Media Relations Guidebook
Navigating the Changing Media Landscape

To Do

- Write a smart pitch.
- Boost social media presence.
- Deliver a concrete message.
- Prep the C-suite and other executives.
- Measure results.
- Engage with Influencers.
Dear reader,

Public relations professionals who engage with the media most effectively have mastered the messaging and the communications tools needed to deliver stories that advance the objectives of their clients. While much in the industry has changed, the imperative of communicating with the media has not.

In this 2nd edition of PR News’ Media Relations Guidebook, that necessity is met with over sixty articles explaining how best to pitch, build relationships with, and manage the media in both good times and during crises. The pages that follow contain practical implications for some of the most innovative developments in media relations, including the technologies, methodologies and mannerisms that define the ecosystem in which PR pros practice this essential part of their craft.

As the landscape evolves, there are no easy answers to the overarching challenge of how to get a story effectively distributed to the media. Social media has changed everything, shaking the very foundations that time-tested media relations strategies were built on and changing even the basic definition of media players.

Today, PR professionals face questions that they have only recently begun to grapple with. Do press releases matter anymore? Do bloggers count as influencers? Can we take citizen journalism seriously? How can we best use social media to reach different outlets?

Now more than ever, the savvy PR professional has tools at his/her disposal to come up with new ways to disseminate information quickly and intelligently, securing that all-important coverage along the way.

That’s not to say that old-school methods don’t apply anymore. Instead, a major focus of the industry—and this book—is to take those hard-earned lessons about the media and apply them to the new situations PR professionals face today.

Our contributing writers to this Media Relations Guidebook run the gamut of this industry sector. Each author brings insight to his or her role from subjects as agency advisors, corporate practitioners, marketing communications executives and academicians. I want to thank these contributors who so eloquently shared their ideas, tips and best practices.

I also want to thank you, our readers, for letting us help you as you learn new skills, hone existing ones and grow your businesses. The current media relations environment demands determination and creativity, and we hope this Guidebook will help inspire both.

Sincerely,

B. Greene

Editor, PR News
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How to Manage Key Media Relationships In the Age of Social Media and Mobile

By Zaheer Nooruddin

In the brave new world of communications and marketing that we live and work in today, multi or “omni” channel brand engagement is all the rage. Gone are the days of single or “uni” channel communications strategy. In a nutshell, based on the highly nuanced and complex ways that consumers make decisions about what they will advocate and buy today, there is no single medium or channel that can deliver a tangible business outcome for brands.

Any savvy communicator knows that the brand engagement game has completely changed. What was once (not so long ago) considered a “strategy” can now, in the present, be considered nothing more than a mere tactic.

Those of us who work as consultants at agencies increasingly talk to our corporate and brand communications clients about the myriad of new and exciting opportunities that exist today for either direct stakeholder or audience engagement. Simply put, there are so many possibilities for a more effective development of a more effective form of public relations, communications and marketing—propelled by digital media and channels.

In the practice of media relations, PR professionals can learn a great deal about how to better manage media relations today. Gone are the days when media relations must be conducted in the real world (that is, just on the phone or face-to-face meetings) using traditional formats. Public relations consultants should first look to the concepts that operate at the agencies they work at for inspiration. Then, they should speak to communications and marketing clients about engagement and fostering audience relationships—be it of audiences at large, specific consumer groups, influencers or stakeholders.

For the sake of your consideration, here’s what I think these might be:

**Think about how your contacts create and consume media themselves.**

By and large as an industry, today we all acknowledge the critical role that insights play in creating a corporate communications or brand engagement strategy. In the same way, we must apply valuable insights about media to develop a new understanding about how the contacts on our media list create and consume media today. We must think about how the media develop stories—what channels they themselves professionally inhabit and spend a large portion of their own work time with (for example, Twitter and Wikipedia). We must think about what interests them. What do they like to write about, to search for, to respond to? What sources do they go to regularly? Who influences their opinions and
observations? This is the kind of information that would make for a more effective media relations program, and it is openly available to any public relations team with some non-invasive research.

**Consider how you usually engage with media and what content can make it more engaging.**

One of the greatest digital opportunities for media engagement is the range of new avenues that it opens up for public relations professionals. A press release no longer needs to be a Word document formatted the way it was 20 years ago. There is nothing in the rule book that says that media cannot be engaged across professional channels.

The media wants factual information and material that will support the creation of their stories in a timely manner. Today we can create complex information such as infographics, spokesperson quotes in the form of video, and images that help tell the story. We can deliver a mix or all of these to the media around any developing story as part of a digital media kit. And it can all be done in real time.

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**It’s basic human psychology that people like their relationships to be nurtured, valued and to go beyond just the transactional.**

**Do you only engage media when you need a story published?**

Even as the craft of public relations has evolved into one of both factual (in the case of corporate) and creative (in the case of consumer) storytelling today, we still tend not to follow our own good advice when it comes to how to build and manage relationships. As consultants, we keep telling our communications clients that the healthiest and most enduring relationships they can build with their own audiences is through ongoing storytell-
One-way, sporadic messaging to audiences does not work and might never have. Audiences want to (in fact, they demand to be) in a relationship with organizations. They want to be part of a co-created conversation about the brands they both love and hate. They wish to be a part of an organization’s storytelling—not merely a recipient of it. I believe that the same general principle applies to media relations. No one likes to be talked at and only spoken to when you need something. It’s basic human psychology that people like their relationships to be nurtured, valued and to go beyond just the transactional.

Media relationships should be strategic and ongoing. Keep media informed and engaged about an organization—not just when a press release is ready but at other times too. Create a media relationship with those media professionals that matter to your work as a strategic layer that lies on top of the tactical aspect of media relations.

As in real life, go across channels and media.

In today’s multi-channel world, in which personal and other professional relationships that we each have are managed via a multitude of digital channels and social media streams, it should not be strange to think of extending this new normal behavior to how we manage media relations. I am constantly surprised by how many public relations people I know that still do not have a Twitter account—even when the service has been the hub of global media for some time now.

Many PR professionals think that media relations must be managed over the phone and in email. These communications tactics are inferior to social media communications when it comes to audience and end-consumer engagement. Of course, not all communications and relations can happen through social media channels. A phone call is still a highly relevant form of communication, and nothing beats an in-person catch-up with the media.

But, at the same time, it would be foolish not to take advantage of new ways to communicate and to nurture ongoing relationships with influencers and media. As an example, webinars and neatly crafted online events can be a highly effective and engaging alternative to the traditional round table, just in the same manner that a tweet that says, “Great piece,” can be an impactful option to an email.

At the end of the day, it’s important to engage in order to build longer-lasting, more trusting relationships with the media. The definition of media itself has changed in the last few years. The great news for the public relations industry is that this change brings with it the unprecedented opportunity for media relations and other practices within public relations to also be re-imagined and re-invented for the future of corporate and brand storytelling. Today, we are all connected. And this is the best news there is. 

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Media Training Your Clients for Interviews Needs to Focus on Both Print and Video

By Mark Veverka

Time is money, so you should implore your clients to treat their time spent with news media as a capital asset. As we all know, little is more valuable than the time of a C-level executive. So, if an executive is going to commit valuable time on his or her calendar, then get them to view their time as an investment that can produce results. Of course, the results can be varied. It can be something as simple as establishing a solid, trusting relationship with a reporter. Or it could result in something as significant as a front-page story in a national magazine.

Get your client to embrace the opportunity to meet with the press.

At any rate, what you want to instill in your C-level client is that if they are well-prepared and committed to learning and implementing their messages, then the time they invest in meeting with reporters, editors and camera crews can produce very positive outcomes. Too often, high-level executives view their interaction with media as a necessary evil or something they must power through in hopes of not saying something that might come back to haunt them.

On the contrary, get your client to embrace the opportunity to meet with the press. Don’t let them just sit back and let the process happen to them. Teach them to be proactive, engaging and confident, and they will find that their messages may resonate better leading to positive outcomes in earned media.

I recommend that you provide media coaching to your client. If you don’t feel qualified to do it yourself, then find someone who is. Communications professionals can provide a lot of the basics, but I’m a staunch believer in having a current or former journalist do the training. I was a broadcast television reporter before becoming a print journalist for a number of national newspapers and magazines. Thus, I prefer to do the training myself. The crux of the exercise is to essentially put the executive through a number of mock interviews with immediate verbal critique and feedback after each session.

I strongly believe that one-on-one coaching sessions produce the greatest results, especially for C-level execs. Think of it as being akin to the benefit of private golf lessons versus group lessons. In group sessions, each participant doesn’t get enough direct practice with the coach. I find that those who aren’t directly interacting with the coach don’t learn much by watching and are often distracted using their smartphones and other devices. In fact, they are wasting their time not investing their time as a capital asset. What’s more, having more than one person being trained at the same time changes the coaching dynamic. It is more difficult for the coach and executive to be candid and critical if other executives are in the room. No CEO or senior executive
wants to be dressed down in front of members of his or her team.

Another benefit is that media coaching offers a pragmatic time to introduce new messaging to your client. Have your clients give any new messaging information to the executives well before their sessions so that they are ready to implement it during the practice. You can work on the messaging during the mock interviews while simultaneously working diligently on interview practice. We know our clients’ stories. This kills at least two birds with one stone. It provides fundamental interview practice, implements new or existing messaging—which forces busy executives to learn their messaging—and provides practice time using the new messages.

Divide your media coaching program into two basic areas of concentration: print (which includes digital pubs and blogs) and broadcast/video. You should do this because they are vastly different. They require different skill sets, and the types of stories or appearances that they can lead to are also radically different.

For example, a news story in a daily newspaper has little in common with a live appearance on a cable news program. Of course, basic interviewing and media skills are still used in both situations, but the specific skills required for each scenario are quite different.

You might want to follow a program such as the following: Cover the basics by providing a primer at the beginning of each individual session on the value of earned media, how to interact with news people and provide background on how news operations work. Go over a list of tips and tricks, do's and don'ts, bridging messages, body language and the importance of speaking clearly and in digestible bites. Don't teach sound bites per se, as that can sound canned, rehearsed or phony. However, encourage speaking in such a way that lends itself to good sound bites that sound natural. There is a difference.

A 90-minute, one-on-one broadcast/video coaching session might go something like this: Spend the first 10 minutes or so giving a primer focusing on the big differences between how print and broadcast interviews are conducted and how the PR opportunities are different.

For broadcast/video, consider providing two distinct types of interview formats—the first where the person speaks to the coach/interviewer directly as if they are on set with the interview subjects. This is to simulate a TV reporter or producer who is putting together a television news story or longer TV special. The other format is likely to be more common, attempting to simulate a live cable news show appearance where the subject is likely in a remote studio. The interviewer can be thousands of miles away, and your client might be stuck in a dark closet with a robotic camera and earpiece.

Do at least one of each format. First, try a simulation of an on-set reporter interview that runs 20 minutes or so. Afterward, run the tape back for the client and provide immediate feedback. If you don’t feel equipped to do this, hire a former TV reporter or outside
coach to do the mock interview.

Then, try a 10-minute segment, where the interviewer is off camera and the client being interviewed speaks directly to the lens. This tends to be the more common TV opportunity with multiple guests. Again, immediately review a portion of the tape and provide a verbal critique. Try to do as many of these shorter, remote-type interviews as time allows. The interviews can be as difficult and challenging as the client wants, and you can go very deep into financial lines of questioning. The shorter, into-the-lens format also lends itself well to Skype-type, remote interviews that are becoming more common.

A 90-minute mock print/blog interview might go something like this: Start with the same primer as with broadcast coaching and then conduct two or three interviews depending on the clients’ preference for length. Then offer immediate critique and verbal feedback after each interview segment.

Always preach that sharp interviewing skills can lead to high quality earned media hits and that practice makes perfect (or almost perfect). No matter how much media experience an executive has, I believe that person can always improve. Experienced executives can also get rusty. Practice is important even for seasoned media pros.

Mark Veverka is senior VP of content marketing at Eastwick.