

# Only "Human" Intelligence Can Nurture Relationships with Media

By now, we've all heard about ChatGPT, the artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot that's been taking the tech world by storm with its ability to deliver detailed and articulate responses in many domains of knowledge. Jaffe Owner/CEO, Public Relations, Vivian Hood recently [wrote about](#) how ChatGPT – and AI more broadly – could be applied to public relations (and, more specifically, law firm PR), by writing press releases or social media posts. In practice, AI definitely could help write credible content. But nonetheless, AI lacks the influence of strategic thinking that adds an element of humanity.

Before we worry about losing our legal PR and marketing jobs to chatbots and other imaginable applications of AI, what about the things artificial intelligence *can't* do? These just might be where we can really make a difference and where we, as PR and marketing pros, should be concentrating our professional efforts.

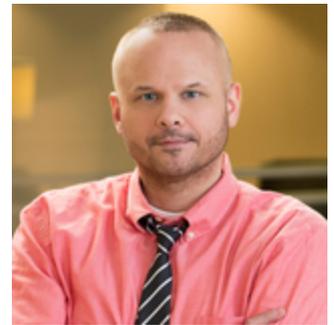
A chatbot is not going to know how to respond – precisely and credibly – to an email from an editor with a question about a specific lawsuit that needs answering in 10 minutes. Nor will a chatbot be able to take a reporter to lunch. A chatbot cannot build relationships – a truly human endeavor – with media members who are so integral to the work we do to keep law firms and lawyers in the news to help raise their professional profiles among key audiences. With that in mind, here are some best practices for working with reporters and editors that will nurture relationships in ways that a chatbot cannot duplicate – for now.

## Speaking of taking a reporter to lunch 🍷

Do that, if possible. If physical proximity allows for face-to-face meetings and social interactions with key legal or business reporters in a lawyer or law firm's community, the extra effort demonstrates that you really care about the relationship and the person who covers the beat.

## Even "no comment" is better than no response.

Every media inquiry deserves a response, even if you cannot provide all the information a reporter or editor requests right that minute. Giving some kind of response is just common decency in the world of media "relations." Ignoring a reporter's email or call might elicit karmic silence from that reporter if you ask them to cover a story in the future, interview your client or send you that article that you can't access without a paid subscription.



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## Personalize when possible.

Whenever the task allows for it, don't just send the same communication, such as a pitch for a source on a trending topic, as bulk email to everyone in your address book. "Dear Editor" or "To Whom it May Concern" can be off-putting and kind of spammy. It's a good practice to tailor emails. If you correspond with certain reporters and editors regularly, and they are likely to cover your law firm more than just once, use their first names in your emails to them. And make sure messages look like they're only going to one person.

## Don't be a nuisance.

None of us like spam, and the more times you try to grab a reporter or editor's attention (if you already are certain the message has been received, so to speak), the more likely your emails will devolve to spam in the reporter's eye.

There are two parts to this equation: 1) being careful not to follow up too much or too often on a pitch or press release and 2) not overhyping news and/or being dishonest about the news value of a pitch. (For an entertaining take on how *not* to pitch a story, read our blog post, [Media Lessons Learned from "Better Call Saul."](#)) There's a fine line between being too passive and too aggressive when courting the media. Bottom line: Respect a reporter or editor's time and timelines. It's more an art than a science.

## Understand the news judgment of the outlet you're pitching.

Not all media organizations are equal, and what is considered newsworthy by the hometown newspaper or business journal won't necessarily pass muster with Bloomberg or Reuters. Also, if the news is more than a few days old or the real "news" of the story has already been covered, it may take some strategic thinking to reveal a fresh angle that could merit media coverage. Often, an attorney's comments on a breaking story or trial verdict may not be good enough. Instead, reporters want to know what the verdict means for practitioners and/or other industry stakeholders. Help reporters move the story forward.

Furthermore, keep in mind that major media outlets typically don't want to follow other news organizations' coverage. With the exception of a truly significant piece of news that cannot be ignored, news outlets want ownership of a story. And never offer an exclusive if that's not the reality or truly feasible. Bridges burned with high-profile media are difficult to repair.

## Don't offer a source you cannot deliver.

Sometimes we are at the mercy of unpredictable schedules and other uncontrollable whims and factors. Media professionals understand when an attorney or law firm has a conflict that negates commenting on a matter, but simply reneging on an attorney's commitment to an interview will most assuredly ruffle an editor or reporter's feathers. If an opportunity is confirmed, attorneys must understand that there is a reasonable expectation by both the reporter and the firm that they will make time for the interview.

## Follow. Share. Promote.

If you are active on social media, especially [LinkedIn](#) and Twitter, follow reporters you value as contacts and key influencers. Share their relevant articles with your followers. Most reporters appreciate having their stories reach as wide an audience as possible. Showing you value their reporting could pay dividends the next time you come calling for coverage consideration.

Our relationships with the media are fundamental to our jobs and our success in securing positive media coverage for our clients. The bottom line is to be intelligent and be "human" – precisely the opposite of a chatbot. 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.

Having pitched thousands of reporters and editors, and having been pitched to as a reporter and editor in a previous professional life, I would be happy to share additional strategies for securing positive media coverage for attorneys, law firms or other professional service providers. For insights about nurturing relationships with media, contact me at [rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com](mailto:rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com).