

What Is Your Recipe for Media Relations Success?

I recently returned from a trip to Italy, where I attended a cooking school in a picturesque, 1,000-year-old village atop a mountain. In learning how to make my own pasta and prepare an amazingly delicious Italian wedding soup, I discovered that cooking is much like media relations. Here are a few lessons I learned during my latest foray into cooking that could be applied to a public relations strategy.

Planning the Menu

With cooking or baking, the key is to plan ahead. The same is true for using media relations to promote your firm.

When you start cooking, you need a recipe, but before that, you have to consider the meal's purpose. Are you looking for a dish for an intimate dinner for two, or do you need to feed a large group?

Media relations needs a recipe, which takes the form of a plan that outlines your strategy and tactics, including a list of ingredients. Like cooking, before you select the recipe, you have to identify the campaign's purpose, or in this case, its goals. Think about what you'd like your [media relations plan](#) to accomplish. Are you promoting a new hire, or would you like to generate awareness for a practice area?

With cooking, you might need to know the tastes of guests to pick a meal that appeals to them. The same applies to PR: It's important to create content you know will draw positive media attention, so you should familiarize yourself with key press outlets that cover your industry to develop a sense of what interests them. A little pre-planning can help you determine the most-effective and relevant media channels for reaching your objectives.

Knowing your audience's tastes means you also have to know what makes a good story. Think about including a relevant news peg or recent research at the beginning of your pitch. These tactics are essential to capturing a reporter's attention. Also remember that your story has to offer value, and that value has to be evident within seconds of the reporter opening the email. Journalists receive many pitches every single day, so it's important that you do everything in your power to make yours [stand out from that crowd](#).

Selecting the Ingredients

Before you start following the recipe, you have to confirm the ingredients you will need. In cooking, that's a list of everything going into the dish – not all of which might already be in your cupboards. In PR, these ingredients become information. You are going to want to



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pull together everything a reporter might need for their story before you do any outreach, and then put the information into a well-thought-out pitch.

It also helps to consider the different pieces of collateral you might have to develop as part of your ingredients list. Will you be sending out a press release, or are you offering a bylined article by firm thought leaders? (Note that if you do offer a bylined article, try to maximize your firm's exposure by including at least two professionals from the firm as co-authors of the piece.) Determine whether you also will need a trained spokesperson to be available to field media inquiries in the wake of the pitch.

People love to make additions to recipes. Reporters do this as well, by coming to you for additional information just before they are about to wrap up an article. This information might include bio details and/or a headshot for a source. Just like keeping your kitchen cupboards stocked with certain staples for your cooking efforts, having these types of resources on hand at all times will ensure that you don't delay the reporter or their article.

Preparing the Tools

One of my cooking school classes taught our group how to make our own pasta. This required a few special tools, each one designed to make the unique pasta that a given dish called for. The parallel for media relations professionals is to determine the tools you will need for your campaign, such as an updated list of media contacts, before you launch a pitch or promotion. Consider using social media, where companies can break their own news rather than wait for a journalist to tell their story. Just make sure you have your firm's social media credentials first – that's a key tool or ingredient.

Waiting for a Result

A good cook knows that opening an oven too often can ruin an entrée. The same goes with following up on a pitch you have emailed to journalists. Depending on whether your news is time-sensitive, you may want to give the media at least a few days to respond, but waiting too long can cause your breaking news to turn stale.

Journalists are extremely busy people, and it can be easy to for them to miss an email or simply forget to reply due to the large number of pitches they receive on top of their weekly assignments. Follow-ups should only be a few sentences long and contain keywords from your original pitch that provide context for your angle, such as a news peg, statistic or source. You should also include the original pitch at the bottom of the email in case they want to refer to the more-detailed version.

Finally, don't be afraid to pick up the phone when it makes sense. If you choose this route, first ask the reporter if he or she is on deadline and, if the answer is yes, when would be a good time to call back. If no, keep your pitch to no more than a [15-second elevator speech](#). (Another tip: Be mindful of a reporter's time zone. You don't want to call them too early in the morning or after the work day.)

If the media gets back to you asking for an interview or more information, get back to them as soon as you can. If you wait for a day or more, you may lose out on the opportunity.

Sharing Your Dish

Who doesn't love sharing a picture of a homecooked meal online? In media relations, this correlates with pushing your coverage out via your company channels. As with food pics, social media is one way to do this, but your company also should have a [news page on its website](#). This page can include coverage your firm has received or links to article placements. The news page also can be used to post updates about your firm that are not likely to get picked up by the media, such as awards or rankings.

Just as with cooking, it takes practice to perfect a recipe for media relations success. If you need assistance with baking a better media outreach "meal," contact me, Carlos Arcos, at carcos@jaffepr.com.