

Tips for Improving Your Media Relations Game

How many times have you failed at getting your law firm or an attorney's news or press release covered by a particular reporter or editor? It happens to the best of us, no matter how skilled, experienced and connected we are as media relations professionals. You (and especially the attorney or firm you represent) might think, "This is news, and this reporter or editor is simply ill-informed for not realizing it."

Maybe you've sent multiple emails, left voicemails (ideally not too many), direct-messaged a journalist on Twitter, and even tried workarounds like approaching colleagues at the same newspaper or publication. But nothing has worked – and you might never know why what you tried did not work, or what you could have done differently.

Just like you might ask a former baseball player how to play ball (it is baseball season, after all), if you want to get in the mind of a reporter or editor, try thinking like one to help improve your pitch game.

I used to be that reporter and editor, so while I now work to build good relationships for attorneys and law firms with the media, I can sympathize with those folks who are on the receiving end of pitches from some public relations tacticians who sometimes just cannot accept "no" for an answer. Or – even worse – can't accept zero acknowledgment of a pitch or explanation why a "news" item doesn't pass muster.

Let me conjure my former journalist self and share just a few key tips or lessons for a spring spruce-up about what to do – or *not* to do – when you're [working with the press](#) and trying to build a constructive relationship, not only in the moment, but also for a productive future.

Does it pass the smell test?

Perhaps the No. 1 tip – and this should be understood, but sometimes we or our clients can be blinded by the mission – is never to expect the media to cover a story that you know deep down in your heart is just not newsworthy enough to pass the smell test.

The truth is, if you have real, honest-to-goodness news to share, you just need to make the right reporter aware of it, and that news is likely to find its way into press. This really is a fundamental part of our job: to communicate and disseminate to the best of our abilities. But, if you're pitching a dog, you have to know when to let it go. Reporters and editors are not necessarily the villains, because they're also trying to do their jobs the best they can. Professionals with journalism degrees studied ethics in school and, in my experience, do try to do the right thing. Publication of a story or so-called news item as a courtesy is always the exception, rarely the rule.



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"Harping should be limited to musical instruments"

This quote is attributed to author Charmaine Smith Ladd (and probably others). The application is universal. As a former arbiter of the news, I never found it endearing or constructive when someone continued to press a point or pitch beyond reason. Unless it's their first rodeo, reporters and editors have a good sense for sniffing out hype. Especially if you're pitching something that's a real crapshoot, don't badger the reporter. Follow-ups are good and necessary and expected, but a ridiculous number of emails or calls or angry messages will do nothing to accomplish your goal. In keeping with the spirit of baseball, multiple strikes and you're going to be out.

Provide *all* of the facts and pay attention to deadlines

Another good practice with reporters and editors is to always provide the most-accurate and complete information as possible, and in a timely manner. Public relations is some part subjective – working to spin a positive story from a particular point of view – but you're actually doing a disservice by leaving out important facts that you know a reporter or editor is going to ask about. Most reporters and editors are on tight deadlines and you won't get in their good graces by making them work harder than necessary to get all the facts.

Don't be a know-it-all

No one likes to be told how to do their job. That's good to remember when you're at the mercy of a particular reporter or editor to publicize your news. This applies to insisting that something "must" be written or featured in a specific way. Most publications have guidelines to which journalists must adhere. You will always have the right to ensure that direct quotes are accurate. Everything else is up pretty much out of your hands once you release information to the press.

Cliché alert! Journalists are people, too

We all have heard the expression about catching more bees with honey. That's great advice for [working with journalists](#) as well. For example, whether requesting a [correction](#) to a mistake or some other change to a published story – a little finesse can save the day. Media pitching and handling is an art, not a science. Being polite and saying "please" and "thank you" really does matter. Check out a recent article by my colleague and Jaffe owner/CEO Terry Isner, about creating a law firm [culture of caring](#) and kindness to breed success. His insights apply to creating positive professional relationships in any sphere.

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