Five Tips for Building Effective Relationships with the Media

By: Doreen Clark

You have a product, an idea, a thought leader or an event, and you want to gain the attention of writers, bloggers or editors – those who are connected to your target market. You put it out through a press release on the wire or forward an idea or a link via email. The response? Dead air … crickets … silence.

Technology has made the potential for relationship-building so easy that it is hard. Is it possible that we now presume that if we click “send” they will come? They will follow us? They will share our news? It is just as possible they will ignore our message. Why? Though we have the tools for media outreach, the basic skills may have been lost in the shuffle. Think about this: Are you more likely to do something for someone you know or a complete stranger? The media you are trying to reach would probably answer this in the same way. The bottom line? Taking the time to build a relationship before asking for something in return seems like a basic idea – so basic that it may be overlooked.

Consider these five “must-do” elements to get the media into your corner:

1. **Become “friends.”**
   One of the first things about building any sort of relationship is to understand the backstory and to reach out with nothing expected in return. After all, that is the basis of friendship, right? Media representatives respond just like everyone else. Building a business relationship takes time and research, and both are required before any further efforts begin. Understand the publication or outlet. Know the subject matter that interests them. Compliment them, genuinely, on their work. Share and re-Tweet their professional endeavors and suggest topics that may be interesting supplements to their most recent work – without inserting anything self-serving into the dialogue. The key to friendship is trust, and that is the basis of what the media is looking for. As with most things in business, hard work has a payoff, but it will have to be earned.

2. **Speak their language.**
   Technology has increased the potential for a company to get visibility due to online platforms; however, technology has also created more ways for reporters and editors to obtain sources and story ideas, increasing the difficulty to get through the clutter. If Tweeting is their language, you will need to learn it. According to the 2013 Oriella Digital Journalism Study, over 50 percent of journalists get story ideas from sites like Twitter. They also look to LinkedIn among other social networking sites. With this being the case, it would serve organizational efforts to follow trending topics, brush up on social media protocol and even create a TweetDeck so that the company can catch industry topics as they happen and comment in real time. If you are where they are (without media stalking), respect will come.

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3. **Understand their preferences.**
   Reaching out to key contacts on recent articles or touching base on shared interests will backfire if their preferred method of communication is not understood at the outset. As the industry has evolved, there has been a shift from telephone outreach to email to social media or a combination. One of the quickest ways to find your message in the digital trash bin is to ignore your media contacts' preferences for outreach. If you get no response, it might not be your pitch. You might be leaving a message when you should be making contact via *#readthis*.

4. **Know the difference between a pitch and a sales job.**
   Once the relationship is under way, the company may be ready to get down to business and suggest an expert or offer an article for review. Once trust is there, this is the next logical step. However, after all efforts, this could be a make-it or break-it moment. Media contacts are hungry for tips, analysis and insight, but they can sniff out an advertisement disguised as a pitch better than a bloodhound in the forest.

5. **Respect the inbox.**
   You have honored the rules and sent your inquiry/offer to the media. Now it is time to take a breath, allowing the contact space to get through the messages and to review the request. A follow-up is fair – but beware … too many reminders may be considered Spam, and if you fall into the junk folder, it is back to square one. With all considerations taken into account, do not be afraid to start over. Do not be afraid to rework the pitch – it is all part of the process. In the end, if the relationship is nurtured and respected, the reward will come.

About the Author
Doreen Clark is a public relations manager for Edge Legal Marketing. She has more than a decade of experience leading clients, throughout various industries, to increased success through public relations and marketing efforts.

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