

How to make your story count

Quick tips for targeting the media.

If you ask a journalist or blogger what a good PR person does, you will likely hear “They understand what I do, and provide the materials to help me do it better”.

More than ever before, detailed research and careful targeting are crucial to building media relationships and getting the best results. Good PR people should make a journalist’s life easier, and this can only be done with razor sharp and relevant content. But what is the secret to getting it right without hours of research? This whitepaper is designed to provide tips to help you to work smarter.

Be selective about what you send

The ‘when in doubt, just send it out’ philosophy is usually a mistake. It’s easy to think that little harm can be done by sending a release that ends up missing out on coverage, but this isn’t the case. Irrelevant content can often taint the hard work that successful PRs have previously put in with key journalists. When it comes to providing the perfect story at the perfect time, less is definitely more.

The era of social media makes pitching faster and easier, though at times this only amplifies the problem. In Technorati’s most recent State of the



Blogosphere report, results show that many top tier bloggers receive up to 1,000 pitches a week from brands seeking coverage, many of which are wide of the mark. Relationships with the media are hard to build and time-consuming to maintain, but this becomes still more challenging once irrelevant content has been submitted and in turn rejected. PR professionals must serve as matchmakers between their client’s or organisation’s messages, their outlets, and their audience. So before you hit the ‘send’ button, make sure you know that the content is highly relevant to the coverage opportunity.

Keep it personal

Who is the buyer of the product or service you are promoting? Where do they live and what media type are they most likely to engage with? Once you have determined the profile of the audience that you want to reach through the media, you can start your media research.

Generic email pitches can infuriate many media figures. In the case of national papers and magazines in particular, PR people who seem to

be pitching to the publication title rather than the editor they are addressing are likely to be poorly regarded. Don't send the same email to all 25 contacts at an outlet – something that many journalists say happens all the time. View their past articles and look at their individual writing styles as a means of deciding how to approach them. Journalists will appreciate it if you have taken the time to understand the internal structure of the publication before getting in touch.

If after research, you still aren't sure if your information will be relevant to a particular reporter or blogger, it's ok to ask. You could send a quick email introducing yourself, asking about their guidelines for the information that they would like to receive. This could elicit a response where you may learn a lot about what the journalist or blogger is looking for, in their own words.

Show how you can help

In many industries there's more work to do in less time, and the pressure is on. Print and broadcast journalists could be expected to file running updates and special coverage for their outlet's online presence, including maintaining the outlet's blog. This extra workload is often coupled with the fact that many won't have copy editors or proof-readers on their teams to control the quality of their output. The increased pressure that journalists

and other content creators may be feeling is an opportunity for PRs to shine. For example, carefully construct a relevant story that relates to a print outlet's topics, but that would also engage an online audience and therefore be ideal for mention in a blog entry.

Your initial email to a journalist shouldn't feel like a 'cold call'. Be concise, get to the point, and offer them a way to do their jobs better. Hype should be avoided; overblown claims are likely to irritate journalists, whereas constructive information about a company and market area will help to build a relationship. Even when you know that the contact in question is very likely to be interested in your story, the 'hard sell' PR pitch is a turn off for many.

If you are contacting the media with a press release or even just a story idea, you should have the right spokesperson available and the important details lined up. For instance, if your story needs to include opinions from several different people, have their contact details ready to provide to the journalist. If on the other hand, you are trying to have a product tested and reviewed by a publication, make sure that it's ready to ship at a moment's notice. If you need involvement from one of your customers, ensure that they are easy to reach and willing to make the extra effort if required.

Dig deep

Take advantage of automated tools in your research. Criteria such as location, format and topic are just a few of the areas you can examine in detail using Cision's global media database. Think about where your audience lives, works and travels. Do you want to target a certain city or a wider region?

For example, if you search the city 'Nottingham' in the database, it will display contacts with

"It's not about how many editors you've contacted in a day, it's about building a relationship."

a Nottingham address. If you search Nottingham by geographic target, you'll unearth contacts who distribute content in that area. Advanced searches and filtering capabilities like Cision's can make building and

“Journalists need to be highly efficient. To ensure that they want to work with you, you need to make them more efficient.”

updating lists of your target outlets easier, with familiar search engine features like guided navigation and 'type-ahead' recommendations.

Once you've compiled your list of outlets, your next job is to research which people to contact. For instance, if you want to target telecommunications journalists you can use Cision's media database to search technology contacts and further drill down into a specific industry area. You can also use free tools such as Cision's EdCals to view lists based on editorial calendar opportunities.

Use alternatives to email

Make sure you use all vehicles of communication, the more interactive the better. For instance, you could make your press releases available through an RSS feed, or set up corporate accounts on Facebook and LinkedIn and use them to post your announcements. But remember, don't leave messages on a journalist's private page unless you have been invited or have an established relationship, and don't post your news on a media outlet's wall.

You should follow your intended contacts on Twitter, engage in the conversation and post relevant tweets with links to your news when it can add to the dialogue. This will increase the odds of your communication being seen not only by a journalist on your target list, but also by new contacts who may be interested in your story.

“Take the time to see what a publication is covering and what the editors are interested in. Make sure that you understand the internal structure of the publication, instead of sending the same email to multiple reporters.”