



## **One Size Does Not Fit All: Tips for Generating News Coverage**

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Do you get frustrated when you try to generate news coverage for your organization? Changing the way you think about the news media can produce remarkable results.

I know public relations professionals who have distributed the same news release to dozens or hundreds of media outlets in a mass email – perhaps about a new program or product -- expecting the news release to be published, posted and broadcast.

Most of the time, it's an approach destined for failure. The reason: One size does not fit all. Offering the same idea in the same way to various media outlets is not a strategy that will consistently produce good results.

The news media is not homogeneous. Most media outlets have their own distinct needs. And the reporters at those media outlets have their own interests -- the topics, organizations or communities they're supposed to focus on.

*The best results are generated when story ideas are offered to reporters, editors and producers based on their specific needs. It's an approach that can be labor intensive because you'll need to keep track of what they cover and customize your story pitches for individual reporters and assignment editors. But it works.*

Consider these examples:

- Morning TV news shows usually feature light-hearted formats, often filled with advice for viewers. So when I offered one show an opportunity to interview an expert on romantic relationships, Dr. Pepper Schwartz, producers were interested, resulting in a live studio interview with anchor Frank Marzullo.
- Newspaper opinion pages like to publish guest columns tied to current events. So I submitted a guest column to an Illinois newspaper on the anniversary of a campus shooting in that town. It was written by an expert on campus shootings who provided recommendations to prevent future attacks. The editorial page editor gave the column prominent display.
- Reporters who have topical beats are continually on the hunt for the best story ideas. So when I suggested a story about a new high-tech aquatic therapy center to a radio reporter who does a weekly technology story, the story ended up on the morning news.

Here are four tips to keep in mind:

1. Pay attention: Read, watch and listen to the news, observing the types of stories covered by various reporters. You will learn the needs of specific journalists and media outlets and be better able to fill those needs.
2. Be personal: Get to know the journalists who cover the subjects that your organization focuses on.
3. Avoid promotional items: It's not the media's job to promote your organization. Identify ideas that qualify as valid news and information.
4. Stay calm: Don't take it personally if you don't always get the publicity you're seeking. Even the best baseball hitters only get on base a third of the time. Instead, be persistent and polite with media folks.

Finally, remember this: Journalists are not mind-readers. They don't usually know what's going on in the community unless someone tells them. They rely on people to provide them with story ideas – to be their eyes and ears. So they need you almost as much as you need them.

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