

WANT PRESS COVERAGE FOR YOUR COMPANY?

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By **B.L. Ochman**

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Want to get your company news into the media? It'll never happen unless you start by understanding what editors and reporters want. To find out what works, I spoke to editors and reporters at top media organizations across the country.

The editors quoted here work at the top 100 papers and some of the highest visibility media in the United States. Their answers prove that there is no magic formula: getting press coverage for a company is not an easy feat.

Just The Facts M'am

One overwhelming rule emerged. Be brief when you pitch a story. Stick to the facts, get them into who, what, where, when and "why should I care" format. "If it's more than ½ a page it won't even get skimmed," says Charlie Crumpley, Business Editor of The Daily Oklahoman, Oklahoma City, OK. "I don't mind going to a web site for the full information, if I'm interested."

"Just the bare bones," said Jerry Underwood, Business Editor of The Birmingham Times, Birmingham, AL. "And I prefer to be contacted before a general press release goes out to everyone." Jennifer Couzin, reporter for The Industry Standard says to keep initial information to "two or three paragraphs in a quick email."

Says Leslie Eaton, Economics Reporter, The New York Times, "Send a quick email first. If it involves a serious study I want to see the whole thing."

TIP: Keep your initial contact or release to 200 words or less. Make sure you cover who, what, when, where and why and give at least two names as contacts. If an editor wants to do the story, they will ask for more information.

Be Reachable!

Don't use superlatives. The more you use the least likely you are to be trusted. Journalists are trained to check when you say your mother's name is Susan Jones. If you say you are the first or the only,

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you'd better have a patent or some other proof to back up your claim.

One often-cited annoyance was that contact people were not available to reporters and editors on deadline. "At least give me one alternative person to contact," says Danny Sandy, Business reporter for The Fresno Bee, Fresno, CA. "Many times we get a release with a name and number and then find out that person is out of town for the week and can't be reached."

Don't Send Email Attachments

If you send your pitch or release by email, make it plain text with no attachments. David Joachim, Senior Managing Editor at Internet Week says "We have a policy against opening attachments. I would never risk it." As Crumpley notes, "Email can be lethal." A virus could put a writer out of commission.

An editor may be on the road, accessing email long-distance on a laptop with limited batteries. Most journalists simply delete attachments under those circumstances. One email rule agreed upon by every editor: never send a group email that shows your entire press list.

TIP: Send email or a fax containing only the bare bones of your story. Put your release, background, executive bios, White Papers and other documentation on a unique URL on the company web site. If you are asked to send more information, tell the editor the size of your file before you send it.

Should you send tsotchkes? Yes and No.

Will sending tsotchkes (novelties) to editors help you get their attention? Yes and no. "It's a nuisance. I throw most of them away," says David Zeilenziger, who covers People In Business at Bloomberg Business. "But just yesterday I received a huge package from a consumer-related site and inside was just a candy bar. I did go to the site and I called the company. And they haven't returned my call."

"They don't help at all. I've got them scattered all over the office," says Joachim. "If it's food, I leave it on the table outside. Others I either share, give away or throw out."

"If they're clever they get my attention, but they don't necessarily get ink," says Crumpley. "A larger gift has the taint of a bribe. So then we have to do something with it. We'll donate it to the orphan's fund or something and then we have to write a letter to whoever sent it and say this is what we did. Who has time for all that?"

Dave Elbert, Business Editor of The Des Moines Register, Des Moines, IA, concurs, "We have an ethics code that prohibits accepting freebies and that means I have to find some way to dispose of them."

TIP: If your tsotchke is clever and small, you might not get a story, but you might get name recognition. Branding. Might hurt, could help.

Should you leave the price of your product or another important detail out of your release? Yes and no. "I can see the rationale," says Crumpley, "but it's a tricky call. If you know the editor or reporter might be interested, it might be good strategy. If it's kind of a weak story, you might be shooting yourself in the foot."

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Clearly, positioning a company to receive the press coverage so valuable in establishing a brand, attracting investors and selling products is not a simple matter.

Probably the most important rule to remember is that journalists need to know what's new, what's hot and what's affecting a lot of people. Keep their needs in mind and you may very well end up with media coverage.

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Public Relations Strategies: Focus PR Campaigns with Media Coverage Analysis

By Richard Cunningham

Prior to launching a new public relations campaign, evaluate the media coverage you've gained and dig deep into the coverage your competition has received.

One of the first steps in defining a public relations strategy is to understand how you and your competition stack up in terms of media coverage. Taking the time to document and analyze press announcements, bylines, sourcing, thought-leadership, and overall media relations helps to focus and streamline PR campaign tactics.

In the audio book, "Sound Advice on Public Relations," author Susan Misukanis says it is important to "identify who, in your marketplace, is winning in terms of positive press coverage." Evaluate who distributes the most press releases, and whether they are actually picked up by the media.

"Know who is continuously being quoted as an expert source within stories," says Misukanis. "Quantify how many articles are being contributed, or bylined, by your competitors." From this, you begin to identify whether the companies being bylined are considered thought-leaders.

Finally, obtain media kits from the publications in your market space, and study their circulation and reader profiles. "You can understand with whom your competition is building mindshare - which constituents' categories your competition is reaching," says Misukanis.

Weighing these findings, you'll be surprised how focused your PR campaign will become, and how clearly you can position your company's public relations vis-à-vis the competition.

Susan Misukanis offers advice on public relations strategies each week in the free audio newsletter from What's Working in Biz,

Richard Cunningham is a principal of What's Working in Biz,

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