

To Get the PR You Want, Focus First on the Media's Need

By Matt Baron

Do you want to know the most effective path to getting media coverage of your product, service, organization or cause?

Focus on what the media *need*, not on what you *want*.

Not only will you increase your immediate chance of getting coverage, but you will also establish credibility and create relationships that result in additional media exposures.

You probably already know what you want, whether it's more customers, more sales, more recognition, or more support for a philanthropic campaign.

But have you given much thought to what the media need? Generally speaking, the media need stories that have one or more of the following elements:

Timeliness

Localization (a local tie-in to a broader geographical issue or trend)

Controversy and/or Conflict

Highly educational and/or entertaining elements

Compelling human interest/dramatic elements

A "David vs. Goliath," or "underdog" theme

A celebrity connection

This list is not exhaustive, but gives you an overview of some of the recurring themes that resonate with the media. If you can check off multiple boxes from this list, then you will have little problem garnering coverage.

What follows is some elaboration on the top three elements outlined above: timeliness, localization and controversy/conflict.

Timeliness

In the 24/7 warp speed of today's media world, speed is king. In other words, the moment you think that you have a timely tie-in to a hot story is the same moment you must begin taking action to capitalize on it by reaching out to the media.

Waiting a day, or a few hours, or even a few minutes, holds the potential to knock you out of contention. Often, someone else has moved faster than you, or something else has already captured the media's minuscule attention span.

Also, pay attention to the calendar.

In mid-May, with Father's Day a month away, I suggested to the Chicago media that a cool feature story would take a look at a father-and-son dental practice in Elmwood Park, Taglia Advanced Dentistry. Within one day, a local newspaper was placing a call to the Taglias to pursue the story, and others in the media expressed immediate interest.

Obviously, it made sense to make the recommendation a month before Father's Day, not a month afterwards.

Localization

Here's one example to make this point of identifying a local link to an ongoing—or hot-off-the-press—regional, national or international story:

In the summer of 2006, Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger had a terrible motorcycle crash (while not wearing a helmet).

Any company that made helmets, trained motorcyclists on safety, or otherwise was part of that industry ought to have immediately contacted the media with an advisory that they were available to discuss some relevant aspect of that story.

Controversy and/or Conflict

We live in a world full of controversy and conflict. It's an inescapable part of the human condition. "Contro" means against and "versy" stems from the same root that gives us the words "conversation" and "version."

So “controversy,” at its core, consists of two sides speaking against one another. How dull would life be if we all agreed on every point? How dull would our news be?

An effective story-teller’s job includes identifying and anticipating those parts of a story that run counter to conventional practice, or buck the system in some way.

In May 2008, when senior placement specialist Andrea Donovan hired me to raise awareness about her work, it quickly became apparent that her business model had all the makings of controversy.

She does not accept a nickel of commission from senior-living facilities, but instead charges a flat fee to families, and that is in sharp contrast to the industry norm. Through her actions, which resonate more powerfully than any words could, Donovan is declaring, “I disagree with your approach.”

So I focused on that aspect of Donovan’s story, dubbing her “senior living’s lone ranger” in the process.

Her business also presents a quintessential David vs. Goliath scenario and the press release and media outreach campaign was highly educational—exposing an underside to the industry with which few are familiar.

Lastly, Donovan’s story contained compelling human interest and drama, dealing as it does with seniors at an especially vulnerable time in their lives.

And who knows? Maybe there’s a celebrity out there willing to speak out on Donovan’s behalf. Then we’d *really* be giving the media what it needs, which you should always remember is the key unlocking the door for the publicity you want.

*For more than 20 years, Matt Baron, founder of Chicago-based **Inside Edge: Public Relations & Media Services**, was a staff and freelance reporter for small-town weeklies, big-city dailies and national magazines. Through workshops, webinars and columns, Baron has trained thousands of reporters and PR professionals how to tell stories more effectively. You can reach him at Matt@InsideEdgePR.com or 708.860.1380.*