

How to Talk to the Media - Please Don't Be Annoying!

As an entrepreneur, are you giving press members what they want? You will not get the press coverage you are looking for if you are annoying when you contact reporters. With this in mind, here are a few suggestions to help build long-term media relationships:

The Do's

Research

The best way to reach reporters is to pick up the phone. But before you start dialing, it is essential to conduct research first. You can waste a lot of time and effort, and even get your name blacklisted by reporters and editors (they do talk to each other) if your pitch does not fit the media venue and is sent out blatantly to hundreds at one time.

And it all starts with your basic business goals. Who are you trying to reach and what is the message you want to convey? Find out what your target audience watches, listens to and reads. Then, make a list of these publications, radio programs, television shows and Web sites.

Next, review these venues. What is the focus and mission for each? What stories have been covered in the past? What topics do specific reporters cover on a regular basis? Do your homework and learn about the venues first.

Develop Newsworthy Story Ideas

Once you know the various media venues you want to pursue, try to develop specific story ideas that will fit into each and which writers, producers or editors will be interested in what you have to say.

For example, look for:

- unique benefits no one else offers;
- client success-stories that reveal interesting "before and after" testimonials;
- aspects of your business that apply to a current industry-trend or news headline;
- new studies, survey data or research results;
- personal insights or opinions; and
- upcoming charity events, presentations or community activities that involve others.

Although this takes time, it is an essential step to the success of your pitching efforts. Be creative and think about what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. And most importantly, focus on why the person you are talking to will care about your pitch. It's also a good idea to prepare several story ideas in case the person you are calling is not interested in your first angle.

Betsy Cummings, a writer with The New York Times, offers her suggestions. She likes talking to publicists who do their research and present newsworthy information. "I am interested in features on companies and anything that's unusual," says Cummings. "It can be a quirky business story, a strange trend in the marketplace, etc. Include lots of statistics, studies and trends in the pitch. And put the information in bulleted points rather than in a long narrative."

Call and Keep it Succinct

Now that you have done your research and practiced your pitch, call specific reporters on your list directly. Introduce yourself and provide the key points to your pitch. Be succinct.

If the reporter is not interested, end the conversation and thank them for their time. Move on to the next name on your list. And be sure to provide any additional information, photos or interviews quickly if requested.

Christopher Elliot, a National Geographic Traveler's ombudsman, Tribune Media Services and MSNBC.com columnist, commentator and independent producer for public radio and host of "What You Get For The Money: Vacations" on the Fine Living Network sums it up nicely in a recent interview on Nielsen Media.

He says, "I like thoughtful, targeted pitches that suggest you've taken the time to familiarize yourself with my outlets and determine if the story will make a good fit. I think the rules are the same, whether you're a Fortune 500 company or a one-man tour operator. If it's interesting -- if it's likely to resonate with my readers and viewers -- then I'll cover it."

As an entrepreneur, it is essential to reach out to the press. However, a good pitch takes practice. Think before you call. How would you like to be treated if you were a reporter? And even if your story angles are rejected, at least you have started to create valuable relationships with key media members for future opportunities.