

MEDIA RELATIONS INSIDER

WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT'S WORKING TO INCREASE YOUR MEDIA COVERAGE

SUPPLEMENT TO BULLDOG REPORTER'S BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE EDITIONS

PITCHING STRATEGIES

Don't Let a Good Idea Die: Five Tips for More Effectively Following Up—and Earning More Pickup

Unless you're offering blockbuster breaking news, chances are your pitch won't be picked up upon initial delivery. Most reporters weed through so many submissions a day that even a targeted, well written pitch will likely get put on the back-burner for later consideration—and then forgotten. By that logic, you'll have to gently prod busy reporters to keep your pitch front of mind. And there's only one way to do that—the “dreaded” follow-up, as most journalists view it.

Tip #1: Add value with each exchange. What journalists really abhor is actually the *empty* follow-up—the “Did you get my email?” and, “Are you going to cover me?” calls they consider vacuous time-wasters. The fact is, following up is a critical skill, without which tons of great stories would ultimately fall through the cracks. Successfully following up is even more than a skill—it's an art form that savvy PR pros have mastered. Here, some leading practitioners—and journalists—pass on more advice to help you follow up with aplomb.

You first have to remember that reporters are super-busy—which calls for some etiquette on your part. “When calling for a follow-up, always ask if the reporter has time to talk—and if not, set a time quickly and exit the call,” advises marketing guru **Shel Horowitz**. And when you get a reporter on the line, “Don't just ask, ‘Did you get my press release?’ Call with some new fact or information that provides a genuine reason for the contact,” he adds.

Tip #2: Use email to recap your original pitch. Just as most reporters prefer original correspondence via email, follow-ups are most effectively done the same way. “I have a regular column in *Entrepreneur* and have also been a PR consultant,” says **Aliza Sherman Risdahl**. She offers the following best practices:

- **Reference the original pitch by name.** “[Good PR pros] put the name of the person they're pitching and the company or product in the subject of the email.”

- **Recap the pitch upfront.** “They remind me what the pitch was about—briefly—instead of just saying, ‘I'm following up on the pitch I sent last month.’”

- **Be timely and flexible.** “A good pro follows up within one-to-two weeks of pitching, then listens to what I might tell them, [such as,] ‘The pitch sounds great, but check back in a month,’ or, ‘The pitch sounds OK, but I need more info,’ or, ‘The pitch is way off or doesn't work for what I need,’” says Risdahl. “She should then respond appropriately to my comments and suggestions.”

- **If no response, plan a well-timed third approach.** “If she doesn't hear back from me, even after a first follow-up, she should feel like she can follow up once more—in a few weeks—but not email repeatedly,” she adds.

- **Include all prior correspondence.** “Including all of our previous emails in the follow-up is extremely helpful,” she points out. “I get so many pitches daily and sometimes forget who sent what. Follow-ups are very helpful to me, but [PR pros] should not rely on me to remember who they are.”

Tip #3: Time your follow-up for best reception. Keep in mind that a reporter's time is often under the influence of various uncontrollable variables, and the actual time the follow-up crosses her desk can make all the difference.

“Be sensitive to deadlines and busy periods of the day for reporters,” advises **Bill Borden**, senior account executive with New Jersey-based **Coyne Public Relations**. “Specifically, a wire service reporter at a business desk should not receive pitches or follow-up calls before the market opens (9:30 a.m. ET) or after 4 p.m. ET. Most companies disseminate market-moving news when the markets are not open. Pitches or follow-ups should be done in the late morning or early afternoon. On the other hand, business sections of newspapers typically have earlier deadlines than the metro sections and front pages, so business reporters normally prefer earlier calls,” he says.

- **Tip #4: Don't wait until your news cools off.** “Make sure that your follow-up call is timely,” he

reiterates. “A follow-up coming a week after a meeting or a pitch might be too far removed. It should be three days at the longest between news peg and pitch.”

Tip #5: Take external variables into account.

“Take into account what might be happening on a reporter’s beat before making that follow-up call,” adds Borden. “Do not expect a warm reception if you are calling to follow up on a pitch or interview [while] the reporter is covering spot news that is likely to lead newscasts or make the front page. For example, if a pharmaceutical industry reporter is covering a major drug recall, do not call with information about an unrelated matter.” ★

MEDIA TACTICS

Can’t Lure Reporters to Your Event? Leading Pros, Consultants Offer a Dozen Ways to Bring the Media In

Lots of events are similar from a PR perspective—they are of paramount importance to you and your client, but in need of a little finessing to get busy journalists out of their offices. While the amount of media turnout will likely be proportionate to the nature of your event, there are a number of tactics for selling yours with the right bait—whether it be via clever angle-spinning, fringe benefits for attending or sheer convenience.

1. Offer transportation. “For a New York City [or other big-market] event, always offer private-car service to and from the event,” suggests **Ann Blumenstock** of New York-based **Euro RSCG Life PR**. “It exponentially increases reporters’ likelihood of attending [because it] makes their lives easier—therefore providing a jumping-off point for a better relationship,” she explains.

2. Think beyond you client’s interest. “It’s not all about your client—frankly, unless your client is a celebrity, you can do very little to attract a journalist or TV crew to your event based on who your client is. So make your event about *other* people—interesting people, even dead people!” suggests **David Newman**, managing partner at Philadelphia-based consulting firm **BusinessDNA**. “For example, when I was advising a video game expo on how to get coverage, one of the things we did was locate the family of a video game champion who was in the record books, but who never claimed his reward. It turns out the poor fellow fell off a roof and died a few years back, so we designed a posthumous award and had his sister, aunt and cousins come out to accept the award. All three local news networks as well as several papers were there with reporters and photographers.” In the eyes of the media,

“The event wasn’t *about* my video game expo—it was about the video game champ who finally got his reward—at my expo.”

3. Remember that all news is local news. “You won’t get coverage in markets where there’s no local angle. So find a local angle—or *make* a local angle,” Newman advises. “Does someone related to the story live in the community? Did he grow up there? Did he get his first job there? ‘Local boy or girl makes good on the national stage’ is a tried and true angle.” Don’t have such a hook? Not a big problem, Newman suggests: “Have your client donate to a local charity or hospital, get on the board of a local company or non-profit, start a local initiative, open a local branch or store, or hire a local—or once-local—executive.”

4. Offer plenty of notice. “You can’t get journalists to come to anything on the spur of the moment,” Newman continues. “They’re attending events tonight that they first heard about six weeks ago—and they’re on some other deadline for tomorrow. Send invitations—and well-timed reminders—well in advance, and right up to the day before the event,” he suggests.

5. Provide free food and drink. “Don’t just serve it—*tell* them it’s going to be there,” Newman says. “It sounds simple, but you’d be amazed at the difference it makes in your media attendance.”

6. Target the right audience. “I used to receive endless emails, faxes, calls and news releases that were meaningless to our specific audience,” says **Karen Friedman**, founder of Philadelphia-based media and communications training firm **Karen Friedman Enterprises, Inc.**—and formerly a TV news reporter with 20 years’ experience. “Sometimes it’s as simple as preparing a generic announcement with a customized headline. Other times, it means sending word of your event to the right news organization. For example, if Ronald McDonald is making an appearance at the local library, why would *The Wall Street Journal* or *New York Times* be interested? However, children’s magazines or publications geared toward parenting might find a connection between the character’s appearance and an upcoming story. By helping a publication draw a connection, you give an editor or reporter a reason to reach out to you.”

7. Offer broad context. “Reporters are also interested in the bigger picture. That means you need to ask, ‘What is going on in the world around me that impacts my product, service or event?’” Friedman advises. “For example, if you are in the insurance business and have tried but failed to interest the media in covering your national convention, perhaps you should re-think your



Three Tips to Foster Relationships for More Successful Pitchings

When it comes to successful pitching and follow-ups, one thing is obvious: Communication is more effective with reporters with whom you have an established relationship. Heed these tips for building rapport:

- **Be a resource.** “If you have a prior relationship with a journalist, your job is easier. These can be built by being a very helpful source, [such as by] sending useful tidbits and other sources, and never complaining if you don’t like a story,” says marketing expert and author **Shel Horowitz**.

“For example, I was offering an announcement about a children’s talent show at a local school. I had a relationship with the reporter who did the entertainment reviews, so I called him up and got several inches of coverage—and a full house at the event,” he says. “Thank-you notes go a long way, too.”

- **Let your clients be known.** One way to establishing yourself as a resource is to let the reporter know about your breadth of sources and info—and not just with regard to the pitch that’s on the table. “If you work at an agency and plan on building a bridge to a

specific reporter, write your client’s name on the front of the business card during the first meeting and list other clients on the back of the card,” suggests **Coyne Public Relations** senior account executive **Bill Borden**. “Reporters have difficulty connecting names of publicists with clients due to the sheer volume of pitches and meetings. It seems a bit elementary, but [that tactic] could really go far in making you a resource for the reporter.”

- **Treat reporters like partners.** “We have found that it’s so much more than ‘relationships’ with reporters that gets coverage. It’s more about being ‘business partners,’” offers **Vic Beck**, vice president with Massachusetts-based **Peter Arnold Associates**. “The difficulty is that in building partnerships with so many other ‘businesses’ or journalists, you have to be able to make all the partnerships successful. Essentially, a PR pro needs to understand the life of the reporter and what you can really do to help him. Don’t sell them—understand them. Then and only then can you provide services, products and information that your ‘business partner’ really needs to be successful.”

Entrepreneur magazine columnist and PR consultant **Aliza Sherman Risdahl** agrees: “Put yourself in a journalist’s shoes and work to help make his job a little bit easier,” she says. “He’ll respond by being more receptive to your pitches and follow-ups.”

approach by asking, ‘How are world events affecting the insurance industry and its customers?’”

8. Illustrate your point by giving real-life examples and analogies. “A news release jammed with endless numbers and industry jargon usually ends up in the trash,” Friedman warns.

9. When possible, talk to the publication or broadcast outlet in advance. “Tell them what’s coming to town and ask them what aspect might be of interest to their audience,” Friedman advises.

10. Don’t tell the news organization how to cover your event. “Instead, guide them to points of interest and give them reasons to want to be there,” Friedman adds.

11. Don’t apply the same rules to all media. “Think about their audiences and their needs,” Friedman suggests. “If you were part of their audience, ask yourself what you would care about.”

12. Provide a key point person. “If you get them there, keep them there by providing a spokesperson who

can deliver relevant messages that are to the point and mean something to the reader, viewer or listener,” says Friedman. ★

PR MANAGING TIPS

Use Mapping to Ensure Your Media Contacts Stay with Your Firm—Even When Key Staffers Jump Ship

Relationships with journalists are as good as gold in this business, and a major problem agencies and corporate departments are facing—constant employee turnover—is costing firms valuable long-term relationships. But **Barbara Marchetti**, founder of Massachusetts-based **Preferred Resource Group**, which provides executive mentoring and strategic planning and training, believes PR managers can curb the dissipation by mapping out their organizations’ intellectual equity. Here, she outlines the problems to

watch for—and the solutions to implement:

- **Be aware of “drifting.”** “The definition of ‘drifting’ is that the deviation from today’s standard becomes the new standard of tomorrow,” explains Marchetti. “The process is [catalyzed] by constant turnover and other factors. Unless CEOs know mapping is taking place, drifting can be happening right under their noses. And eventually, they’re not hiring based on the standards of their organizations—they’re hiring for individual talent that can [generate revenue by any means possible].” Organizational mapping helps to formalize your best practices—both with clients and the media—

TERMINOLOGY

“Mapping” Explained: Why is it Important? And Why Should You Start Doing it Now?

“When a staffer leaves, it amazes me that PR managers aren’t big on non-compete,” says executive trainer **Barbara Marchetti**. “When someone goes from one agency to another, it’s expected that she bring a book of business. If her clients follow her, it’s telling you the client is investing in the knowledge of that individual, not the resources of your agency.”

Thus begins a vicious cycle of “personalized” value that forces firms to hire pros with a cache of clients. “Why do PR managers want agency experience? Because they want them to hit the ground running—they don’t want to train them on their ways of doing things, which is the beginning of the disconnect,” Marchetti asserts. “Few managers keep track of the best practices they’ve established over the years that generate results.”

What exactly is not being done? “There’s little time being invested in mapping out a process of how the job is done with each client—and I’m not talking about lousy operations manuals.” She means creating organizational checklists that, as a whole, map out your firm’s greater mission and highlight its unique strategies.

How do you differentiate your firm? “If there’s not time spent on mapping, you have clients investing again, and the means of taking clients through the PR process becomes convoluted. There needs to be some distinction of how things are done,” Marchetti says. “Best practices have to be morphed into how organizations do it—not individuals. When someone is brought into an organization, intellectual mapping has to be in place that explains how she can best achieve an outcome.”

and drifting becomes less of a danger. “Drifting drives CEOs crazy, and you’re setting yourself up for it if you don’t document the intellectual equity [in your organization],” she says.

- **Hire young blood—and invest training time.** Once your business strategies are mapped out, it allows you to recruit younger staffers and teach them from the ground up—but you have to be willing to put in the necessary time and energy. “Junior-level folks are not only unseasoned in business—they aren’t seasoned in life and they normally come into important roles with little training,” says Marchetti. “Without [mapping], these people who have no frame of reference are trying to figure it out by watching and listening.”

- **Imagine your entire staff is leaving.** “Setting up basic 101 [mapping] standards starts with your leadership team. Each [exec] must look at what he is responsible for in terms of intellectual capital,” Marchetti advises. “Assume that six months from now, none of them will be with you. How does your firm maintain its level of service? How do you not negatively impact your clients?” The answer is to assume they *will* leave, and have them begin documenting their duties now. “The players in those positions today must develop key action plans [for ongoing use]. One plan should be to establish a mapping process of each role on his or her team.” Where do you start? “Ask your team, ‘What are the five or ten key activities and results expected of each role?’ Work backwards from the ideal results [in order to] determine the process for getting there.”

- **Convince your boss that mapping is key.** “This is easy to do,” says Marchetti. “Bring up an example of the last time a key player left and the interruption that it caused.” This alone will re-aggravate those ulcers. Also, get optimal input from outgoing staffers by showing your appreciation for their contributions. “Don’t treat outgoing staffers like doormats,” Marchetti advises. “Think of the great things they brought, and adapt the best of their best [to your mapping schematic] so replacements can keep doing what they were doing.” That way, the transitional slowdown will be minimal—and your key relationships with the media will be seamless.

Begin your organization’s mapping process today to avoid potholes later. “It’s your roadmap,” says Marchetti. “You wouldn’t build a house without a picture of the end result—and the same [foresight] should apply to building your business. Mapping provides your blueprint to get there.” Learn more about Marchetti and the Preferred Resource Group at www.preferredresource.com. ★

—Richard Carufel