



Journalists' Top PR Pet Peeves, and How to Avoid Them

Good Research, and a Dose of Common Sense, Can Turn a Potentially Contentious Relationship Into a Productive One

Now more than ever we are all under increased pressure to create more with less. That's true of PR professionals and it is especially true of journalists.

In fact, with the recession and the changes in information delivery brought on by social media-driven technologies, journalism has been hit with a one-two punch. Loss of audiences and advertising revenues to online sites, satellite radio and thousands of video channels have triggered unprecedented downsizing in the ranks of journalists. Yet, while their resources have shrunk significantly, they're still required to file more stories every day for both online and offline outlets. They have to double- or triple-up on beats or regional coverage responsibilities. They no longer have copy editors and proofreaders to help ensure the quality of their output. They have new competition angling for every scoop.

More than anything else, they need to be productive. The last thing they need is a flood of unwanted, irrelevant and intrusive communications from PR people under pressure to produce results in the media for their organizations.

This challenging environment often can cause tension between PR people and journalists. Some reporters say they are spending upwards of three hours a day trying to separate a few good story leads from the hundreds of worthless pitches and messages clogging their inboxes. Many have resorted to blacklisting PR people who continue to send them unrelated news even after being told not to. Any emails from these PR contacts go straight into the trash, unread. Some journalists have threatened to ban entire companies or agencies to punish a single transgressor.

What to Avoid, and What to Do

Cision has spent years in a constant dialogue with print, broadcast and online journalists, learning about how their jobs are changing and how public relations people can help them be more productive and successful. Through that unique position, we've compiled a list of the biggest "pet peeves" journalists have about poor PR practices.

Here is the current "top five:" (1) Sending generic mass email blasts to journalists; (2) Ignoring what the journalists or outlets actually cover; (3) Making unnecessary follow-up phone calls; (4) Pitching identical stories to competing outlets; and (5) Not taking "no" for an answer.

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A Cision Best Practices Tip Sheet



To ensure that you DON'T become part of the problem, but rather the solution, here are some basic tips to help refine your pitches.

1. Keep it personal

Know the person you're talking to. Research your target contacts in advance and personalize your communication. Never send a mass e-mail with zero familiarity about the recipient. Journalists who take emailed story ideas want proposals tailored to them personally. Nothing is more impressive than proving you know someone's history; at the same time, nothing is less impressive than sending out a blanket press release with no introduction.

2. Know what people cover

Nothing annoys a journalist more than receiving a pitch that clearly demonstrates no knowledge of his or her coverage area. Do your homework, offer interesting information that is relevant to the stories that journalist is working on, and you are more likely to be rewarded with a return call.

3. Be helpful – not a pest

Don't follow up an email with a phone call. With many journalists' inboxes overflowing with week-old, unread messages, they commonly complain about being "badgered" by multiple phone calls shortly after getting an email. The best rule of thumb is: If you hear back from a reporter, editor or blogger, he or she is interested; if not, move on.

4. Be transparent about story exclusivity

Don't pitch an exclusive story idea to multiple competitors. Let a contact know whether you're proposing an exclusive story or if the story is being shopped around to various contacts. It's a good way to maintain transparency and spark interest. Journalists are competitive and a story is more likely to get traction if a journalist knows it's a scoop.

5. Develop a thick skin if your proposal is rejected or ignored

Not every pitch will get used, but journalists often keep valuable PR contacts on file. Remember that developing a relationship with a reporter, editor or blogger is the best way to score coverage, and it usually takes time to develop these relationships and build trust.

Use The Tools That Are Out There

The good news is that there have never been better research and monitoring tools available to help PR people find the most appropriate journalists and outlets for their pitch – and understand their beats, deadlines, interests, personal pet peeves, and how to approach them.

The Cision Media Database has extensive, updated information about media and contacts, including profiles on key people in print, online and broadcast media. JournalistTweets from Cision is an invaluable research and monitoring aid, enabling you to easily find and follow journalists' online conversations, learn their immediate needs, and determine whether – and how – to appropriately engage with them.

Applying these best practices and tools to your media outreach efforts creates the transparency and environment of mutual, professional respect that is essential to forming and sustaining good media relationships. And those relationships are the foundation for good coverage for your clients – and for your career success.

