

10 Practical Tips for building relationships with the Media

If they don't come to you, go to them.

Student Edition

By George Bamu

As we interact with the media on a daily basis, such as pitching a news story to a reporter, tweeting a news tip, calling a TV station or talking with journalists about our schools, organizations and community issues, the challenge remains that journalists are sometimes difficult to reach.

Journalists and other media professionals lead busy lives and are always on the go in a twenty four hour news cycle. While it may sometimes be hard to reach media people quickly when we have something important to say, the use of technology and networking opportunities is making it easier to be able to build new friendships with the people who have great control over the information that gets disseminated in the media.

The idea to get your story out, market a product or create a positive impression about yourself, your school, business or organization is the main reason for building relationships with the media.

It is an ability and strategy to be developed over the long term and not just for a day. It becomes critical for students, business liaisons, public relations professionals and the average person trying to cultivate relationships with media people to know how to go about doing this.

Here are a few suggested steps and processes:

- I. **Follow the activities of the journalists and reporters that you like and admire.** This means doing some research about their interests, their beats and specialization. This will come in handy when you get them on the phone or are commenting on, tweeting or retweeting a story that they wrote about, or writing about their activities for your school magazine.
- II. **Identify why you want to contact a journalist.** If journalists don't know you and do not know specifically what you want from them, they will ignore you no matter how good a story or an idea you have. Be specific with your request if you decide to contact a reporter.

- III. **Treat journalists like that “first date”.** This means showing respect and paying courtesy for their time. It also means making a good first impression. For journalists and reporters to take you seriously, you must show that you are genuine and really have an interest in talking to them about the things that you care about and want them to know. You have to state what it is that you like for them to do or help you with. “But your strategy here on should begin from the moment you identify a journalist as a media priority”, says Nancy Schwartz
- IV. **Write to a journalist as if they are your friend.** This is a recommendation from Conrad Egusa, a marketing consultant and entrepreneur at *BrownsteinEgusa.com*. This means treating them like people and using simple language to communicate with them.
- V. **Be a good listener when speaking with media professionals, especially journalists.** Nancy Schwartz, a consultant to non profit organizations at *GettingAttention.org* cautions not to come on too strong with a pitch. “Your value is in making it easier for them to do a good job”, she says.
- VI. **Make sure to follow up after making the first initial contact.** Offer words of thanks and appreciation to the media professional after meeting with them or if they made it possible for your story to be reported in the news. You will be remembered for doing this.
- VII. **Make yourself available for a second date.** One thing you can do to win that second opportunity is to ask to be considered as a source if needed, a suggestion by *Nancy Schwartz*.
- VIII. **Consider becoming a member of a professional media organization.** When you join a professional media organization such as a young reporters club, the society of professional journalists or the Colorado Association of Black Journalists, this offers you the opportunity to meet many journalists in person and over time. With these opportunities, you are not just known from a distance or by facial recognition, your ideas are taken into consideration and reporters would easily identify you as a potential source or subject matter expert for interviews if the need arises.
- IX. **Don’t mess things up.** After you establish relationships with people in the media, remember to stay in touch. This means adding the journalists to your mailing list and letting them know about any activities that might be worth covering in the news. However, do not pester journalists with irrelevant information and things that may not

be news worthy. You would be removed from a trusted list or have your contact information blocked if you send out spam and things that annoy media people instead of luring their interest.

- X. **Build and update a list of your media contacts.** Use your contacts when you want to hold a news conference when needed, for example. Take the opportunity to invite as many of your media friends as you wish and discuss an important issue that needs that the world needs to know about.

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Keywords and Phrases: Ease the way, Pave the way, Smooth things out, Cultivate, Relationships, Journalistic Beat, Pitch, Date, Friendship. Media professionals, Subject matter expert, News worthiness, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. Newspapers. Broadcast Television. Blogs, NewsTip, Spam. Source.

Networking opportunities

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