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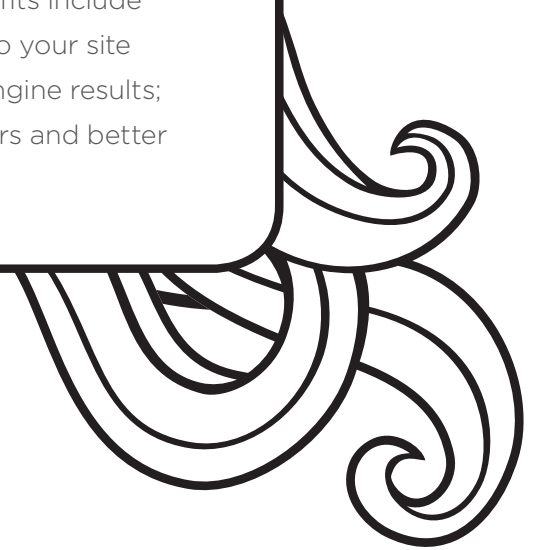
ABOUT

Tips on building relationships with the media.

BY CAROLEE NOURY



Ever wondered exactly what media coverage can offer your event and organization? Although media coverage is not the only public relations category businesses need to pay attention to, it can be an invaluable tool. The time and energy pay off in many ways, though not all of them are obvious. With Google searches numbering nearly 6 billion each day, your event's (and organization's) first impression may be its online presence. Related media benefits include the publicity and optimization that comes from links back to your site by media outlets; more online articles to populate search engine results; the opportunity to provide distinction from your competitors and better brand recognition.



With plentiful options for getting the word out about your event, it can be hard to decide where to start. The diversity of media outlets across platforms—television, newspapers (and their online components), radio, websites, blogs, YouTube channels and beyond—can make the who, how, when and what difficult to pin down.

To help you strategize, here are tips on attracting media to your event—and making the most of those opportunities—with expert insight from a public relations guru and a senior news producer.

WHO TO INVITE

Though many businesses send out massive press releases hoping to get a response, targeted and well-researched pitches are much more effective. Start by making a list of five to 10 journalists in your region that cover stories similar to yours. Employ your search engine of choice to track down those best suited for your story; make sure to peruse the outlets' websites and reporters' social media accounts. "Generally it's a mistake to pitch to a wide net," says NJTV News Senior Producer Gideon

Butler. "Know who you're pitching to and show that you did your research. We get so many pitches and far too many don't make sense for our audience. Know who the audience is and know what the typical story is like. Only pitch to those that line up with yours. Also, never use a form letter; they're far too easy to spot."

If you aren't sure who to address your pitch to, the answer is close. Simply call the outlet



and ask who handles your subject area. It's important to reach an audience interested in your event, but it's also important to understand how your event will make sense for that particular outlet. "Media is interested in something that is going to be compelling

something that is overly self-serving. There needs to be a reason for media and their viewers to engage that is more than you are great at what you do," Lowe says. Butler agrees: "Don't just tell us the event is going to be 'great,' let me know exactly why this is where I

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to their audience: visually, philanthropically, educationally or simply something fun," says Brian M. Lowe, president and CEO of BML Public Relations. Keep those aspects in mind when determining the outlets to add to your list.

More than simply addressing a pitch to the right person, Lowe recommends talking to the contact at some point. "You need to bring your news to their doorstep by picking up the phone and pitching your event to a person," he says. "Media relations is the foundation of our business. It has helped us develop key relationships and is an opportunity for you to find out why media cannot or will not cover an event, so you can take those reasons into account for the next time." If you are working with a limited budget, prweb.com and prleads.com offer resources for public relations and media planning, including information on how to create an effective press release.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPELLING CASE FOR COVERAGE

With vast numbers of pitches coming in, how do you make yours distinctive? Begin by answering the question: "Why would their audience want to know about this?" If the roles were swapped, would you be convinced? If not, keep working on the pitch until you can answer that in the affirmative. "You want to make sure that your event has a unique hook and not

should direct my limited resources. Be specific."

Part of making the case is also helping the reporting team see it. Literally. "Give us as many details as you can. Include things like who will be there and what is available visually," Butler says. But make sure everything you tell them is true; if it's not a definite, don't make it sound like it is. "Everyone wants media to show up and cover their event. But do not oversell it just to get them in the room," Lowe says. "Be sure that you deliver exactly what you promise, when you promise it. The fastest way for media to turn around and walk out the door is when what was promised is not entirely available." And good luck getting them to come back again after that.

WHEN TO SEND YOUR INVITATION AND HOW TO FOLLOW UP

As you make connections with the press, do your best to build a positive relationship with your contact person. "Don't think of the media as 'media,'" says Butler. "Get to know us. Build relationships. Send appropriate pitches and take the time to understand what we do." One way to do this is to ask them about their deadlines. This will help you to determine how much lead time they need and also how quickly you'll need to respond to questions.

There's another important *when*, according to Lowe. "The timing of any event is important. If



media turnout is the goal of the event, we recommend holding it between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., with 11 a.m. being the optimal time. That time gives media a chance to get through their morning meeting and assign stories.”

In general, send formal invitations about a month before the event and even earlier for any events that are enticing enough to bring media from a more distant area which may require hotel and/or flight planning. If you don't hear back in three to four business days, send a brief follow up email. Don't call the journalist unless you know her or him personally. Offer something new in your note, such as images (by link, never an unsolicited attachment). Even better: Include something that makes the work easier, like research (e.g. statistics, links to recent articles or other news related to your event). If you don't hear back after one or two well-spaced check-ins, move on or risk irritating and possibly alienating the journalist.

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—**Brian M. Lowe**

THEY'RE COMING! (NOW WHAT?)

On the day of the event, have a specific media-only coordinator stationed with the media representatives. Make sure you select someone with strong interpersonal and communication skills. “Events are busy and not everything is predictable, but do your best to keep it organized ... have a point person just for the media—someone who can answer our questions, give Wi-Fi passwords and point us in the right direction,” Butler says. Compile a packet with just the right amount of information, such as several suggested story ideas, a quote from an industry expert and the contact for questions after the event. “Don't worry about making the media packet fancy; we don't need that,” Butler says. “What's better is something that gets right to the point with specifics. Make it easy to find the contact information. We're busy, so the easier you make it on us, the better.”

Also, do your best to make the most of the media's time at your event. “You cannot expect media to sit through your entire program of speakers,” Lowe says. “Give them the key spokesperson as soon as they walk in the door as they appreciate it when you expedite what they need so they can get in and get out.”

AFTER THE EVENT

Make sure your media contact responds quickly and effectively to all inquiries, and once available, make sure to link the media coverage to its source on your own website. Send a thank-you note, regardless of whether your story makes it into the news.

An ongoing benefit of genuine, responsive interactions with your media connections is it makes the next cycle easier. Remember each story you pitch must be *new* in some significant way. An identical event isn't going to attract media attention the following year.

“Once media has told your story, they're not interested in telling that same exact story again,” Lowe says. “Figure out a way to refresh it or breathe some new life in it. Create a publicity stunt or roll in a charitable layer that ties back to your company, brand or the reason you are hosting the event. Mix it up.” If you can budget for public relations support, Lowe recommends it. “The great thing about PR is that you can generate media coverage by making a few simple phone calls to the right outlets,” he says. “So if anything, PR should always remain on the table as it is a cost-effective way to deliver your message to the masses.”

Get Connected

BML PUBLIC RELATIONS
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NJTV
njtvonline.org
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