

## A Former Reporter Describes Simple Steps to Working with the Media

Written by Business News

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Building a successful relationship with the press in your target industry is a frequently misunderstood process.

Treat the media the way you treat your customers. Why are the best companies successful? More than pitching their products, they listen. They ask questions to determine the customer's needs, then try to fill that need. When your client complains he or she doesn't understand the media, use this sales analogy. It's a context they recognize.

Too often, communications between public relations professionals and media is all one-way. You've got a product to promote, so you bombard the press with releases, whether or not they are timely or relevant.



Know the media you target. Be sure what you're sending is appropriate. I once edited a magazine for paneling manufacturers. We wanted articles about new technology and manufacturing techniques. But most of the inquiries and unsolicited articles I received were along the lines of "How I paneled my basement." Read the publication; visit its Web site; check the editorial calendar. Get a copy of the media kit.

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Understanding your target media is the first step toward building a lasting relationship. Make initial communications short and to the point. If the subject line reads “Widget Corp. Press Release,” the editor may file it away to read (much) later or not at all. “ACME Acquires Largest Widget Maker” is much more likely to get an editor’s attention.

Use the press release sparingly. Many editors allow only one or two chances to show that you have something newsworthy. After they see two or three releases that offer nothing newsworthy, subsequent company releases will likely be tossed unread.

Don’t be a pest. Don’t call to verify that your release arrived; make sure you have the right address first. If you have good reason to call, do it after deadline. Don’t spam every editor and reporter in the newsroom with your press releases. Find out who the appropriate contact person is, direct it there, and learn how they prefer to receive information; don’t send it by e-mail, fax AND snail mail.

Is that harsh? Sure. Is it fair? No, but it is reality. Reporters and editors too often are unreceptive, even rude. Their skepticism is usually based on prior experiences. The editor agreed to look at a story, but it was all sales pitch and no substance. Or a promised interview failed to materialize. Make it easy for the press to work with you, and you’ll stand a better chance of getting in on the really meaty stories.

One of the most effective ways to get press coverage – in breaking news and feature stories, not in the “people” or “new products” departments – is to make spokespersons available for interviews on current issues. Alert them that you have an expert who is available. Make sure the interviewee is available that day and will return calls before deadline. Provide direct contact information, in addition to your own. Include qualifications and relevance to the issue. You may also send a prepared quote. Include contact and background information. Some will use it, but most want their own quotes, or will do a follow-up interview.

In your press kits, note who is available for interview, their accessibility, and topics they can address. Make sure they are comfortable interviewees. Be sure they can speak for the company. A helpful interview can lead to a long-term, beneficial working relationship.

Reporters on deadline don’t have time to be bounced around. They’re under pressure to make

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productive contacts and write quickly. Make their jobs easier, and they'll turn to you as a valued resource.

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