlete announces he has developed a cancer from using chewing tobacco, suddenly the reporter has a peg - a reason - to write about tobacco.

Every news story, no matter the angle, must have a peg. Without it, there is no reason to write the story.

5. Making the Deadline - Every journalist is racing against time.

The TV news reporter is fighting a 3 p.m. deadline for the 6 p.m. broadcast. The magazine reporter must meet a deadline three months from now. The Web reporter faces a new deadline every few minutes.

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The deadline is just that: The last possible moment when the reporter is allowed to file a story for print, broadcast or transmission.

Reporters who miss their deadlines lose their jobs.

6. Satisfying the Boss - Every story must interest at least two people before it sees light. Those people are the reporter and his editor.

If either one rejects the story, it is dead.

The Boss also sets the criteria for the reporters: What they can cover, what they can pursue, how they can write their stories, what angles they can take, which pegs are acceptable and when the deadline is due.

Make no mistake. You may never see The Boss. But the world of journalism is ruled by the editor, not the reporter.

These are the problems that face every reporter: Story, facts, angle, peg, deadline and editors.

The PR Rainmaker knows: If you can help reporters solve their problems, you can become their best friend. And therein lies great opportunity.

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### **How to Sell Your News to Reporters**

**By Rusty Cawley**

#### **How to Sell Your News to Reporters by Rusty Cawley**

If you want create a PR campaign that is effective and consistent, you must learn to market your story to the news media. You must learn to treat reporters as the customers who will either buy or reject your product: raw news.

You should apply the techniques of PR Rainmaking, which is the practice of using the news media to attract customers and clients to your enterprise.

Any effective campaign of PR Rainmaking is grounded in three fundamental ideas:

- a) The reporter is the consumer.
- b) The story is the product that must be tailored for and sold to that consumer.
- c) Reporters will buy your story for their reasons, not yours.

## To Make News, Solve a Reporter's Six Basic Problems

First, the reporter is the consumer

Today's PR specialists often forget this basic principle. The bad ones - the ones that reporters ridicule as mere "flacks" - never learn it.

To some of these folks, the reader or the viewer is their primary consumer. Others consider their client or their CEO to be the consumer of their work.

Wrong.

The PR Rainmaker knows: When it comes to getting your story into the media, you must look upon the reporter as your consumer.

Without the reporter, nothing happens. There is no story for your target audience to view or to read. There is nothing for your CEO to show his directors. There is nothing for your sales team to hand out to prospects.

Without the reporter, all you have is a story idea.

The reporter is the consumer. The reporter is the customer. And you must act accordingly.

Second, the story is the product

It is not enough that you want to sell something. Countless enterprises have lost money trying to sell a product they wanted to sell and no one wanted to buy.

No matter what you produce, you must find a market that wants to purchase your product.

The same holds true when placing your story in the news media. The PR Rainmaker knows that the story is the product. The story must be tailored for the consumer, who is the reporter. Then it must be sold to that reporter.

This is where PR flacks lose their direction. They look upon media relations as mass production. They want to build an assembly line. They want to crank out one press release after another, send out a blast fax, and read their story in the newspapers the next day.

By using these "spray and pray" techniques, a company may well generate media coverage. But that coverage is likely to be ineffective. The key messages will be distorted. The story will go to the wrong audiences. The company will receive no return on its investment other than some newspaper clippings and perhaps some videotape.

The PR Rainmaker knows: The best news stories are earned one by one.

The assembly-line approach rarely works well in media relations. Reporters do not like to buy "off the rack." Each wants a story of his own. Each demands a custom fit.

## To Make News, Solve a Reporter's Six Basic Problems

So it becomes the PR Rainmaker's job to take stock of a reporter's needs and wants. We must tailor the story to fit that reporter. Then we must take that product and sell it to the reporter. We must convince the reporter that our story solves the reporter's problems.

We must keep in mind during every step of developing the campaign: The reporter is the consumer and the story is the product.

Third, reporters buy for their reasons, not ours

It is not unusual to spend hours designing a story for a specific reporter, only to have the reporter reject the idea. This can become incredibly frustrating.

This is one reason why so many flacks resort to assembly-line, blast-fax methods. "Why should I bother?" they say. "Why not just send out a thousand press releases and hope someone somewhere picks up the story?"

But PR Rainmakers understand and accept the challenge of executing an effective campaign. They know that, when it comes to convincing a reporter to buy any particular story, failure is far more likely than success.

As with any sales prospect, a reporter is more apt to say no than yes, even when you have tailored the story especially for that reporter.

Why? Who knows?

Maybe the reporter is working on a seven-part investigative series and doesn't have time. Maybe the reporter is being moved to another news beat. Maybe the reporter is coming down with the flu. Maybe the reporter is going on vacation. Maybe the reporter is just a jerk.

Who knows? Who cares?

When the reporter says no, move on.

Don't argue. Don't rage. Don't resort to spray and pray.

Advance to the next proposal with the next reporter.

Reporters will buy for their reasons, not ours. Keep telling yourself this and you will have a much better chance of holding your temper, maintaining your sanity and placing more stories in the news media.

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