

MEDIA RELATIONS INSIDER

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

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1

JANUARY 2005

NEW TIPS & TACTICS

TV Placement Secrets: Get to Know Your Local Station's Public Affairs Director—How to Do It and Why It Can Help You Score "Free" Air Time **2**

Capture Column Inches at Home: Secrets of Tailoring Campaigns to Boost Local Pickup **3**

Media News, Recent Surveys and Emerging PR Tools to Watch **5**

Local Vs. National Media: Easy Tips for Differentiating Pitches **6**

Score Ego-Boosting Ink—and Points with Your Boss: Tips for Successfully Positioning Your CEO as a Quotable Expert **7**

Online Rumor or One-Time Rant: Monitoring Tips for Staying on Top of Bad News Online **11**

NEWS & ANALYSIS

PR Newswire: 70% of Journos Visit Corp. Sites

Last issue's cover story citing PR Newswire incorrectly stated that reporters prefer to get info via email, not corporate websites.

The actual stat is that over 70% go to corporate sites for story research. Journalists did, however, indicate that they weren't finding what they needed online. The findings were first announced when PR Newswire launched its MediaRoom service, which promises to give reporters the "best online experience possible when visiting corporate websites."

► Turn to "PR News You Can Use," page 5, for more.

JOURNALISTS SPEAK OUT

Don't Go There! Top Tier Editors Reveal and Discuss Trust-Busting PR Practices to Avoid

"Two-timing a publication is disastrous," says **Paul Maidment**, executive editor at *Forbes*. "If we feel an agency is playing two pubs off against each other and not being straight—that's the number one thing that will damage relationships. Without trust, your media relations efforts amount to nothing. It's a small world—and you will get called out if you don't play above board," he warns.

"If you have mutual trust, it's more difficult for the journalist to write negatively about your company," elaborates **John Byrne**, editor-in-chief at *Fast Company*. "That's a fact. Reporters are susceptible to charm and relationship building. Even if it's a

tough story, you'll get every break possible," he says. "Journalists need to feel everything is above board," concurs **Harry McCracken**, editor-in-chief at *PC World*. "That builds trust. But one mistake is all it takes to lose it," he warns. Here are Maidment's tips for ensuring that doesn't happen:

1. Exclusivity is touchy—handle competitors with kid gloves. "If a PR company is pitching the same story to more than one similar publication—like *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune* or even *The Wall Street Journal*—they're treading on thin ice," says Maidment, building on his earlier point. "All national business magazines want exclusives. We want to know we have a lock on

continued on page 2

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

How to Respond to Online Rumors: Ten New Tips, Tactics from PR's Top Internet Experts

No doubt about it—the online rumor mill can be a killer when it comes to managing your company's public image. That's because Internet chatrooms, blogs and forums are hard to stay on to of—it's not like scanning your morning paper's headlines, that's for sure. To make matters worse, these online breeding grounds of bad news are often the first places many of today's investigative journalists turn to for sensational fodder. So what do you do when you spot bad news online? The nation's leading experts in online communications share these tips:

1. Don't throw your weight

around—threats roil the blogosphere. "If a blogger is writing about your company, for example, you might be tempted to get lawyers or other heavies involved. That could be a big mistake," warns **Mike Masnick**, president of **TechDirt** and editor of the popular blog by the same name.

"Your goal in bringing attorneys on board is to get false information taken offline—but that's not what usually happens," he explains. "Generally, bloggers will post your [legal correspondence] and publicize the fact that they're being censored or threatened. This will draw more

continued on page 10

the interviews and key actors of any given story,” he explains. “It sounds like common sense, but it doesn’t always happen the way it should.”

In addition: “Know the publication you’re pitching,” Maidment continues. “A bedrock principle at *Forbes* is that we run completely original stories. Any PR person worth her salt should know that. My colleagues here throw up their arms when a PR person says, ‘You should write about X because *The Wall Street Journal* did.’ Comments like this suggest that you don’t know what we’re about—they make you look incompetent.” More specifically: “We understand that you need to get your news out—and we accept that the same story will be pitched to others. But that should never happen at the same time. Wait for confirmation or rejection before going down the road to another outlet in our space.”

2. Timing can be critical—juggle lead times carefully. “Don’t think you can get around this by pitching different angles to competitive publications,” says Maidment. “It doesn’t work that way—particularly with big corporate profiles. Chances are that different outlets will settle on the same [story outcome], no matter what the original pitch was. The only way it works is if you’re pushing two radically different angles—even then, it’s a risky proposition.”

Similarly: “Timing is a big issue,” Maidment adds. “Lead time for us is about four to six weeks. Reporters are pitching stories in our writers’ meetings about a month and a half out—so be conscious of this. That means you don’t give any other formal interviews to our competitors before we go to print. Of course, we don’t expect exclusivity forever—this doesn’t preclude your working on an exclusive with a daily, as long as it doesn’t break before ours.”

3. Get your ducks in a row—manage client expectations. “Exclusivity must be managed carefully. You have to make sure the client is on-board from the beginning and keep them [in the loop] at all times,” says Maidment. “Everything falls apart if [the client] is pushing the same type of story elsewhere while you’re out negotiating terms. I’ve seen this happen—it’s often because a CEO knows or has met an executive editor at a [competitive] publication and ends up reneging on an agreement made by [his] PR team.”

For example: “There was a case recently where one of our reporters was interested in doing a story on a tech company. He put in requests [with them] for interviews. They weren’t rejected, but he was strung along. It became clear why when *BusinessWeek* ran the same profile.”

Maidment offers this suggestion: “Get your ducks in a row with management—don’t promise what you can’t deliver. Educate [the client]. Companies without strong media relations departments seem to think they’re setting two hares running at the same time—and whichever one crosses the finish line first wins. To avoid that, explain that the numbers game may work when sending out releases—but it never works when pushing [exclusives]. When your boss usurps you, argue that you need to be straight to build credibility with us.”

4. Negotiate with those you know—NDAs, embargoes and for-attribution agreements can backfire. “All companies want us to sign NDAs,” says Maidment. “I understand that, and realize this is a common practice on the commercial side of the company—especially when people are sharing market sensitive information. But it doesn’t apply to journalism. I won’t sign them.”

More to the point: “These are different than negotiating embargoes or going off the record, both of which journalists usually honor. But when one person breaks an embargo, all bets are off. They’re worthless. As a PR person, you need to be very careful about who you’re sending these to and who will honor them. For example, blogs might not have the same restrictions for holding onto an embargo or for preserving anonymity. They don’t have the same long-term interests as [mainstream] journalists. So, it’s risky—this is one rule of the game that has been completely changed by bloggers.”

In addition: “The simple rule in journalism is that everything is on the record until agreed to otherwise,” says Maidment. “So you need to know the jargon and arrive at mutual understandings with reporters. Make sure you both know exactly what you’re agreeing to. This goes back to building solid relationships with the journalists [on your beat].” ★

► **Media Strategy**

TV Placement Secrets: Get to Know Your Local Station’s Public Affairs Director

“I’m shocked at how poorly PR folks pitch local TV stations,” says **Akila Monifa**, director of communications at CBS 5/UPN in San Francisco. “PR people tend to pitch print media better than they do us,” she adds. “TV seems to be a mystery to them.” Monifa shares these quick tips to enlighten her PR peers, and also reveals several easy ways to score coverage on your local TV network:

1. Target the right person—get to know the assignment desk. “PR people think they’re golden if they

get their information to a news director, an anchor or even a reporter,” she says. “Those people are not the primary gatekeepers at most news stations, which tend to be assignment-desk driven. In fact, a reporter is never going to see your copy. So the key is to make sure the assignment desk gets your newsworthy information in a readable format. Stories work their way upstairs from there.”

2. Puree your press releases—use email instead.

“Another myth is that a pile of press releases is brought into an editorial meeting and that the best ones are discussed to help decide which stories get covered,” says Monifa. “This comes from watching too much TV—it doesn’t happen that way,” she laughs. “The truth is the assignment desk staff are the only ones who see your copy—and they usually want it via email. Include only your contact information, who you’re pitching to, what newscast or segment you think might be a good fit and what the story is. Remember that TV isn’t really an in-depth medium. They don’t want to see a lot of background. They want the facts and visuals that help tell the story. That’s it.”

3. Look behind the curtain—demystify TV with a visit to the studio.

“When PR people deal with print media, they try to meet reporters over coffee or tea. But I don’t see that happening in TV. I think PR people are scared to step foot into the studio.” Her advice: “Most stations will let you sit in on a news broadcast or during the taping of a public affairs show. So call and ask to take a tour or to meet the people on the assignment desk. Just call the public affairs or corporate communications person at the outlet—we’ll introduce you. There’s no excuse for not doing this.”

4. Think “earned” media—not nightly newscast.

“Public affairs shows, original local programming, sponsorships and even PSAs are all easy options for getting your message out there,” says Monifa. “But they’re all overlooked by PR people who are focused on getting past this specific producer or onto that particular news segment.” Her advice:

- **Partner with the press.** “There are a lot of media sponsorships available with your local TV station,” Monifa assures. “For example, we recently sponsored the AIDS Lifecycle Ride. They were dissatisfied with their volume of news coverage in the past, so they asked us to be a media sponsor. The result was that we created and ran PSAs for them. But we also did a live broadcast with our medical reporter from the road during the ride. They wouldn’t have gotten any coverage if they had merely sent a release. But because they partnered with us, they earned live coverage for seven days.”

She offers this suggestion: “Research what your local station is interested in with regard to sponsorships and civic or community involvement. Visit the site and click on the sponsor links. From there, approach the director of public affairs or communications. People in these positions are going to help you if you’ve done your homework and can show that your PSA or partnership is a good fit. If your station doesn’t have a public affairs director, then talk to the general manager.”

- **Pinpoint public affairs shows.** “Most stations have at least one public affairs show,” says Monifa. “These are actually mandated by the FCC. In our case, we have half-hour public affairs shows that run in two segments on Sunday, at 8:00 a.m. and another at 6:30 p.m. The good thing about pitching these programs is that you get more exposure. For example, compare nine minutes on a panel with Jesse Jackson discussing community affairs to thirty seconds on a weekday newscast.” Her advice: “Offer community affairs angles for your local station’s public affairs shows. Again, your best bet is to call the public affairs director or director of communications—not the newsroom.”

- **Pitch original programming.** “Most local stations also run at least some original programming, which is typically easier to [get on],” assures Monifa. “For example, we have a program called ‘Evening Magazine,’ which runs five days a week from 7:00-7:30 p.m. We’re always looking for more information and segment ideas. We also have a show called ‘The Raw Deal,’ where a consumer reporter talks about consumer issues in the Bay Area.”

Her advice: “Dig deeper than the nightly newscasts. If you have a fundraiser, for example, you’ll get more play on ‘Evening Magazine.’ Similarly, our last three segments were profiles of people who survived the Japanese internments—so think outside the news box.” In addition: “Getting onto original programming can drive wider coverage,” Monifa assures. “For example, we had Jesse Jackson and Walter Cronkite on. That got piped into the local network and then the national news.” ★

► Media Placement

Score More Ink at Home: Secrets of Tailoring Campaigns to Boost Local Pickup

“One of the biggest mistakes a PR person can make is to approach local papers the same way as the national press,” says **Pat O’Brien**, PR coordinator at Dallas, **Pennsylvania’s College of Misericordia**. “There’s no such a thing as cookie-cutter PR,” he explains. “Not only

are no two outlets ever the same—but local papers are looking for very different elements than the big guys.”

He should know. “We have two dailies here [*The Dallas Post* and *Suburban News*], one in Scranton [*Scranton Times*] and another in Hazelton [*The Hazelton Standard Speaker*]. They’re all incredibly competitive,” O’Brien says. “But we still manage to get covered in them—as well as in the national press.” He and other experts in localized media relations share these tips for scoring more ink at home by tailoring your campaigns to regional preferences:

1. Pitch “man-on-the-street” reaction to your news.

“National media usually look at news through a telescope, while local media look through a microscope. Finding the local angle is the most important step in pitching local media,” says **Gene Grabowski**, VP of **Levick Strategic Communications**. “Ways to do that include using local names and area businesses or examining how the issue affects your community,” suggests the former *Beaver Falls Tribune* (Pennsylvania) reporter who later covered the White House for the Associated Press.

He offers this example: “When President Jimmy Carter was quoted by *Playboy* in 1976, saying ‘I have lusted in my heart,’ I turned a national story into a local piece by focusing on the people of Beaver Falls. I interviewed local residents to gauge their opinion of the former president after the infamous quote was published.”

2. Follow the “locals only” rule.

“I am educating consumers on behalf of Seventh Generation, the nation’s leading brand of natural household products, to the dangers of bad indoor air pollution generated by the chemicals in their cleaners,” shares **Christen Graham**, with **Warner Communications**. “To be successful, I create a custom, local ‘package’ for the local news. I am the only ‘out of town’ on the scene and perform a demonstration in the home of an area resident. A local physician and local indoor air quality expert support me. That’s three local market participants per city. It’s a lot of work—but it makes a difference. For example, in Denver our story was carried on four of the five stations.”

In addition: “Had this been national, there would be less attention to the geography of our participants. Further, we would have needed a nationally regarded expert, as opposed to many of the everyday folk we used.”

3. Compile local case studies.

Michael Volpatt, partner with **Larkin/Volpatt Communications**, believes that local case studies are also a smart way to go: “We created geographically-based case studies [for online gaming company *Arkadium*],” he says. “We first researched the top 100 newspapers by circulation using *Bacon’s*—then mapped that against registered game

players on the [client’s] system. We segmented these users by geography and sent an email to each, asking if they would consider talking to the local media about their game-playing habits. For those who replied, we created a case study and pitched that to the local media in their geographic regions.”

The result? “To date, we have had placements in *The Detroit News*, *The Sacramento Bee*, the *Baltimore Sun* and *The Columbus Dispatch*. We continue to pitch local media and focus on using the case studies as a tool [to accomplish this].”

4. Push local quotes up, national quotes down.

“Even if it’s a national story, you have to find local connections,” agrees **Shel Horowitz**, author of six books on marketing and communications. “For example, you could target releases to places you’ve lived or attended school, or are speaking—or to places where the event takes/took place.”

Similarly: “Papers in small markets will be a lot more willing to give you ink on a story if you include at least one local quote. This should usually include someone who uses your product or service.” However, he advises against substituting local quotes for national ones. “The ideal [localized release] will quote both a local and a national expert, quoting the local person first. Quoting only the national source implies that the story has no local connection—and local reporters won’t be interested. Quoting only the local sources suggests that yours isn’t an important story—so local reporters aren’t likely to be bothered.”

5. Provide artwork featuring local landmarks.

“Some years ago when one of my books came out, I sent a press release about the publication party,” says Horowitz. “That went to probably about seven or eight papers. It resulted in an interview and full-page advance story in a local weekly, a reporter attending the event and writing a 30-inch story with a picture for the local daily, and announcements in at least two other dailies, one of which ran my release nearly verbatim.”

His point: “It is always a good idea to provide great photos, and many times they will go directly to print. This not only increases the number of inches you get, but also makes it more likely that the story will run [because local outlets have smaller art budgets]. At minimum, include things like head shots, product shots or even book covers—and make them available as downloads. Similarly, make yourself available for local photo shoots.”

6. Tap civic leaders to sound off on your local impact.

“With local media, it’s all about pitching the impact of the news on your region,” says **Shawn Whalen**,

continued on page 6

► **Is “Citizen Journalism” a Threat to PR?**

For a glimpse into one possible scenario of the media’s future, visit Wikinews, a site that allows anyone to edit and post corrections to “breaking” news. The site runs on an application that allows users to collectively author web documents. Though experimental, the beta version hints at what experts call the growing “democratization of media.” In addition, Wikinews will present original material rather than compile existing news, .

What does this mean to PR? If tracking and pitching blogs is a challenge to practitioners locked into traditional media, future models of news distribution may prove yet more challenging.

Similar efforts include Indymedia.org and South Korea’s OhmyNews. Bookmark them now to stay abreast of what may become an increasingly non-pitchable online media environment.

► **Back Door to the Blogosphere?**

Yahoo News was the top news source cited by bloggers and Boing Boing was the top-cited blog, according to a year-end review of blog data by Intelliseek’s BlogPulse.com. Yahoo! News got 205,093 citations and Boing Boing got 23,836. Other top news sources read by bloggers included: The New York Times, BBC, CNN and The Washington Post sites.

► **Media Database Out of Date? Here’s Why**

More than one million journalists changed jobs, beats or contact information during 2004—confirming PR hunches that journalism is an industry rife with

turnover and that tracking media moves is becoming increasingly difficult. This according to Bacon’s Information, which claims to make up to 30,000 weekly changes to its media contacts database. Weekly media move updates via email or posted on websites by PR service providers like Bacon’s, Bulldog Reporter and others offer a way for PR practitioners to keep up with such turnover.

► **Media Training A-Z: New Book Available**

Media Training A-Z, the newest addition to Media Training Worldwide’s product line, is now available through bookstores and online. Retailing for \$24.95, the 190-page book was written by TJ Walker as guide to controlling your image, message and sound bites. Specifically, the book offers:

- approaches to developing and delivering memorable messages
- strategies to help reduce nervousness
- tips and guidelines for looking your best on camera
- successful approaches to answering tough questions
- tips on dealing interview situations
- examples from key media figures
- a step-by-step system to create sound bites

► **Ethics and Media: Only 5% of Reporters Seen as Honest**

The annual Gallup Poll ranking on honesty and ethics in various professions found that only 5% of respondents gave newspaper reporters “very high” marks for honesty; 16% received “high” marks, 50% “average” and 28% “low

or very low.”

In order, professions were ranked from most ethical to least as follows: grade school teachers, pharmacists, military officers, doctors, police officers, clergy, judges, day-care providers, bankers, auto mechanics, local officeholders, nursing home operators, state officeholders, TV reporters and then newspaper reporters. Business execs ranked lower even than reporters.

► **Cut These Buzzwords from Copy: Survey Reveals Most Annoying Terms and Phrases**

Companies claiming to create “synergies” in an effort to develop a “value-added” “paradigm” that leads to new “solutions” may want to be strategic in another way: not going overboard with cliché phrases and industry jargon. According to a national poll conducted by Accountemps of 1,000 of the nation’s largest companies, terms such as these are among the most overused in the workplace—not to mention press releases, websites and other corporate communiqués:

- metrics
- redeployed
- value-added
- core competency
- alignment

Examples of currently popular buzzwords include:

- smell test (determining potential success of a product; formerly: “run it up the flag pole”)
- critical path (determining appropriate steps to take)
- bandwidth (amount of time and resources needed)
- download (assess facts of a situation)

How to Score More Local Ink from page 4

a senior VP with **Schwartz Communications**. Reporters look for locally headquartered companies (not regional offices), local spokespeople and local customer references. When local reporters cover a national event, they often prefer the local twist,” he continues. “A good way to give them this is to offer neighborhood and community spokespeople, and to stress contributions to the economy.”

Whalen offers this example: “[Our client] LocatePLUS provides investigative databases used by law enforcement and government for homeland security. For a pitch to the *Boston Globe*, we crafted a heavily local story focusing on how this Massachusetts company was helping local and state police fight crime. To do that, we turned to local police departments to be spokespeople, stressed the local jobs being provided in a down-turned economy, and underscored how this company in our

neighborhood was also being tapped by national authorities to help in homeland security.”

7. Parlay national clips into regional success stories. “If you’re struggling to get in your local newspaper, the best way may be to go national,” counters **Dan Sondhelm**, a partner at **SunStar**. “Mentions in [national] business/financial pubs give you credibility. Once you’re recognized for your business expertise on a national scale, then go back to your local paper and tell them that you are a local firm with national recognition,” he suggests. “The main reason this works is because many secondary newspapers don’t have their own business and finance staff. They get their articles from wire services. However, once you go national, the local press takes notice.”

He offers this example: “Abilene, Texas-based Parkway Advisors is a smaller money manager with clients all over the country. They tried very hard over the years to get

LOCAL VS. NATIONAL MEDIA: TIPS FOR DIFFERENTIATING PITCHES

“People think pitching a local paper is easier than pitching a national outlet—but it’s just not true. Local media can be just as demanding as national targets,” says **Sandra Sokoloff**, executive VP and senior media strategist at **Belsito & Co.**

“For example, securing coverage with regional dailies and broadcast outlets requires in-depth knowledge of the media target and the journalist you are pitching. In addition, don’t bother picking up the phone unless you have news that is relevant to the reporter’s beat and within the outlet’s geographic parameters,” she suggests. Sokoloff’s quick tips for differentiating national and local pitches:

- **Show how your news impacts various audiences.**

“The need for news is critical for both local and national outlets. Where the difference comes into play is how the news is packaged. On the local level, reporters need in-depth details on how something—a trend, a medical breakthrough or a new product, for example—will impact the region their outlet covers. This means the local reporter will want to know who from the area is involved. She will also want local examples that illustrate how this story is playing out, and key local data [that substantiates your claim].”

Conversely: “On the national level, reporters need to see how something is impacting or manifesting itself around the country. The national reporter will want to

see a broader scope of what’s going on around the country, what segments are impacted—Caucasian, African American or Hispanic, for example—and any marketplace similarities or disparities.”

- **Offer national and local experts alike.** “Both local and national reporters need expert sources. The difference is that local media often requires sources from their specific geographic region, whereas national media tend to look for a wide variety of sources from across the country.”

- **Provide anecdotes that convey a universal human angle.** “Personal, compelling anecdotes play well with both local and national media,” says Sokoloff. “Local reporters respond well to individual stories from their own back yard. National media will often have much more flexibility as to the origins of personal anecdotes.”

For example: “To generate local media coverage for the Surviving Sepsis Campaign, we pitched and placed the personal story of a sepsis survivor from St. Louis in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to discuss why sepsis awareness was so important. Additionally, we booked an interview to discuss sepsis issues with WJAR-TV (NBC affiliate in Providence, Rhode Island) for an author who teaches at Brown University Medical School in Providence and who is affiliated with Rhode Island Hospital.”

their local paper, the *Abilene Reporter News*, to notice them,” shares Sondhelm. “When they earned national coverage, the paper finally featured them in an article entitled, ‘Local Firm Has Mutual-Fund Success.’”

The story’s lede reveals with surprising transparency how much local media relies on national outlets to vet, even justify, coverage: “Those in the know have sought [the company’s] expertise... The Abilene-based mutual funds have been mentioned by *Barrons*, *BusinessWeek*, CNNfn, Fox News, and *The Wall Street Journal*.”

8. Link to local controversy. “One way to [cut through the clutter locally] is to explain exactly how your release ties to current events in the community to create a sense of urgency. The trick is to cross the fine line between trivial and urgent,” says **Mike Abram**, director of PR for **Charleston/Orwig**.

He offers this example: “For one local client in the western suburbs of Milwaukee, we tied the expansion of an equine hospital to a local healthcare controversy. Specifically, when Wisconsin Equine Clinic and Hospital expanded its facilities and added new services, they asked for a press release and plenty of coverage in local and trade pubs. At best, they could expect a two-line blurb,” recalls Abram.

“So the account team went one simple—but crucial—step further,” he says. “They added a cover letter to the press release, along with a tongue-in-cheek reference to a hot issue in the client’s own community.”

“Amid the controversy over plans to build a hospital in Oconomowoc,” the letter began, “one healthcare entrepreneur is quietly adding beds to his hospital without a protest. Of course, this hospital is for horses.”

The result? *The Waukesha Freeman*, which serves the client’s primary market, liked the angle and sent a reporter and photographer. The positive full-page story ran with the headline, “No Controversy for This Hospital.”

9. Think beyond the subject line. “You can be a little [more comprehensive] in local pitches,” believes **Kelly Cahill Hennigan**, account manager for **BTC Public Relations**. “Local media don’t have nearly as many pitches flooding their inboxes as the national media do. You practically have to hook the national media in the subject line. You can be a little more specific and detailed in trying to get the information across when working with regional outlets.”

10. Be a good neighbor. “I pitch the local press (in Silicon Valley) for National Youth Sports,” shares **Rob Gelpman**, principal of **Gelpman Associates**. “My angle is community based. [In situations like these], you

must know the needs and dynamic of the community. That means you need to mention your affiliation with the local community and [emphasize] long-term ties. Don’t pitch the big corporation coming to grace your community. Instead, pitch the local presence backed by a larger organization. That includes providing contacts that don’t require dialing an area code first—and using the bigger, umbrella organization [only to] establish credibility.”

Equally important: “Local reporters are more apt to respond if there’s personal involvement by the PR person. For example, I actually hold the title of assistant director of marketing [at National Youth Sports], even though I am not an official employee. And I tell the reporters that my own kids play in the league. [This type of community involvement] makes the organization appear more personal and accessible,” believes Gelpman. “After all, [the PR person and local media] often live in the same community. Very likely, we are even neighbors and our kids go to the same schools.” ★

► **Media Tactics**

Score Points—and Ink—with Your Boss: How to Turn Your CEO into a Quotable Expert

“Members of the media are easier to reach than they used to be,” says **Expertizing.com** CEO **Fern Reiss**, who has been quoted in *Fortune Small Business*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *International Herald Tribune* and over 100 other pubs in the last six months. “Because they’re pressed for time, reporters and radio or TV producers can’t pound the pavement looking for experts,” she explains.

Even so—no matter how much you know—they’ll turn to you only “if you can offer one of more media-worthy credentials,” according to Reiss, who teaches professionals with credentials how to take their knowledge to a national media platform. Here, she spells out four such calling cards and how to leverage each to give your CEO or spokesperson a better shot at big-time ink:

1. Authors command credibility—demystify the book bugaboo. “Authors get many more column inches than non-authors,” says Reiss. “For example, I got a call from a national women’s magazine that wanted to quote me about an infertility diet pill. They called me because I have a book out called ‘The Infertility Diet.’ They wanted me to speak on the issue for one reason only—because a book lends you instant credibility.”

Convincing your CEO to put out a book is your biggest challenge, warns Reiss. “It sounds intimidating,” she explains. “But there are ways to make your exec more open to the idea.” For example:

- **Address time and content concerns.** “The biggest hurdle for busy CEOs is that they don’t have the time. They also worry about lack of content,” Reiss relates. “The way to address that is to explain that they don’t have to write the book alone.”

In addition: “Your CEO probably already has a lot of material available. For example, if she gives a lot of talks—then tape those and have someone transcribe them,” she advises. “This is a great start.”

- **Find a helping hand—turn to freelance resources.** “Another approach is to hire a ghost writer or someone to write the book for your executive,” Reiss suggests. Her advice: “Turn to freelance organizations and other resources to find appropriate authors. For example, try the American Society of Journalists and Authors, or the National Writers Union. Vet prospects by zeroing in on authors with existing books or experience in your area.”

- **Start small—speak to budget concerns.** “You don’t have to find a big publisher,” encourages Reiss. “Sure, big publishers have certain distribution-and-supply cachets—but self publishing has become a very affordable option these days. For example, a 250-page book might now cost about \$2.00 per copy these days.”

In addition: “It doesn’t really matter if you sell the book,” says Reiss. “The goal is to use the book to promote your exec—to use it as a calling card to sell your expertise to the media. That can be accomplished by simply posting the book on your website.”

2. Websites can be an expert’s calling card—revamp yours. “Journalists also turn to websites looking for experts,” Reiss says. “This means that your site can be a showcase for your [executive’s] expertise. For example, author Philip Greenspun stands out from other money and finance authors with the ‘Bill Gates Personal Wealth Clock’ at his site. Journalists love it.”

What does that mean to you? “Your site should give away something free, such as tips in your particular [niche]. If you’re in the business of efficiency, for example, then provide seven tips on organizing an executive’s office. If you’re in venture capitalism, offer five ways to come up with VC money.”

But Reiss says many companies are loathe to give away “secrets or tips” for free on their websites. “That reluctance is short-sighted,” she warns.

Here’s why: “Contrary to common concerns, one in-depth article featuring practical advice in your field will

attract media and customers—not drive them away. They’ll call because they want more.”

Reiss offers these additional web-related tips:

- **Harvest customer names.** “A lot of people have websites, but few actually make an effort to gather email addresses,” she says. “My take is that they’re wasting time and money. Throw up some sort of [opt-in] registration page to collect emails from those who want your expert’s how-to article or tip sheet,” she advises. “This way, you can then use those emails to sent out releases further promoting your executive’s brand as an expert.”

For example: “If your expert lands a speaking engagement—that’s something you’ll want to promote via email [and on the site],” according to Reiss. “This keeps your exec top-of-mind when [reporters look for expert sources].”

- **Beef up your boss’s bio.** “It’s important that your CEO’s personality has a real presence on your site if you want her to be seen as an expert,” Reiss believes. “

Her tip: “Start the process by pulling your exec’s bio from the back pages—move it up front,” she suggests. “Include a photo and provide things like an ‘areas of expertise’ section, a list of associations your exec is involved in and a schedule of events or organizations your executive will be [speaking at or attending].”

- **Think clips—post them immediately.** “Similarly, it’s a good idea to include a section for the media where, in addition to press releases, you offer clips of your CEO’s past and ongoing coverage,” says Reiss.

Here’s why: “The simple fact is that the media likes experts who’ve appeared elsewhere,” she says. “They want people who have been [vetted]. Clips ensure continued coverage—so it’s worth your effort to [budget for] a clipping service.”

3. Associations amplify credibility—think about starting your own. “If your [boss] is a child psychiatrist, that’s good,” says Reiss. “But if he’s also the founder of the National No-Bullying Association, that rates exponentially more media coverage.” Her advice:

- **Keep it simple.** “Zero in on your exec’s area of expertise and what he can offer,” Reiss suggests. “Ask yourself what types of associations can help showcase that expertise. If you can’t find an existing group that fits the bill—then start your own. People think this sounds grandiose—but it doesn’t have to be elaborate.”

For example: “You don’t need a board of directors, fees, members, incorporation, a large membership or staff,” she assures. “All you need is a website announcing the association and putting forward a coherent mission that supports your CEO’s area of expertise.”

Your goal, she adds, “should be simply to get reporters to quote your exec with a line that reads, ‘John X, CEO of Y Company and head of Z Association.’ That alone will attract further coverage,” Reiss assures.

- **Don’t reinvent the wheel.** “If you have a catchy name and your association idea hasn’t already been taken, chances are the media will take notice. For example, [B.L. Ocham] started an organization called ‘Rent-a-Kvetch.’ It got some media attention because it was a great name and idea—she served as a clearinghouse for consumer complaints.”

Her point: “There are a lot of associations out there. Be sure yours doesn’t overlap with those that already exist. Be creative and original.” [Note: Rent-a-Kvetch is now defunct and apparently had several competitors, including Complain.com, Caveat Emptor and Poison Pen.]

- 4. **Holidays can hook daybook editors—get creative.** “Surprisingly, an [invented] holiday is a great way to get the media to focus on your expert,” assures Reiss. “Things like this get picked up in daybooks and are often mentioned on things like morning shows.” Her advice:

- **Make it relevant.** “Zero in on the area of expertise you’re trying to brand your expert in,” advises Reiss. “With holidays, you have to keep in mind that some routes will be more appropriate, depending on your company’s strategic goals and culture. If your CEO is stuffy—don’t go with a funny idea. Conversely, go for it if your business or boss is cutting-edge.”

She offers this example: “A technical services company I consulted with is unrolling ‘National Geek Day’ next year—it’s a sure-fire media pleaser and it fits [the company]” Reiss believes.

- **Register online.** “A great resource for this is Chases.com,” shares Reiss. “Go there to see what other holidays have been [designated]. They’ve got everything listed, from Labor Day to Take Your Fish to Lunch Day.”

In addition: “This is also where you will go to register your holiday when you’ve decided on an appropriate one. The good news is that it’s really easy to do—there’s no board or group that accepts or rejects your idea,” she says.

- **Promote and pitch the date.** “It’s not enough to just register a holiday,” concludes Reiss. “On slow news days, the media will go through [the directory] to see if there’s anything to cover. If you couple the date with a great release and campaign, it’s sure to get ink,” she assures.

“But the date is just the news hook—it provides reporters with a timely angle. The rest is up to you,” Reiss exhorts. “That includes promoting your expert as someone who can speak knowledgeably and in soundbites

AUDIO CONFERENCE ALERT

“How to Prepare Your Healthcare Team for a PR Crisis Before It Strikes” — Jan. 6

To make sure your healthcare organization’s PR crisis plan is up-to-snuff and up-to-date—Bulldog Reporter invites you to join this exclusive PR University audio conference on Thursday, January 6, 2005 with four healthcare PR pros who have lived through and managed major real-world healthcare communications crises. They’ll offer proven strategies and techniques to help you manage and prepare for the next crisis to hit your institution.

Hear and speak with:

- **Joann Rogers**, Director of Media Relations, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions
- **Richard Puff**, Director of Public Relations, University of Cincinnati Medical Center
- **Kent Jenkins**, VP Communications, Amerigroup
- **Ben Singer**, Senior Vice President, FischerHealth
- **Jon Greer**, President, MediaBridge and Audio Conference Moderator

For one low price—just \$279—you and your entire staff can participate in this exclusive PR University training session. Participants will learn:

- A hierarchy of potential crises you need to be prepared for, depending on your type of organization.
- How to pull together a crisis planning team—and which tasks members should be charged with.
- How to identify likely first-responders for various crises and how to prepare them.
- How to “triage” incoming PR issues.
- What to do—and not to do—in the first 48 hours of a crisis.
- How to train your staff—and senior executives—for crisis, training them on how your communications plan works and how to activate it.
- How to continuously refresh your plan.

For more information, phone toll-free 1-800-959-1059 or go to www.bulldogreporter.com.

visitors and attention to them—and to the information you’re interested in burying.”

2. Consult with counsel—approach cease-and-desists cautiously. Nancy Sells, PR Newswire’s VP for eWatch services, puts it more directly. “Getting your legal team to issue a cease-and-desist is an uphill battle,” she cautions.

Here’s why: “Large portals and investor message boards, for example, don’t believe they have the right (or desire) to edit this stuff—it’s still the Wild West,” according to Sells. “Similarly, Yahoo and AOL won’t take information down unless there is legal action proving a statement made online was blasphemous and wittingly slanderous. If you can do that and show damages, then you might be able to get a posting removed—but it’s very involved. Also, taking an issue like this to the Internet Crimes Group puts the issue into the legal sphere—at that point, it’s out of your hands,” she warns.

Porter Novelli’s Jon Goldberg elaborates: “If you’re a publicly traded company, consult immediately with your securities counsel. But ultimately, suing an online source will get you nowhere. Your lawyers will file a legal complaint and another rumor will emerge before it’s settled. Generally speaking, a response by the court is not a good first line strategy.”

3. Starve the story—doing nothing works with isolated rumors. “When it comes to blogs, your bad story or ‘misinformation’ is already moving off the top of the page in a day or two,” continues Masnick. “Sure, it lives on in Google—but that’s not such a big deal anymore. People will have to search for the story using specific key words to find it.” His point: “My advice is to consider letting it go. Kill the story by refusing to add fuel to the fire.”

4. Beware the “Tyranny of Nexis.” Goldberg considers Masnick’s approach naive: “That’s fine if it’s isolated to a single blog or chatroom. But if a rumor makes its way into print—you’ve got another problem on your hands. Everything journalists write is captured on the Nexis database for eternity—you can’t just hide and pray it’ll die out. You have to respond in a way that remains visible the next time the rumor shows up.” His tips for doing that:

- **Post a “correction.”** “Start with your website—but realize that responding on your site alone isn’t enough,” advises Goldberg. “You might also consider issuing an email clarification to those involved. If so, maintain an even tone. Don’t antagonize the [source], avoid opinions, state just the facts—and expect your copy to show up on the blog [or source site]. Even if it’s not edited, [bloggers] won’t paint you in a favorable light.”

Sells issues this caveat: “If you must react online, post a response on your site without legitimizing the source. Post a release positioning your company positively without outwardly acknowledging the source [of the rumor].”

- **Put boots on the ground.** “Written communications isn’t enough,” Goldberg believes. “Engage in one-on-one dialog with your customers, employees and key constituencies like investors and civic organizations—call them, email them, use whatever channels you have available to counter or correct the rumor. Also, rely on your field force and sales reps—arm these people and call centers with the right information. Similarly, put a system of protocols in place at your company telling staff what to do when somebody calls and says, ‘I heard about X rumor.’ Make sure these concerns are passed through the appropriate channels.”

- **Find allies in the press.** “Call reporters and present your side—one piece countering the [printed] rumor can be used to offset [a story in Nexis],” says Goldberg.

5. Go beyond bytes—bring a human touch to the issue. “Good relationships go a long way toward righting perceived wrongs—even in the online world,” says Masnick, elaborating on Goldberg’s call for one-on-one interaction. “For example, we had written something negative about Volvo a few months ago. They contacted us and said there was more to the story, and suggested that we give them a call if we wanted the details. This was a great way to break through the impersonal wall [and lack of accountability] the online medium often generates. Also, the message was non-threatening—they didn’t come right out and ask for a correction or retraction.” The result? “I ended up presenting their perspective online—they got their side of the story out.”

- **Don’t take it personally—think strategically.** “Some of the stuff you see online could drive any CEO nuts—they’re likely to take it personally,” says Sells. “But reacting in the moment isn’t a good idea. In fact, CEOs should never respond online—especially if the company is publicly traded. Better is to look at the context the information is in, consider the source and his influence or reach and then to track where else the item is being mentioned. If it’s one mention on an obscure blog—then it will likely be buried. Similarly, if a posting is incorrect, chances are that other posters will correct it.”

- **Don’t expect satisfaction—calibrate responses accordingly.** “The key is not to get engaged personally—you don’t want to step into a chatroom to counter a rumor,” Goldberg concurs. “You will get booed down in a blog. And there’s no way to turn the tide anonymously. So look for third party validators—find people to point users to other sources of information dispelling [the rumor].”

More to the point: “Recognize that you won’t get satisfaction from the source. All you can do is make sure people see your side. Take a breath, research what’s said and who’s saying it—and calibrate your appropriate level of response. Don’t over-react. You can’t put the bullets back in the gun if you go out with both barrels blazing.”

8. Shape strategy in response to message flow—not content. “It’s important not to respond to online content just because it’s about you—instead, focus strategically on how the content spreads,” elaborates **Dan Solomon**, CEO of **Mindshare Interactive Campaigns**. “React to the pattern—not the content. For example, if it’s reaching a constituency you’re concerned about, consider putting a firebreak in place—post something [at those sites] with the correct information. A good tool for tracking [misinformation proliferation] about your company is www.snoops.com, an urban legends reference page.”

9. Do as others have—research similar stories. “Besides working closely with legal, the number one thing you can do is to follow the lead of others in your space,” says **Idil Cakim**, director of knowledge development at **Burson-Marsteller**. “For example, we’ve noticed that

companies often bury responses in a release somewhere in their online newsroom—that’s not effective. Set aside time now to visit the following sites of brands who have dealt successfully with online rumors,” advises Cakim:

- Response to rumors about how peanut butter does not have trans fat (www.peanutbutter.com/faq.asp)
- Response to Swiffer Wet Jet rumors about how the product might be harmful to pets (www.homemadesimple.com/swiffer/usenglish/products/pets_rumors_answers.shtml)
- Response to Febreze rumors about how the product might be harmful to pets (www.homemadesimple.com/febreze/pets.shtml)

10. Budget for help—turn to the experts. “If you’re dealing with a particularly sensitive posting or malicious story, consider bringing in a third party to handle the situation,” Sells concludes. For example, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association recently turned to V-fluence [www.v-fluence.com] for help in responding to online rumors related to the mad cow scare. ★

ONLINE RUMOR OR ONE-TIME RANT? QUICK MONITORING TIPS

“When monitoring bad news online, it’s important to know the difference between influential posters and one-time rants,” says **Julie Woods**, EVP of product strategy and marketing for online monitoring and measurement provider **Cymfony**. “When bad news hits, you have limited time to respond and get the word out about your position on an issue. So it’s critical to determine the origin of a story, see how it proliferated and identify the most influential sites and posters to respond to.”

Her advice for doing just that:

- **Turn to blog aggregators.** “Looking at sites like www.blogstreet.com [which lists the top 100 blogs, the most influential blogs, etc.] will help you identify all 10,000+ blogs out there,” Woods says.

In addition: “Communications professionals should be spending their time strategically looking at the most influential blogs in their market or product line. Since the influential blogs can often change, a monitoring company can tell you what you should be looking at and what [other news] is breaking for your own company and your competitors,” says Woods.

- **Track pick-up in traditional media.** “Understand

the correlation between online and offline coverage (i.e., a blog and a newspaper article),” she continues.

For example: “Does one influence the other? Are the same messages coming up in multiple discussion boards and news posting sites? Are there ways to look for benchmarks and metrics that will provide early warnings of issues that are causing concern?” she offers.

The point: “It is important to not only correlate Internet content to general media—from trade journals to broadcast transcripts—but also to look for historical trends,” suggests Woods.

- **Set up alerts.** “After a monitoring and analysis system is in place, make sure to set up alerts so that you are notified of any brand mentions in real-time,” Woods continues. “A monitoring system with alerts should ensure that you are adequately monitoring the Internet without having to manually read through blogs and message boards. Continue to track your progress and compare it to your initial Internet coverage. This comparison, repackaged as a glossy report, should provide valuable feedback to senior management—not to mention, make you look ultra tech savvy and on top of all of your online and offline media coverage.”

AUDIO CONFERENCE ALERT

"Veteran Radio Journalists Reveal How to Leverage the National Airwaves" — Jan. 13

Radio news reaches hundreds of millions of loyal listeners every day—but most PR pros miss this golden broadcast opportunity! Find out how and why you should be working with national radio networks to generate huge coverage and awareness of your company or clients—join Bulldog Reporter's PR University on Thursday, January 13, 2005 for an all-star panel of leading radio journalists.

Hear and speak with:

- **Rusty Lutz**, Editor, ABC Radio Network
- **Charlie Kaye**, Executive Producer, CBS Radio Network
- **Mitch Davis**, Managing Editor, Fox Radio Network
- **Lou Giserman**, Senior Editor, Bloomberg Radio Network
- **Patrice Sikora**, Managing Editor, Wall Street Journal Radio
- **Jon Greer**, President, MediaBridge and Audio Conference Moderator

For one low price—just \$279—you and your entire team can take part in this insightful PR University training session. Participants will learn:

- Which hooks, story angles—and sounds—should you be pitching to these radio journalists?
- What mistakes do even veteran PR professionals make when pitching to radio?
- How do each of these major media outlets differ approach—and audience—and how can you customize your pitch to each?
- How can businesses, both large and small, craft winning pitches for radio coverage.
- How best to pitch your CEO to these media?

For more information, phone toll-free 1-800-959-1059 or go to www.bulldogreporter.com.

COMING UP IN FUTURE ISSUES:

- APR Versus ABC—Which Is Best for You?
- Time to Blog? Advanced Strategies for Influencing Online Media's Hidden "Influencers"
- Does Your CEO Cheat at Golf? Counterintuitive Pitches Sure to Grab the Media's Attention
- Case Studies—How Others Prove PR's Value
- How to Craft the Perfect Pitch Letter

MEDIA RELATIONS INSIDER

BOARD OF EDITORIAL ADVISORS

Steve Bennett
Executive Trainer
Media Mentor
Cambridge, MA

Ray Durazo
President
Durazo Communications
Los Angeles, CA

Jon Greer
Founder
MediaBridge
Emeryville, CA

Peter Himler
Executive VP
Edelman
New York, NY

Jim Lukaszewski
Chairman
The Lukaszewski Group
White Plains, NY

Tom Orewyler
Clifford Chance
San Francisco, CA

Katherine Paine
President
KDPaine & Partners
Portsmouth, NH

Tom Gable
CEO, Partner
GCS Public Relations
San Diego, CA.

Karen Randall
Vice President, Advantica
Spartanburg, SC

Don Spetner
Senior Vice President
Korn/Ferry International
Los Angeles, CA

STAFF

Editor
Brian Pittman

Client Satisfaction
Torry Burdick

Controller
Kimmy Cheung

Publisher
James Sinkinson

Published monthly by Infocom Group, 5900 Hollis St., Ste. L, Emeryville, CA 94608-2008; (510) 596-9300, fax (510) 596-9331. www.bulldogreporter.com.

Copyright © 2005 by Infocom Group. Subscription price: 1 year, \$449. Add \$20 postage per year to Canada and Mexico; for other foreign orders add \$40 per year. Back issues: \$25 each. To subscribe, call 1-800-959-1059.

Comments and story suggestions are welcome. Call us or email the editor at bpittman@infocomgroup.com.