

Want to Build Relationships with the Media? Try Human Intelligence

Artificial intelligence, in contrast to humans' natural intelligence, is quickly evolving in the world of computer science, transforming the way machines can perform human-like tasks. It's being used in everything from ride-sharing to mobile-banking technology to medical diagnostics. Artificial intelligence for public relations and marketing professionals is already helping to make routine tasks and jobs – such as posting to social media, automating emails, creating content, producing analytics, etc. – easier, while freeing up time for more strategic thinking and creative work.

Psych! This article is NOT ABOUT THAT!

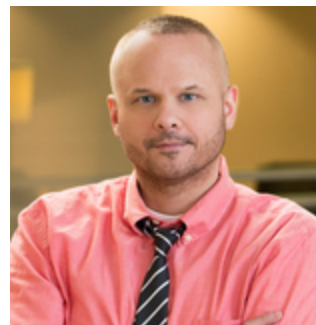
Forget – for the moment – about all that highfalutin' talk of technology and how it will make legal PR professionals' jobs more productive or deliver more successes to clients. I jest, of course, because there's definitely a place for artificial intelligence within PR, as well as other new technologies and innovations that are driving positive change for the professional services industry.

Instead, I want to give another shout out for "human" intelligence as it applies to building and maintaining good ol'-fashioned, mutually beneficial relationships for law firm publicists with members of the media. These interactions are anything but artificial, requiring us real humans to think logically, creatively and strategically about how we work with and pitch lawyers and law firms to editors and reporters for media opportunities and press exposure.

I recently attended an open dialog forum for PR professionals with some key editors and reporters from Bloomberg Law. The journalists shared some important – and not all that surprising – advice about how to best work with them, as well as how to get under their skin (not that anyone wants to purposefully do that). Consider the following tips straight from the mouths of the media and from my own experiences. These tidbits bear repeating because they never go out of style. Breaking these rules also could go a long way toward damaging your relationships with members of the press. And while the open dialog forum focused on legal media, much of this applies to publicists working in any area under the professional services umbrella.

Don't pitch a story or topic that the reporter or publication you're pitching just wrote about.

Reporters from Bloomberg and elsewhere are pretty direct on this. If pitching a story that's just been covered and/or a story that's three or four days old, what we publicists offer had better somehow move the story forward. In other words, suggesting an attorney can comment on a breaking story or just-announced verdict is not good enough if it's late. Instead, reporters want to know what the verdict means for practitioners and/or other



Randy Labuzinski

Vice President
Public Relations

773.405.7583

rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com

industry stakeholders.

Major news outlets will not follow their competitors' coverage.

The exception to this would be true "news" stories or announcements that cannot be ignored. Major publishers will want ownership of a more-contextual feature or trend-focused story. Admittedly, our instincts are not to divulge to one reporter that a story is also being pitched elsewhere, but reporters say they would prefer to know that up front. Finding out later can turn even the most mild-mannered journalist cranky.

Speaking of cranky, probably the biggest pet peeve of reporters is being offered a source who ends up being unavailable as promised.

If an attorney or a law firm has a conflict that negates commenting on a topic, that's one thing. But some reporters really bristle when an attorney is inaccessible or unavailable after being "advertised" as eager to talk. Attorneys are busy and sometimes other matters take precedence over PR. The best practice is to make sure attorneys are keenly aware of when/if reporters may want to talk to them and that there is a reasonable expectation that they will make time for an [interview](#).

Always respond to media inquiries.

Even if you can't help a reporter by offering a source or provide the precise information an editor seeks, every media inquiry deserves a response. Ignoring a reporter's email or call is likely to elicit a reciprocal response the next time you need that reporter to cover your story or interview your client.

Unless it's a very routine announcement or similar communication, don't "email blast" a pitch to reporters without personal greetings.

Not only does the impersonal nature of a "Dear Editor" or similar greeting communicate a certain lack of esteem for the recipient and a subpar work ethic, but it flags an email as not very important or not very newsworthy. We don't actually know most reporters and editors we contact, but a more-personal approach can breed familiarity and build a relationship.

Don't overpitch.

This applies to both overhyping news and being dishonest about the news value of a pitch, as well as following up too many times on an email. There's a fine line between being too passive and too aggressive when courting the media. It's more an art than a science.

Our relationships with the media are fundamental to our jobs and our success in promoting our clients. The bottom line is be intelligent and be human. The little things really do matter. Take time to learn what reporters and editors want or don't want, and be smart about not pitching stories or angles that they view as a waste of their time. For some reporters, the latter practically borders on being "inhumane."

I've pitched thousands of reporters and editors (and I used to be a member of that profession). If you are looking for [additional PR tips](#) or new strategies for landing media coverage for attorneys, law firms or other professional service providers, please contact me at rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com.