

Want Media Coverage? Here's How to Get It

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A recent survey revealed that journalists only respond to about 3% of media pitches they receive and fewer than 8% of pitches become stories. Despite these low percentages, you shouldn't shy away from seeking press coverage as it comes with significant marketing benefits.

Being quoted by an outlet or having a story run about your firm positions you as an expert in your field, generates visibility beyond your immediate client base and brings you third-party credibility. Media coverage can also lead to more website traffic and phone calls, and ultimately, new business.

So, what's the secret to getting your pitch noticed and garnering media coverage? We've outlined best practices below.

What is a Media Pitch

First, you may be asking what exactly is a media pitch? It's a summary of your news sent to a journalist with the goal of publishing a story on it. Typically, pitches are sent via email, but it's still appropriate to pick up the phone, particularly if you're offering an exclusive or it's super timely – think breaking news.

It's important to note that most reporters are not looking for promotional pitches on your firm. The exception would be if you are pitching a profile piece or making a large announcement such as a substantial merger, but even in those instances, you need to discuss how the news ties into the greater community or its business impact. Will your merger create new job opportunities in multiple cities across the country? How is your new practice area servicing an untapped area and what will the long-term impact be in the industry?

What Makes Your News Newsworthy

There are a few key themes that will make a reporter take notice of your news: timeliness, impact, prominence and conflict.

Timeliness: Journalists want to know why they should be covering this topic now. Are you offering them fresh insight on a particular issue or a different perspective on a story that's been in the headlines? While some topics are evergreen, there still needs to be a timely angle or the reporter will quickly delete your email.

It's also important to recognize that we live in a 24-hour news cycle. For example, if a new law was passed on Monday, and you're pitching yourself to comment three days later, you've likely missed your

window of opportunity. It's critical to reach out to reporters the moment the law is announced, or at least within 24 hours.

Impact: If the news you're pitching will affect a large population of people or a significant portion of the outlet's audience, it's much more likely they will want to cover the story. It's helpful to back up your pitch with numbers or statistics from a reputable source versus anecdotal evidence.

The impact doesn't always need to be a global or national one if you are pitching a story with regional or local appeal but understand who the outlet's readers and viewers are. If you're reaching out to Wall Street Journal, New York Times or CNN, then yes, you'll need to make sure there is a national angle, or it focuses on one or more major markets that could have a widespread effect in the U.S. However, if you're contacting Los Angeles Business Journal, your pitch will need to focus on what the impact is for the L.A. community.

Prominence: Probably the easiest way to get media coverage is if your news involves a household name or well-known organization. If you're filing a lawsuit against the LAPD or a former high-ranking political figure is joining your firm, this could be interesting to a reporter. But this doesn't guarantee they'll run a story and you should also explain the impact and why the public should care.

Conflict: Is the issue causing a dispute or tension? Most stories involve some element of conflict, and this presents an opportunity to provide your expert opinion on why it's an issue and forecast for an outcome.

How to Draft a Media Pitch

You could have the most interesting story to tell, but if it's not packaged correctly, you'll never grab a journalist's attention. Here are a few pointers for crafting an engaging pitch.

Subject Line: This is the first thing the reporter will see and could make or break whether they open your email. Subject lines need to cut through the clutter and immediately tell the reporter what your pitch is about and why they should care.

Follow the three Cs: concise, compelling and creative. If you can keep your subject line brief (less than ten words) and get your point across, this is the best approach. Compelling subject lines can be crafted by creating urgency with timely words ("Newly passed legislation..."; "Tomorrow's vote will...") And get creative – if it's a topic everyone will be talking about, consider how to make your subject line stand out with a startling statistic or an opinion that may be at odds with other experts.

The Pitch: Reporters are busy and likely skimming your email in their first pass-through so get to the point. It can be advantageous to start off by showing you've done your research on the reporter and what they cover. Referencing a recent article they published creates personalization and could get you on their good side.

From there, your opening sentence or two should explain the main point of your pitch and capture their interest. Then describe who should care, the impact, etc. and include a few bullets about specific points you can address. Rule of thumb is that a pitch shouldn't be more than a paragraph or two, but if it's a complex issue, you can let them know you've included additional background following the main part of the pitch. Another tip is to avoid technical jargon unless you're pitching a trade publication (an outlet in your industry that regularly covers the topic). Most reporters don't have the same knowledge you do (which is why you're the expert!) so keep the pitch simple and clear.

You should also include a one-sentence statement that introduces who you are, your area of expertise and why you are in a position to be commenting on this topic. Close with a call to action asking the reporter to contact you if they're interested in scheduling an interview and include your contact information.

Developing a Targeted Media List

Your efforts to craft an engaging pitch will be all for naught if you're not pitching the right people. There are platforms, such as Cision or Muck Rack that can help build your media list, but they can be expensive and should only be used as a starting point. We've found with the turnover in newsrooms, these databases are often out-of-date because the reporter has moved to another outlet or switched beats.

The best way to find journalists who cover topics relevant to your pitch is to do online research. This strategy takes more time, but you can be certain you're identifying the correct people. Visit the outlet's website where you'd like to be featured and see who has been writing on similar issues. Often, the reporter's email will be listed with the article or on the contact or masthead page. Another great source is social profiles – most reporters have LinkedIn and Twitter pages where you can read about their beat, quickly see what they've been covering and obtain contact information if they have it listed. Worst case scenario, if you can't find their email, you can pitch them by sending a message via their profile.

Before you add every reporter under the sun to your list, consider if they warrant being pitched. As previously mentioned, if your pitch has a hyperlocal angle, it's probably not a fit for Wall Street Journal. A quote in a national outlet is something to strive for, but there is tremendous value in local/regional media. Also, if you're pitching every story idea to national outlets and it's not something they would cover, when you do have something of interest, they may not bother opening your email.

Things to Keep in Mind Before You Pitch

You've identified an intriguing topic, drafted your media pitch, compiled your target list and you're ready to hit send, but there are a few things you should consider before distributing your pitch.

Timing: Be mindful of other news or events. Is tomorrow election day? Perhaps not the best time to send out your pitch unless it's specifically about voting outcomes.

With access to email all hours of the day wherever you are, there are no hard and fast rules about when to send a pitch. It's been reported that most journalists don't have a preference for what day of the week they receive a pitch, and if it's timely news, you shouldn't wait to send it out for the sake of avoiding a Friday afternoon. Nearly 65% of journalists say they like to receive pitches between the hours of 5 am and 12 pm, so aim to get your email out in the morning.

Be available: We know you're busy and client issues can come up unexpectedly, but if you're sending out a pitch, try to be as available as possible and not traveling, heading into trial, etc. If a reporter can't get ahold of you, they will move on to the next source and will be less likely to turn to you for future stories.

Be flexible: In an ideal world, reporters would receive your pitch and call you immediately to discuss what you proposed. But sometimes their plate is full, and if the story is a bit more evergreen, they may suggest reconnecting at a later date or keeping you on file as a resource. Don't be disappointed – half the battle is getting a response. If they give you a specific timeframe to follow up, make sure to contact them then, and in the interim, offer to send updated information if anything arises related to your pitch.

Alternatively, reporters could express interest in talking with you now but ask about issues not included in your pitch. If it's something you're knowledgeable on, then be open to discussing other angles. If it's not in your wheelhouse, it's okay to tell the reporter that. Offer to connect them with a colleague if someone else would be a better fit. The idea is to be helpful so the reporter will keep you in mind for the future.

Another aspect of being flexible is responding to a reporter's questions in their preferred format. Some reporters are happy to set up a phone call or Zoom, and others prefer emailed comments. There are benefits to each, so be open to how they would like to conduct the interview.

Follow Up

You can't sit back and wait for the phone calls or email responses to roll in after sending out your pitch. Most of the time, follow up will be required on your part. Depending on the timeliness of your news, you may follow up the same day or the next morning. Otherwise, give the reporter a couple of days to get back to you and if you haven't heard anything, then follow up with an email or phone call. If there is new information that may pique their interest, be sure to mention it.

Ensuring a Successful Interview

Even though you secured an interview with a reporter, there's no guarantee they will publish your comments. Sometimes the story gets scrapped for various reasons which is out of your control. What is in your control is how you prepare for the interview and what you do (or don't do) during the interview that can increase your chances for being quoted.

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