

# Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks

Understanding the changing face of journalism can be the key to getting more coverage for your business.

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Media professionals today are taking on more responsibility, facing changing job requirements, and are more aware of the commercial side of the **business** than ever. This evolution in reporting is a reflection of the changing face of all communications, as traditional roles and practices are being challenged by newer forms of media borne from web 2.0. Social networking, blogs, **online** video, search engines and RSS feeds have woven their way into the fabric of journalism, significantly impacting how reporters do their jobs and how news organizations structure their operations. For PR professionals, the changes offer both opportunities and challenges.

## New Media, New Roles

As traditional media outlets work to remain competitive, they are expanding their online offerings to compete with new media. This has put a strain on many journalists, who are being asked to assume new responsibilities to support these initiatives. In addition, declining revenue has forced many outlets to reduce staff, leaving reporters to contend with more work, varied responsibilities and longer hours.

The results of the 2008 PRWeek/PR Newswire Media Survey, which assessed the attitudes and ideas of traditional journalists and bloggers, bear this out. According to the survey, 57 percent of respondents feel they are being asked to work more today than in the past few years, while 56 percent say they are contributing to other media outside of their official duty. Forty-two percent of magazine journalists and 39 percent of newspaper reporters are expected to contribute to the website or online version of their publications, and 22 percent of media respondents are blogging for their traditional publications.

As journalists take on longer hours and fill more multi-faceted roles, it's more important than ever to take reporters' needs and interests into consideration when making a pitch. Spam is still a top concern of journalists. More than half of respondents to the study said that less than 20 percent of pitches received were relevant. Sending an errant pitch can lead to your e-mail address being placed on a blocked sender's list, or in some cases, landing on a blog post as an example of a bad pitch.

Initial pitches should almost always be sent by e-mail, as nearly 90 percent of journalists surveyed prefer to be contacted electronically. As you craft your e-mail, focus on providing a short, enticing subject line that sums up your pitch, followed by a brief synopsis of your story idea that is exciting and informative. Maximize the impact of your words by minimizing the strain on the reporter's eyes. If you can't summarize your idea in three paragraphs, reconsider your approach.

## Compelling Content

While reporters may be a bit more sensitive in today's competitive media environment, it doesn't mean that PR professionals should refrain from sending pitches. The same pressures that require journalists to contribute to more outlets could increase your opportunities for placement. A pitch that does not fit the parameters of a reporter's print guidelines may be appropriate for his or her blog.

Competition among different forms of media is also causing journalists to put a greater emphasis on creating compelling content. According to the same survey, 91 percent of reporters identified the creation of appealing content as the most important aspect of their work. In addition to seeking hard news, reporters and the editors are also searching for other content that will appeal to their audience.

Take the time to consider how the story you are pitching will appeal to the reader. Is the main demographic investors or stay-at-home moms? Consider how you would speak directly to this audience when tailoring your pitch. For example, if you have a new product announcement that you'd like to pitch to both business and consumer outlets, focus on issues like market opportunity and revenue potential for business outlets; for consumer outlets, focus on product features.

### Stay Ahead of the News

What are the hot topics in the industry? What's being said about your company? Knowing what's being said about your company, competitors and industry can not only provide valuable insight that can be useful to your business, but also help you anticipate trends and get ideas for future pitches.

Stay up to date by setting up alerts from search engines such as Google and Yahoo!, but also be cognizant of what's being reported in the blogosphere. Not only are blogs a key influencer in many markets and industries, but reporters are also using blogs as a source for their own coverage. The survey found that nearly 73 percent of respondents sometimes or always use blogs in their research.

From a PR perspective, it's always better to be proactive rather than reactive. If reporters are using blogs, then so should you. Blogs can be goldmines for uncovering story angles that will likely appeal to a reporter. A quick look at certain blogs could arm you with the necessary trends and data to craft a pitch that could yield significant returns. Blogs can also provide a means for you and your company to gain validation in the minds of reporters. A positive mention in a blog or a well-written response to a post could give your company additional caché and heighten your position as an industry leader.

While reporters are pressed for time and new responsibilities are pulling them in different directions, they still rely on PR professionals to direct them to interesting stories or fill in the gaps of their research. Reporters will appreciate the PR professional who takes the time to research their coverage areas and writing style, and who empathizes with the hectic nature of their job. Make yourself stand out by being an asset to the reporter.

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