

Securing Media Coverage - PR University



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Top 10 Tips for Getting Local Media Coverage

Ideas on How to Develop Media Relationships and Generate Local Coverage for Your Marine Business

By Wanda Kenton Smith (Special Contributor)

Working with the local media can prove beneficial for your marine business as you provide information that may be of interest and value to their respective readership or viewing audience. Much of your success in developing news or feature coverage will directly relate to how you position yourself and your delivery at the outset, and how you package your concept in the pitch. Here are 10 tips to get you started on the path to PR success!

1. Understand Your Role as a “Valued Resource” to the Media.

If you have responsibility for PR for your company, you must perceive yourself as someone who provides useful information that can help the media do their job. Taking this approach will help build your confidence and allow you to present your ideas in a manner that will be more readily reviewed and accepted. Far too many novices approach the media either with an attitude of expectation or demand, or possibly fear and tentativeness, all of which are a major turn-off resulting in negative impressions. At the point of contact, your tone and demeanor should convey a sincere interest in providing the media with valuable and newsworthy information that would be of interest to their audience.

2. Do Your Homework in Advance!

One of the biggest pet peeves journalists or editors have is speaking with someone about a story who has obviously never seen their publication or watched/listened to their show. You need to know the specific composition of their audience so you can succinctly explain why your story idea will be of interest. In addition, when you read their publication or watch/listen to their show, look for specific opportunities where your story might work. Observe the types of stories they cover and where they are spotlighted. When you make your pitch, you can recommend consideration in some of these specific areas.

3. Utilize the Tools of the Trade.

If you have a news story for consideration, it helps to have it professionally produced in the form of a press release. The release will answer the following questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. If you don't have anyone on your staff with experience in writing a press release, either study reference material from the library or online, or hire a freelancer. At minimum, produce a basic fact sheet on your letterhead that summarizes your story by answering these questions. Your release needs to state the facts, not read like an advertisement. Remember, editors are very busy people ... you have one opportunity to pitch and make a first impression, so having a professionally produced release helps maximize the chance for your success. If you are seriously interested in learning more about PR, join a local association in your area and you'll likely discover a ready room of professionals available to assist you!

4. Select and Help Train a Spokesperson.

Let's say you've successfully pitched your story idea and now the media wants to speak with someone in more detail. A person from your organization should be singled out in advance and designated as the media spokesperson. Ideally you will choose someone that is well-spoken, comfortable speaking before the public (or perhaps with a camera shoved in their face!), and who is knowledgeable about your business and industry. This can be the business owner, a partner, manager or staff member.

In addition, your designated spokesperson should be fully informed about your media story ideas in advance of any contact, and should be prepared to respond to potential questions. Stories can sometimes turn on a dime, so you must be ready at the time the pitch is made. If you don't have a natural fit for this role on your staff, you may wish to consider outsourcing 1:1 media training for your spokesperson, as there are tricks of the trade that can be taught by a trained PR or communications professional. If you decide to invest in training, be sure to ask for and follow up on references to ensure your trainer has the necessary experience to do the job.

5. Develop a Database/List of All Possible Media Outlets for Your Story.

You may have a terrific idea and a really great story to pitch, but you need to know who to talk to if you hope to secure coverage. Assign someone from your staff to research the media and to prepare a database that would include the names of the editor, managing editor or special sections/assignment editors, their mailing addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses. The database list should include:

- Small local marine publications that are often free giveaways at marinas
- Regional boating publications
- Local newspapers (sports or outdoor editor, news and business editors, boating writers)
- Larger metro newspapers and magazines (metro, sports and business editors, boating writers)
- Business and city publications – newspapers, magazines
- Coastal lifestyle publications
- TV and radio stations – include local cable TV stations that may carry a “hometown” interest show that is always looking for topics and guests, and boating/outdoor TV and radio shows. You will need the contact information for the assignment editor.

As you are developing your database, ask around and see if any media contacts in the area are known boaters/sailors, as their passion for the sport and lifestyle can often help open doors.

In terms of researching the list, you can gain contact information by accessing a hard copy of the print publication off the newsstand. Also, the internet is a phenomenal source for information and you can access contact information for virtually any reputable newspaper, magazine or broadcast station with a few clicks. If you have exhausted these resources and are unable to locate the information, you can make a direct phone call and simply ask the receptionist for details. Don't be surprised, however, if you aren't automatically sent to the very contact you are trying to find without warning!

One final tip as it relates to the database: update it regularly! All of us value our own names and we like to receive mail intended for us, not our predecessors. Someone should be designated to regularly review and update the media database to ensure the accuracy of your contact list.

6. Know Your Contact Media Preference.

Once you actually start working with the press and establishing 1:1 relationships, find out how they prefer to receive news tips. Some will want a phone call. Others will prefer an e-mail, possibly with a press release attached. Some will prefer contact be made within a particular time frame, to avoid deadline periods. No two editors or journalists are the same, so ask. Then be sure to document it in your records so the next time you're ready to pitch them with an idea, you remember their preference.

7. Follow Up!

Once you've decided to focus on a PR initiative, you're ready to get things going! Remember, however, that journalists are constantly on deadlines, some on a daily basis. If you've called or emailed and haven't had an immediate response, don't be surprised or be ready to give up ... just continue to follow-up! Most professional media will take the time to respond, but will do so in their timeframe, which isn't necessarily your own. Unless your story has a real sense of urgency associated with some type of deadline, be patient but persistent. I'd recommend waiting three to five days to follow up after your first contact, if you haven't heard back. Always acknowledge your understanding of their deadlines and communicate your willingness to work around their schedule. When possible, provide a cell phone or email that can be accessed 24/7.

At whatever point you actually make contact, be prepared to summarize or restate your story concept succinctly. Don't drag out the story idea and get into a lot of detail. Develop a tight and compelling pitch to intrigue them and if and when they want more detail, they'll ask. In summary, know in advance what you want to say and be prepared to deliver it professionally and quickly.

Also as it relates to the importance of following up ... if you are successful in piquing their interest and they ask for something – anything – make sure you are responsive! Immediately get the information they have asked for in a timely manner. You'd be surprised by the number of complaints from editors who have expressed interest in a story but can't get the information they need in time to meet their deadline.

8. Learn From Your Experiences.

Your first encounter or two may not deliver the homerun you hoped for or anticipated. Don't be dismayed. Instead, learn from your experience and try to determine what didn't work. Usually editors are pretty direct and will tell it like it is. Never put them on the defensive or pointedly ask, "Why didn't you run my release?" In the meantime, continue to regularly review the media vehicles with whom you'd like to develop relationships so you can see the type of stories that seem to catch their interest.

Follow the writers whom you believe are best suited to your potential area of coverage and read their stories regularly. This is the ultimate compliment to a reporter. If a particular article or interview gets your attention, send them a note commenting on the piece. While some are not able to accept a "free lunch," you might want to meet over a soda just to open dialog and get acquainted. Some are more open to doing this than others. One thing is for sure: the more attuned you are to their readership or viewing audience, and the better you can fine tune your pitch to reach that target market, the greater your chances are for getting the story ... *eventually!*

9. Post Coverage Contact.

When you've successfully landed a story or an interview, make contact following the coverage. This shouldn't be expressed in gratuitous platitudes, but a simple acknowledgment and appreciation of the coverage and perhaps a comment or two about the creative angle, the thoroughness or accuracy of the story. A handwritten note is highly recommended as this breaks through the clutter of e-mail and adds a personal touch. Include your business card and conclude your note with the offer to serve as a future resource (should the need arise) where your expertise could be of assistance on a related story.

10. Share the Success!

If possible and if the media allows, post the article or interview on your website. Nothing delivers more power and credibility than positive editorial coverage about your business. When the press says it, it has more impact than anything you can ever say about your product or service. If the story is particularly good, check to see if you may have permission to make reprints, and make those available to your sales team and in your prospect literature packets.

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