

MEDIA RELATIONS INSIDER

WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT'S WORKING TO INCREASE YOUR MEDIA COVERAGE

SUPPLEMENT TO BULLDOG REPORTER'S BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE EDITIONS

PITCHING STRATEGIES

Crafting the Perfect Subject Line: PR Leaders Reveal How to Ensure Your Pitch is Read Every Time

The mistakes PR pros make when emailing pitches stand out like sore, swollen thumbs. Don't over-promise, never check the "urgent" feature or use all caps, colors or boldface, and don't be overly cutesy, to name a few. But with over 10 years of email trial and error behind us, PR practitioners are really zeroing in on what works best for grabbing the attention of editors—especially when it comes to hooking them with a killer subject line. And in today's media climate, where reporters are bombarded with hundreds (or thousands) of emails everyday, a killer subject line can mean the difference between having your email pitch read and having it automatically deleted.

Below, PR pros offer hints and tips for crafting the perfect subject line to ensure your pitch is read:

1. Make it timely and actionable. "I call it the Two Ts: timing and tips," explains **Rodger Roeser**, president and owner of **Eisen Management Group**. "Timing is especially important this time of year—and putting your tips right in the subject line is a quick and simple way to tie into a current event. So try, 'Five Best Ways to Alleviate Holiday Stress,' 'Top Ten Tips for Holiday Cooking,' or 'Ten Best Spots for Valentine's Day,'" he recommends. Notice how none of these examples tout a company or are blatant product pitches. Journalists are wary of subject lines that look like advertisements—but trends and tips are more likely to hook them.

2. Employ humor. "Humor is definitely one of the keys to a killer subject line," says **Glen Stone**, public affairs manager for the **Toronto Board of Trade**. "For example, when ex-basketball player and Toronto Raptors GM Glen Grunwald—who stands 6'8"—joined the Toronto Board of Trade as our new president & CEO, I could have sent my e-mail to key journalists with the subject line 'Grunwald joins Board of Trade.' Instead, I used "Toronto's tallest free-standing CEO." Reporters

opened it, got a laugh and remembered Mr. Grunwald's new position. The nickname also got some traction—the *Toronto Sun* photographed my boss in front of the CN Tower, the world's tallest free-standing structure."

3. Use clever literary devices. "A play on words or a clever alliteration will usually bring the desired result," explains **Chris Parente**, vice president of **Strategic Communications**. "Also, active verbs are much better than passive ones for pitches, and well-placed analogies or metaphors are helpful—a David vs. Goliath metaphor for Convera vs. Google, for example."

4. Don't be afraid of long subject lines. "Newspapers often favor longer headlines, and the same holds true for subject lines," Parente continues. "Long subject lines are OK—as long as the subject isn't so long that it gets cut off. Most importantly, though, leave out any words or phrases that are commonly blocked by spam filters. For example, even if your new product is 'hot,' pick a different adjective—'hot' is a common spam filter keyword."

5. Upset expectations—and surprise the reader. "A great lead often taps into a contrarian viewpoint," Parente says. "The same is true of subject lines. For example, the subject line 'The best technology for search—it isn't who you think' secured us three media interviews for our client. Another one, 'The Veteran's Corp. Putting Veterans in the Front Lines—of Business' secured us two radio interviews, three print media placements and a forthcoming daily newspaper placement for our client."

6. Customize, customize, customize. "You have to pitch to the unique interests of the reporter or publication," Parente offers. "If I'm pitching to *Government Computer News*, and the reporter's beat includes the Justice Department, he's liable to read any email pitches that have 'DOJ' or 'Justice Department' in the subject line. There's definitely a quantity versus quality issue at play—the more pitches you send out, the harder it is to customize them. But even if you send your pitch to 200 reporters, be sure to come up with at least three different subject lines to go with the different verticals you are targeting." ★

Breaking Through in December: Tips for Scoring Ink During the Page-Cluttered Holidays

Ah, the holidays. With so much holiday hype, Nutcracker performances, tree-lighting ceremonies and dancing elf toys dominating media coverage, how do PR pros manage to sneak their clients' news into this crunch? Below PR pros and newspaper editors alike offer tips for landing coverage when every page is filled with Santa:

1. Find out who will be writing holiday features. "Researching media contacts who have covered

the holidays in the past is necessary for getting coverage during the busy season," says **Jill Yamamoto of Richmond PR**. "Research will help uncover the writers who would not usually cover lifestyle or entertainment. An example would be a metro writer who does an annual holiday story as a break from his normal beat."

2. Jump on the holiday bandwagon. "The key is—don't fight Santa," says **Glen Stone**, public affairs manager for the **Toronto Board of Trade**. "You'll never win. Instead, find a way to hop on his sled. You have to recognize that the holiday domination of news stories is inevitable, and try to use that to your advantage by developing and pitching holiday-oriented stories.

"It sometimes takes imagination to find the link

PR STRATEGY

Walker Explains How to Control the Camera to Get More Out of Your CEO's Time on Air



CEOs and other executives are often abundantly confident in the boardroom, at company meetings or with clients. But stick a camera in their faces and start asking tough questions, and watch as formerly proud, animated execs disappear. "People are great at talking about what they're going to talk about on camera," explains **TJ Walker**, president of New York-based **Media Training Worldwide**. "But once you actually get your client in front of the camera, it's often a different story."

"Talking to the media is a type of public speaking," he says. "You have to rehearse. You can't just talk it out beforehand. You have to get in front of the video camera as much as possible, test your messages out and see what works and what doesn't. With practice, you'll be able to look comfortable and relaxed on TV," he assures.

Specifically, Walker recommends keeping a video camera in the office at all times and rehearsing often. Additionally, review each rehearsal immediately after it takes place. Focus on the positives to build your client up, but also critique what you'd like to improve as specifically as possible. In addition, Walker offers these quick on-camera tips to make your exec shine:

1. Hold yourself up high, and lean forward 15 degrees. "Slouching is the worst position on camera," Walker says. "But sitting up perfectly straight is also unflattering. The best way to sit is to hold yourself up

high while leaning forward about 15 degrees. Whether you're thin, tall or overweight—everyone looks their best this way."

2. Use natural hand gestures. "Nervous people don't use their hands," Walker explains. "And you never want to appear nervous on TV. You want to continue moving with a natural body motion, using your hands naturally as you talk. Speak as if you were having a normal conversation with a friend." But again, this boils down to practice: "If you don't rehearse, you will stiffen up," he warns.

3. Dress simply. "You want the spotlight to be on your message, not on what you're wearing," Walker stresses. "The simpler you dress, the better. For men, you should wear a dark suit with a light shirt and a solid tie. But make sure the shirt is not white. Women should wear darker, muted colors—but not black. Your makeup should not be shiny or overdone, and don't wear dangly or distracting earrings or jewelry."

4. Look at the reporter, not the camera. "You never want to have your eyes shifting around," he warns. "In a newsroom, there are people walking around, cell phones are going off, the cameramen are arguing over who's going on break next—so keep your eyes on the reporter throughout."

5. Stick to just three simple message points. "We can't control reporters and their questions, but we can control what comes out of our mouths," Walker says. "So stick to your top three messages and lay them out one at a time. And keep your messages short—once you use more than eight words, you're on to a different message point. Keep each point positive and make sure you answer the basic five Ws."

between what you do, sell or represent and some facet of the holiday season. For example, we noticed last fall that both Christmas Day and Boxing Day were falling on a weekend. Someone had the thought, ‘How are businesses going to decide whether to close on Friday or Monday?’ So, we did a survey of our ten thousand members and used it as the basis for a media release, pointing out the possible confusion to shoppers and employees. The story was picked up by a national TV outlet, CTV Newsnet, as well as by local media.”

“The key is having some kind of hook to the holidays, bearing in mind that for some products and services it may be quite a stretch,” confirms **Lawrence Savill**, an attorney for **Chadbourn & Parke LLP**. Every year during the holidays, Savill produces “CDs of original, allegedly-humorous, law-related rock-and-roll holiday songs that are composed, performed, and produced by this practicing litigation attorney.”

Savill’s CDs, which include songs like “You Don’t Wanna Cross Santa” (“cross” as in cross-examine, of course), and “Billin’ on Christmas Eve,” have received coverage in *The New York Times*, CBS Newsradio, and a long list of other outlets. “What could be more newsworthy than a lawyer with a sense of humor around the holidays?” he asks.

Although you don’t have to be a satirical songwriting powerhouse to score coverage, cleverly or humorously tying your news to an aspect of the holidays will boost your chances for getting a second look from editors.

3. Pitch well in advance. “The holidays cut both ways,” says **Richard Weiss**, founder of **WeissWrite.com** and a former metro editor and writing coach for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. “The media is often desperate for stories—but too many are alike, sending readers into diabetic comas. You can get your story in by planning ahead—weeks ahead if possible. At the *Post-Dispatch*, we would ask reporters to prepare stories a couple of weeks ahead so we’re ready for those lean news weeks. The bar is set kind of low then, but as these stories roll in and the list is fattened up, you’ll be hard pressed to get your holiday piece even if you’re pitching the local version of Mother Theresa.”

“I would say that in some ways it’s easier to get an idea pitched and accepted,” confirms **Tom Hallman**, a features editor with the *Oregonian*. “All papers are looking to fill the pages with a smaller staff during this time. A lot of stories will be pre-written, so send materials a month or three weeks in advance so we have enough time to work on the story and get contacts.” ★

PRESS RELEASE WRITING

Go Beyond Tech ‘Geek-Speak’ to Craft Winning Press Releases That Editors Are Grateful to Receive

The use of excessive jargon in a pitch is one of the top complaints of media types. There are many reasons for resorting to jargon—for example, these technical words may explain the product or service you’re pitching better than any others, or you may be targeting a high-level audience that speaks this language—but reporters normally jump to one conclusion when they see too much jargon in a release: The PR pro doesn’t understand what he’s pitching. This perception can kill even the most newsworthy of pitches, so pros are highly advised to substitute simple, clear language whenever possible. You must basically assume that your target recipient—and her readers—cannot interpret the language, so you have to employ layman terminology.

Granted, this is no easy feat—and some pros concede that certain terms are sometimes inescapable when it comes to pleasing clients—but there are fundamental things you can do to corral your use of jargon and assess the right circumstances for its use. PR experts and journalists offer the following advice for crafting clean, jargon-free copy:

1. Have a grasp on who you’re writing the release for. “It’s necessary to acknowledge upfront the politics within companies, especially the larger companies,” says **Lonn Johnston**, founder of **PageOne PR**. “Think realistically about what you have to work with based on expectations. Sometimes companies are interested in publishing and datasheets. If that’s the route you’re going, you need to have that conversation ahead of time. But if you’re sending press releases to the media, it’s different. You need to understand what you’re trying to do with the exercise. Are you writing for a broad audience, or a niche or trade pub? Those things need to be clarified ahead of time.”

2. Construct separate pitches for different audiences. “Before you even open up your Word document, think about the core idea for each of the audiences you want to communicate with,” offers **Kristine Schaefer**, principal with **Loma Communications**. “Then you make three columns. First, you make a list of audiences—investors, companies, partners, distributors, employees—and second, map out the media outlets that would be appropriate for each audience. Third, write the messages that are core for those audiences. For example, some tech companies put

forth a too tech-oriented pitch, but they're targeting investors. Make sure your messages go to the target media."

3. Make the pitch to your mother—if she can't grasp the concepts, reporters likely won't try either. "Jargon is something you hide behind because you can't put it into your own words," explains *Fortune* tech and GA reporter **Oliver Ryan**. "If you fully understand something and get why it's important, explain it—especially for a general audience. You should be able to explain it to your mom. And you wouldn't use clichéd business terms like 'leading edge' or 'pioneer' with her. That implies that no one has really thought it through. It's a refried language and therefore uninteresting. For example, every company seems to be a leader in its field, so I don't pay any attention to that."

4. Boil your message down before writing your pitch. "The first thing is simplify, simplify, simplify," says Schaefer. "That's one of my mantras. Instead of thinking about what the product does, think of the value that's derived from this product. Many releases are stuck in future-benefit mode. The value derived is something that gets you out of that future-benefit mode."

Johnston offers this example: "We had a client recently and the CEO insisted on using the term

'autonomic.' We explained that it was an empty term, and if anyone did understand it, it was largely system vendors who had also discarded it. But we couldn't get him off of it," he relates. "So we set him up with an analyst, and had the analyst ask him what 'autonomic' meant. He had to learn it himself, and he stumbled while explaining it. He lost his authenticity."

5. Incorporate a news approach—steer clear of promotional hype. "With the early-stage companies we work with, we don't have the luxury to have enough time to sit down and be too thoughtful. We try to get out of the client the three main things they want to say," says Johnston. "Then we craft a general release for pickup that can stand alone. It's written like a news report. It can be astonishing how much pickup you can get if you think of the release as a stand-alone news report. We have those run all the time. Some journalists don't even come back to check on the info."

7. Make a list of alternative words and phrases. "If you're lucky enough, there will be someone—often the most tech-savvy person at your company—who can explain something clearly," Schaefer offers. "As soon as you hear something used more clearly, grab it and use it. Ask those people what the terms mean."

—Frank Zeccola

PRESS RELEASES

How to Avoid the Most Overused, Irsome Cliches and Jargonic Phrases



Here's a look at some of the all-time classic jargon terms—and some ideas of how to avoid them:

1. "Solutions." "Everything is a solution to something," says *Fortune* writer **Oliver Ryan**. "PR people mainly use this when they're striving to throw too much into a sentence to broaden the appeal. The problem is, it's just too broad."

"I worked on a campaign for a cooking tool that was offered as a 'solution.' But people don't eat solutions," says **Kristine Schaefer**, principal of **Loma Communications**. "The reason it's used is because it's a combination of things. If that's why you're using it, then just call it a combination of X and Y. Be more specific."

But clients typically love tying this word to their products. "I use 'solution' as a substitute for 'product,'" says **Lonn Johnston**, founder of **PageOne PR**. "I can't always avoid it with my clients."

In that case, make sure you explain what problem your product or service is a "solution" to. "A solution is too often offered without a problem," says Ryan. "It always goes back to [understanding the words you're using]."

2. "Scalable." "It means something is extensible in some fashion," offers Schaefer. "It's one of the five words every high-tech company uses, and therefore it means nothing."

"By using this word, you're saying what something can handle," says Ryan. "If what you really mean is your new server is designed to support X number of users, that's much more detailed than 'scalable.' It may not be perfect, but it's better."

3. "End-to-end." "This presumably means solving a problem from beginning to end, and integrating the sequence of a set of problems," says Ryan. "These are perfectly good words—they're just used too much. If there's another way to say it, then do so. For example, say, 'This thing takes you from the beginning of X problem or experience.'"