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Improve Your Media Relations Skills

Here's ten top tips.

by **Peter Granat**
 Senior Vice President, *MediaMap*

You can have all the facts, know what you want to say, and believe that your message is important to your market, yet never get a single media placement. Could it be the way you are communicating?



Listed below are 10 highly effective tips to improving your communication with the media and efficiently increasing media exposure for your company or client.

1. Know the reporter and the publication before picking up the phone. First, build a targeted media list of the publications that may have an interest in what you're pitching, and then determine which journalists you should be talking to at those publications. If you are pitching a portal story to a technology magazine, for instance, don't begin emailing and calling all of the reporters you can find at the magazine. You will be wasting time and reducing your chances of coverage by aggravating the staff. Once you know who to target, you should also find out what he/she has recently written to understand the subtleties of their coverage area. This will help you create targeted pitches and story ideas that are both compelling and relevant.
2. Always know how and when a reporter wants to be contacted. Some reporters want phone calls, others prefer email, and still others want news the old-fashioned way – by snail mail. In the case of breaking news, some reporters even recommend that you call them on their mobile phone if they can't be reached at their desk. Contacting reporters inappropriately or at the wrong time – such as on deadline – can lead to damaged relationships.
3. Clarify your message before delivering your pitch. There is nothing worse for a reporter than receiving an email that is a carbon copy of a press release, or getting a call from someone that is not familiar with the company they are pitching or the news they are announcing. Develop a bulleted "fast facts" sheet, especially for phone pitches, that outlines your key message points. Most reporters are extremely busy and will give you only 30 seconds to make your case. They will not bite on your idea if you don't offer



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a convincing argument.

4. When sending ideas via email, always include a short, pithy pitch along with your contact information. It is important to make the reporter's job as easy as possible so make sure to provide the most important news in the first paragraph. You should also include the company's URL, as a reporter will often times visit the company's Web site before calling back. Editors and reporters get hundreds of emails a day, so entice them into calling you for more information or, even better, to set up an interview.
5. Be careful what you send via email. Never send unsolicited email attachments, as some reporters will be wary of opening them due to virus concerns, and others simply won't take the time. In addition, always craft a catchy subject line but avoid using all caps or excessive punctuation as both tactics produce a red flag that your pitch might be a virus. Finally, never send out a group email with your entire distribution list in the header. It's impersonal and shows a lack of effort on your part.
6. When calling a reporter, introduce yourself fully, reference previous conversations to jog the reporter's memory on who you are and why you're calling, and ask whether it is a good time to talk. The press gets flooded with calls, so be as specific as possible. The more general you are, the less likely your chances for success. As you develop a stronger relationship with the reporter, they will know you the minute they pick up the phone, making it easier to get their ear.
7. When you get a reporter on the phone, always ask what they are working on and how you can help. This will allow you to uncover new opportunities that will allow you to position your news by way of a different point of view. Also, be sure to provide assistance even if it won't necessarily benefit your company or client today. Eventually, the reporter will come to you with new story opportunities – rather than the other way around.
8. Never make promises you cannot keep. Nothing will squelch a media relationship faster than if you promise something you cannot deliver. Promise to do your best to get the reporter what they need in advance of their deadline, and *always* follow through. However, if you won't be able to come through, let them know as early as possible.
9. Follow up aggressively. While some reporters will provide coverage after one phone interview, that is often not enough. It is important to be in front of reporters on a consistent basis with compelling information that demonstrates what you are pitching is viable, credible and worthy of coverage. Also be sure to offer reporters the additional elements they would need to round out their story – photos, customer references, analyst references and additional sources, if necessary. You need to be able to provide these elements at the drop of a hat – so have the information ready in advance.
10. Whenever possible, pitch by phone. This will get you better results and allow you to build the relationships you need to

ensure consistent success. Plus, it's much easier for a reporter to delete an email or send a quick "no" than it is to hang up on you. When using the phone, leave one message only, and then continue to call the reporter at different times of the day (non-deadline times, of course) until you catch them live. Once you have them on the line, it is much easier to make your case, as you can engage a reporter in a conversation and handle objections as they arise.

Media relations are critical to an effective public relations plan. It is important to develop a strong understanding of the media and how best to communicate with them. Once you develop these basic – yet key – fundamentals, you will improve message adoption, which in turn will generate better results.

Peter Granat is senior vice president of MediaMap. Since 1986, MediaMap has developed innovative Communications Management solutions to public relations agencies and corporate communications departments worldwide. [MediaMap](#) delivers solutions that enable these organizations to centralize information resources, manage key relationships, ensure targeted message delivery and measure performance.

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