

4 Best Practices for Media Relations During the Pandemic

We all have had months now to get used to the new normal in our daily business routines and work tactics amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea that we're all in this together is a truism, especially when we work with media across the aisle in our roles as publicists for law firms and other professional services providers. We might sometimes forget that journalists are dealing with many of same types of business, technical and personal challenges that we face. Since we're in this for the long haul, with at least months still to go, now is a good time to reset and refresh some reminders and best practices for working with the media to keep public relations initiatives on track.



Randy Labuzinski

Vice President
Public Relations
773.405.7583
rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com

The Media Are People, Too

An overarching reminder is to cut reporters and editors some slack during this time. Sure, we want timely email responses, confirmations on interviews and deadlines, and updates on when articles will be published. But if you are stressed or preoccupied about personal or health matters involving yourself or family members and loved ones, remember that reporters and editors are dealing with those same issues. With a nod toward good media relations, now is the time to be especially considerate in communications with the media, particularly those reporters and editors with whom you have ongoing relationships or want to build a meaningful rapport.

No More Working (only) 9 to 5

Many, if not most, of us are working from home during this pandemic. The same goes for journalists. Why wait until tomorrow to respond to a reporter's email that arrives late in the evening? It could be the difference between snagging that interview for an attorney and missing a reporter's deadline. Also, be brief, to the point and offer useful information in media pitches. Reporters and editors never had the time for overly promotional or misdirected pitches, but their tolerance levels for useless content may now be at an all-time low. The bottom line is to try to make it as easy as possible for reporters to work with you and get the information they need, when they need it, from professionals and firms.

Keep Technology in Tune with the Times

More media outlets are turning to video, such as Zoom or Skype, to conduct interviews with sources. To help [attorneys prepare for video-capable interviews](#), it's always good to know in advance if the reporter's expectation is to appear on video or use audio only, and then mirror that approach. The reporter also should be briefed about what to expect from the source.

Furthermore, a reporter will probably announce intentions to post some or all of a video conference on a news site, but it's best to never assume. Attorneys should always be cognizant of their personal appearance and surroundings for a video call – both for presenting a professional image to the reporter and in the event that any portion of the video ends up getting published or disseminated.

It's also a good idea to make sure that an attorney's computer apps and software are up to date and fully functioning before an interview. A brief trial run with an attorney is a great way to iron out any kinks in advance.

It's not Just about the Pandemic Anymore

Publicists surely know this by now, but the coronavirus is no longer the only story – or even the predominant one. For the most part, business is back to normal (or as normal as it gets during a pandemic) for law firms and other professional services providers as the media revert to covering their usual beats and not necessarily viewing every story through the lens of the deadly pandemic. Therefore, pitching non-COVID-19 stories and angles is fair game, and even necessary, to feed the media's need to cover the industries, practices and topics that inform their readers and mirror attorneys' current preoccupations and focus areas. That's not to say the impact of the pandemic is not fodder for media articles – it's just no longer expected or even wise to steer clear of everything else.

Also, while many reporters have returned to some aspect of normalcy in terms of the types of stories they're covering, there's no denying that they are still stretched a bit thin by having to jump on and off COVID-19 stories (and, until recently, covering the 2020 election). That has pushed the envelope just a bit more – at least temporarily – on the need and desire for media outlets to publish contributed content. That means there may be more opportunities to get thought leadership bylined articles and commentaries published in legal, business and industry trade publications. For attorneys who have experienced a bit of a lull in their client work, a productive and fortuitous PR tactic is to encourage them to write more articles that also can be repurposed on blogs, firm websites and across social media.

Media relations during the waning (we all hope) months of COVID-19 continue to be different, yet reporters and editors are increasingly reverting to the way it was before we all had to adapt to new paradigms near the beginning of 2020. Until we're all free to walk around with our faces maskless again, it behooves us as publicists to take the reins on what we can do to [maximize media opportunities](#) for law firms and other professional services providers while rolling with the punches on what we cannot control.

For help with executing media relations and related PR best practices during the pandemic, feel free to contact me, Randy Labuzinski, at rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com.