

Is It Time to Schedule a Journalist Meet and Greet?

As public relations and communications professionals, we usually wait until we have [news](#) before we contact the media. However, it's beneficial to establish an ongoing relationship with the press instead of only contacting the media when you need to push a specific story. A good way to establish relationships with reporters is to schedule a background meeting — in this case, between lawyers in your firm and local journalists.

Why Should You Meet the Media?

Meeting with journalists in your area allows a lawyer to build a stronger connection with reporters through direct personal contact. The purpose of the meeting is to introduce an attorney to a journalist, provide background on the attorney's focus or practice area, and offer a convenient source to the reporter for future stories about related issues.

It's also a good way to familiarize the journalist with your law firm and communicate a certain image (or perhaps even change it), especially if you are not one of the larger firms in your area.

Who Should You Invite?

Business and legal reporters from the local daily and business journal may be obvious. If your law firm is located in a city with a focus in a particular industry, such as oil and gas, technology, or manufacturing, there may be journalists with trade publications to invite. Also, if your firm is located in a large city, several of the national newspapers or news services may have bureaus in your town. (However, remember that these reporters are looking for news and trends that are local, but have a national appeal or impact.) Also, [don't overlook radio news](#) editors and business reporters. They need sources as well.

How to Invite?

To invite a journalist to meet one of your firm's attorneys, send a brief email identifying the lawyer (or lawyers) you would like the reporter to meet. Include practice areas and the industries the lawyer(s) can discuss. I also find it appealing to reporters to mention that the lawyer can address anything that has or might have an impact on any large companies headquartered in your city or region; for instance, new legislation, cybersecurity issues, cryptocurrencies, etc.

It may make sense to meet at your office, especially if there are several attorneys you would like the reporter to meet. However, if it's going to be a one-on-one, offer to meet the reporter for coffee or lunch. I have found that meeting first thing in the morning is the



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best time for journalists. They are less likely to cancel due to breaking news or other interruptions that can occur as the day progresses.

Be prepared for the journalist to insist on paying. Journalists do not want to give the appearance of being compensated in return for providing news coverage.

What to Discuss?

When meeting with a journalist, make sure he or she has plenty of background information. Ideally, your firm will have sent the reporter a media package before the interview that provides background on your practice and the firm. Remember: The purpose of the meeting is to introduce the lawyer, practice area and, perhaps, firm. The meeting probably will be more conversational, with the reporter asking general questions.

If possible, develop "sound bites" ahead of time – short, memorable phrases that are easily quotable and explain your basic message about the information you are going to share. Avoid legalese when possible.

The goal is that, during the meeting, the reporter will identify a news angle or trend of interesting. I have found that attorneys are usually too close to their practices to recognize interesting aspects of their work that would be of interest to journalists. A background meeting helps identify those topics.

At the end of the meeting, offer to be an on-call resource by being available to check facts in stories and provide quotes, comments or background information in the attorney's area of experience. Aim to stay in touch with journalists periodically, even if by a brief email. Update the reporter with developments that you think might interest them.

If the reporter indicates he or she will write a story based on your conversation, offer to review your quote or quotes for accuracy, or to fact-check the reporter's story for factual errors. Do not be offended if the reporter declines your offer – it is not customary for reporters to share their stories with sources before publishing, but sometimes they do, so it doesn't hurt to ask.

Meeting with reporters face to face is the best way to present your news to those in charge of spreading it. If you already know a journalist reasonably well, you can use that familiarity to help you get your points across. If you barely know them, or don't know them at all, meeting in person can help you establish a relationship that will grow over time.

Do you have additional tips or thoughts on establishing relationships with reporters? Leave a comment below or contact me, Carlos Arcos, at carcos@jaffepr.com.