

# Jaffe PR meets the press

PR professionals and the news media have a love/hate relationship. We need each other to achieve our goals.

How do you get to the Zen of PR and media relationships? To answer that question, my colleague and I recently hosted media panel discussions in Houston, Austin and San Antonio. During these informative discussions, we had a chance to go directly to the experts and hear first-hand the things that we as marketers do very, very well, and the things that make reporters want to scream, cry, laugh at us, block our emails or ignore pitches altogether.

Our panels of award-winning journalists from large daily newspapers, wire services, weekly business journals and news radio revealed insights about how communicators and attorneys can best engage with them and the demands of the modern news cycle.

Popular questions asked of the panel in every city included: What do editors want in a story? How do I get my lawyers "on the list" as media resources? Are press releases still relevant? How do I approach the media with a story idea? Do blogs and social media play a factor in public relations?

We quickly discovered that every reporter is different and has his or her own take on how they like to be approached with news and "news." It was no surprise to learn that, with the 24-7 news cycle, most journalists are bombarded with constant deadlines. Even reporters with the weekly business journals have daily deadlines for pushing out content on their websites.

They emphasized this need for a large amount of content daily as an opportunity to promote our attorneys and their knowledge. Many noted that they start most days not knowing what story or stories they will cover, and spend the early part of the morning doing research for ideas and topics.

The majority of journalists on the panel also welcomed the opportunity to meet with potential sources for background interviews. However, one correspondent with the Associated Press Bureau in Austin pointed out, he is looking to build long-term relationships with sources to determine their credibility and availability. He said patience is a must, because it may take a number of months before he finally quotes your attorney.

When it came to social media, the panelists all agreed that they rely on Twitter to help identify trending stories and possible sources, and occasionally quoted tweets when they were not able to reach the source for a verbal quote.

Finally, the journalists said, that as public relations professionals, we have a duty to set our clients' expectations. For example, an interview doesn't guarantee the attorney will be quoted in the story. Also, most reporters do not allow sources to review their quotes



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before the article publishes. However, most agreed that, if they had any doubt about the accuracy of information they received during the interview, they would follow up with the attorney to confirm its correctness.

At the end of each panel discussion, the audience left with useful information that will help them maximize their media relations outreach.

I have compiled a list of some of the most popular take-aways from the media panel discussions.

- Take time to review and understand the reporter's beat before pitching a story.
- If a reporter doesn't respond to an email or social media message, don't follow up with a phone call. Don't follow up at all. That dead silence means the reporter is not interested, and "following up" will come across as pestering.
- Make sure your attorney or expert is readily available; journalists are not sitting on stories and will find another source if you don't respond back in time.
- Give reporters enough time to digest your news, respond to it and write a story.
- Become more active on social media platforms, specifically Twitter, since reporters use this to identify story ideas and sources.
- Ensure your press release is brief, highlights all the useful information in the first couple of paragraphs and adheres to AP style guidelines.
- Most journalists welcome photos, graphics or charts that will help illustrate your story; the panel was divided on video, with about half preferring to produce their own videos.