

Targeting and Pitching the Media in the Information Age Is All in the Approach

By Allie Gray Freeland

Ten years ago, PR careers were rife with cutting and pasting media clips into a thrown-together three-ring binder, sending out company news releases through fax machines, making endless follow-up calls, and delivering media kits by hand. Today, the role of media relations is completely different due to advances in technology.

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As in all occupations, the expanding world of digital has made a strong impact on how we do our jobs. Technology has allowed public relations professionals to become hyper-connected with journalists, has increased the speed of our delivery of information, and has democratized the publishing model.

In a world of micro-blogging, over-stimulated journalists and decentralized newsrooms, this article will help you pitch your stories with success. I'll explore the modern-day newsroom, how to pitch via Twitter, inbound marketing techniques, and time-tested email pitch tips.

How to Target

Targeting the right people in a newsroom is the key to landing press. Before you pitch any sort of story, know the hierarchy of a modern-day newsroom.

Do not pitch:

- **Editor-in-Chiefs and Managing Editors:** They serve in leadership roles, and typically do not sniff for stories.
- **Video and Photo Editors:** They're responsible for the non-text aspects of the publication.
- **Copy Editors:** They worry about grammar and not headlines.
- **Guest Writers:** They are often one-time contributors.

Instead, pitch:

- **Reporters:** They gather facts, interview sources, and write stories.
- **Assignment Editors:** They work with reporters, develop story ideas, and fine-tune stories.
- **Bloggers:** They write digital stories, dig for news and sometimes have the quickest publishing turnaround time.

Once you have a better handle on the newsroom, it's time to research reporters, assignment editors and bloggers who would cover your company's news. Utilize **Google+**, **LinkedIn**, **Twitter**, and paid tools like **MuckRack** and **Vocus** to find media contacts in your given industry. After that, start researching. Social media can be enormously helpful in this area.

Then, yourself ask the following questions:

- Are you pitching a person or product that this reporter would find relevant based on the articles you've seen them write or engage with on social?
- Does the journalist you're pitching produce stories about related topics based on what you've seen?
- When was the last time they published an article? That will tell you that they are still employed at the outlet.

Then, put together a media list, ranking the media contacts in order of relevance, and include columns for contact information, title, publication, and social media accounts. After that, find the reporters on Twitter and create a Twitter list to keep their info organized and readily available.

Twitter for Media Engagement

Twitter is one of the most effective tools for media outreach. Many journalists will respond to direct messages through Twitter faster than any other channel. Twitter also gives you an indication of whether a journalist is at his or her desk and what they are doing on that day.

"If a pitch is designed to deliver a succinct presentation of your product or service, then it may be that the 140 character limitation of Twitter makes it a great venue for a pitch," notes Audrey Waters, reporter at ReadWrite.

Here are some best practices for Twitter pitching:

- Make sure your Twitter profile is complete. Your profile should contain your professional title, industry, interests, and a nice headshot. Pitch on your individual Twitter account versus your organization's Twitter account.
- Before you pitch any sort of media, make sure that your Twitter feed is active with industry news and valuable information for your sector. Establish yourself as a



thought leader in your given industry.

- Create media lists through Twitter lists. This way you can organize all of your targets in one area.
- Engage with the journalists on your Twitter media list. Retweet their stories, congratulate them when they get promoted, or comment on a good piece of content they've written. Such communication not only sustains a relationship but also helps you stay top-of-mind.
- Once you've socially engaged with the journalist, pitch them. Send them a 140-character Tweet brimming with your brand's personality and include a shortened link where they can find more information. If space permits, end with a brief call to action.
- Follow up. Follow up via email or another brief Tweet if they haven't engaged with your message three to four days after the initial Tweet.

Inbound PR Through Blogging

Content marketing is now an integral part of PR and media relations. Well-strategized company blogs serve as a way to position your brand as a subject matter expert, showcasing your brand's personality.

Spreading word of mouth via content, social and targeted influencers is just as effective as proactive media pitching. Aim for equal

Leverage Twitter to Reinforce Your Message

Consider sending a tweet to the writer saying: “Could I drop you a quick line on an exclusive story?” or “I just sent you an email, would you mind looking into it?” Twitter can serve as a quicker medium that triggers a response faster.

Your pitch can get overlooked, so you need to take that extra step and add personality to your approach.



parts inbound PR and proactive pitching. You don't want to rely totally on third-party media placements to get your story out. Have information available to journalists by having rock-solid content on your company's blog.

Here's where to start:

- **Set up the building blocks for success.** Solidfy your market position and brand messaging. Find content that speaks to your brand and tells a story. Plan the content out and find interesting authors (in-house or subject matter experts) to add to the conversation.
- **Create content.** Your blog should be informative, interactive, non-salesy, socially sharable, and searchable through Google.
- **Promote content.** Share content with industry influencers and your target audience through social and email. Augment your good content by bringing it to the channels where people interact: **Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Quora, Google+**, and more.

Time-Tested Email Pitch Techniques

Though technology has changed the delivery speed and channels of pitches, there are a few practices in media relations that have remained unchanged.

Here are a few techniques that have worked for me when pitching stories via email:

- **Focus on the subject line.** Devote time to subject lines. Make reporters want to know more about what you have to say. Include questions, create interest through active words, or create a sense of exclusivity.
- **Personalize it.** You can't just “spray and pray,” sending a pitch or release to a blind-copied email list. You have to grow roots before the relationship grows. Include personalized salutations, comment on an article written by the reporter and find common interests.
- **Keep it short.** Keep your pitch emails to three or four sentences. Your email is much more likely to get read by the media if it's pithy and written in an inverted pyramid approach with the most important facts first.
- **Give before you get.** Offer favors before asking for press. Before you pitch a reporter to write about your company's latest and greatest news, you should develop a relationship that is non-self serving at first.
- **Act like a human.** Be personal, find common ground, and don't sound like a used car salesperson or robot.
- **Show enthusiasm.** If you don't seem excited about the idea, neither will they. Avoid exclamations, but show exclamation through your word choice.

- **Create value.** Express why this story is of value to the publication's audience. If you find it boring yourself, don't pitch it.
- **What do you want?** Provide a clear call to action at the end of the pitch email.

In summary, getting a mainstream media outlet to pay attention to your business comes down to your approach and creative use of social media. Be strategic in the brand stories

you share, utilize digital channels, produce great content on your company blog, and leverage time-tested techniques for email pitching. Ninety percent of the time it's not your qualifications, your knowledge or your ability. It's your approach. **PRN**

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