



CISION®

7 STEPS FOR PR PROFESSIONALS

TO BUILD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS
WITH JOURNALISTS



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Journalists are consistently having to do more work with fewer resources. Because of this, they are looking to work with reliable PR professionals that provide them with great stories and bring significant value to the relationship by doing the work of getting to know them. As one of the panelists in our [2020 State of the Media LIVE event](#) said, journalists are people, not receptacles for pitches.

So how do you make your message stand out and create a stronger connection with reporters on your target media list?

Understanding journalists' interests and needs will not only help you target the right people, but they also will appreciate the extra work you put in, increasing trust in your brand and the likelihood that they'll work with you again in the future.

But it doesn't end with establishing the relationship; the connection must be strengthened and maintained over time.

Here are some tips on what you should be doing - and what you should avoid - to bring value to this all-important connection.

As a PR pro, you specialize in creating - or tapping journalists or influencers to create - high-quality content. And publications, from major media outlets to niche industry trade pubs, tend to have high domain authority. In other words, your work as a PR pro gives you the ability to influence SEO – one of the most powerful digital marketing levers – with the work you're already doing.

We want to show you how to take advantage of that opportunity.



1

DO YOUR RESEARCH

This can't be stressed enough. Before you craft your pitch or press release, it's key to thoroughly research the journalists and outlets you are targeting.

According to [Cision's 2020 State of the Media report](#) only 1% of journalists surveyed consider 75-100% of the pitches they receive as relevant. So not only is a pitch to the wrong journalist harming your relationship with them, it's potentially a waste of your time and theirs.

So how do you research?

READ THEIR WORK AND ENGAGE WITH IT:

It may seem like a no-brainer, but it still needs to be said. Reading a journalist's past articles allows you to see what topics they've covered, whom they've used as subject matter experts, and the overall tone of their writing. All of this can help you figure out if they are the right reporter and outlet to target with your news, especially as some demographics around the outlets they've written for should be available. Be sure that matches the target audience for your pitch.

Having a good understanding of a journalist's body of work also will help you craft a stronger pitch that will pique their interest.

It's also a good idea to find out the publication's writing guidelines and what it considers newsworthy, as this can differ between outlets in the same industry.

Comment on a writer's work by letting them know what you liked about the article and share any insight you may have. Remember that this isn't a one-way relationship — you also should be sharing their related posts on social media, even if they aren't about your client or employer.

FOLLOW JOURNALISTS ON TWITTER:

Over the years, Twitter has become an increasingly [valuable tool for journalists](#). It's used for newsgathering, tips, identifying sources, and interacting with readers.

Reporters use Twitter to promote their latest articles, which allows PR teams to learn more about them and their work. What are their opinions on relevant topics? What have they written recently? What's their tone of voice?



NOTE ON TWITTER

You don't necessarily want to pitch on Twitter; journalists generally prefer to stick to email. If you're unsure, use tools like the [Cision database](#) to build your media list and find journalists who meet your needs and learn their preferred method of contact.

ANOTHER BENEFIT OF FOLLOWING JOURNALISTS ON TWITTER:

You'll know if they move to a new outlet, start covering a new beat, etc.

WATCH THE RIGHT HASHTAGS:

The following hashtags are important ones to follow to uncover opportunities or simply learn what not to do.



#PRFAIL AND #PR101:

Yes, it can be tough to read these posts. But it also can be a good way to find out if there's something wrong with your outreach strategy. These hashtags can get a bit noisy at times, but they can help you see exactly the types of things that are frustrating journalists to the point that they could overlook your pitch.



#JOURNOREQUEST:

Reporters regularly use this hashtag to signal a need for sources, quotes, etc. If you find a request relevant to your industry, send a short reply making it clear why you have a story that fills their need.

Don't abuse this hashtag, though. It's meant for journalists looking to fill needs for a story, not for you to pitch them.

FOLLOW REPORTERS ON OTHER PLATFORMS

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:

Twitter may be the most-used platform by journalists, but it's not the only one. Follow their personal blogs (if they have one) and if you have an established relationship, connect with a journalist on LinkedIn.

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP REPORTERS SUCCEED:

Find ways to add value to the relationship. In the State of the Media findings, 46% of reporters said readership and views are their organization's primary measure of success. How does that apply to you? Based on their previous work, ask yourself these questions:

- Does an article have outdated information? Can you help update it?
- Is information missing and you can help fill in the gaps?
- Do you have a fresh perspective?



TRACKING JOURNALISTS

It can be difficult to keep up with all the career moves among journalists. The Cision research team makes over 20,000 media updates to our influencer database each day.



2 TARGET OUTLETS OF ALL SIZES

It's important that when putting together your media list, you don't forget about local media. Getting coverage in national outlets is exciting and may be the ultimate goal, but it can be tough to do.

For small and regional businesses, local media coverage is vital. According to [News Media Canada](#), **73% of Canadians** in non-urban centres read a community newspaper. Getting exposure in these publications helps you reach a more targeted and well-defined audience.

Local coverage also can be a steppingstone to national outlets. If the Globe and Mail is considering doing a story on your company or client, the prior, regular coverage from local publications could help them feel more confident writing about your product or message.

You also should be targeting relevant trade outlets. Whatever industry you're in, there's a trade pub that covers it. While they may not be written for consumers, getting press in these outlets can help you build a reputation as a thought leader.

Lastly, don't forget that the internet has a global audience. Even if the outlet is relatively small, coverage on the website has the potential to be seen by anyone.

3 DON'T OVERLOOK YOUR WEBSITE

Just like anyone else, journalists will use the internet to do research, and that includes visiting the brand's website. So you need to ensure it has all the useful information they need, including:

- An easy-to-find press page.
- A Contact Us page with dedicated press contacts. You don't want reporters dialing the front office only to wait to be transferred or maneuver through a directory, especially if they have an urgent media enquiry.
- A company overview/boilerplate and downloadable multimedia assets (executive headshots, company logo, product images, etc).

You can set up a content hub for all this information with a [customized mediaroom](#). Cision can work with your team to set up an easy-to-manage space that includes your news releases, press kit, multimedia, fact sheets, and more.



4 INITIATE A RELATIONSHIP & MAKE FRIENDS

Utilize the Cision database: Never contacted a specific journalist in the past? Prior to your pitch or press release distribution, it's important that you have access to a database platform with regularly updated contacts so that you know how to contact someone and can be sure the contact details are accurate.

MAKE YOUR EXPERTS AVAILABLE:

Securing subject matter experts for comment in articles is a critical piece of a journalist's process. Your client or employer can be a valuable resource for reporters that can help them better do their job.

- **Tip:** If a journalist contacts you for a comment, get back to them quickly. Being a reliable contact will strengthen the relationship.
- Utilize platforms like [HARO](#) to respond to a journalist's need, rather than pitching them a story. You'll be notified when journalists are looking for quotes, expert opinions, or case studies, for example.

MEET ONE-ON-ONE:

Attend industry events and tradeshows or try meeting for coffee (even virtually if needed). One-on-One interactions can go a long way. Remember that reporters have limited time, so come prepared to share what you have in store or how you can help them.

5

WRITE AN A+ PITCH

Journalists can receive hundreds of pitches each day. So even if you've done all the right research, if the pitch isn't well crafted, it can be lost in the sea of a journalist's inbox. You need to convince them to read it.

WHAT GOES INTO A SOLID PITCH?

- **Write an effective subject line:** It's what's going to decide if a journalist clicks into the email to read more, so use this space wisely. Keep the news up front, in case it gets cut off (especially if a reporter is viewing emails on a mobile device).
- **Keep it short:** In [Cision's 2020 State of the Media Report](#) 36% of journalists surveyed plan their stories daily or more frequently. Give them the necessary info and clearly present the story.
- **Avoid jargon and industry speak:** Write naturally, just like a journalist would for their end reader. Make it easier for a reporter to see how your story can appeal to their audience.
- **Provide assets:** Don't clutter the email with embedded assets or risk attachments not opening. Provide a link (that doesn't immediately expire) to download images, videos, b-roll, etc. Make sure the assets are easy to download and are of high quality.
- **Follow up once:** Inboxes are busy so it's possible a pitch did get lost. Check back in about 24hrs later, then let it go. If you never hear back, chances are it just wasn't a good fit. By not following up incessantly (which a journalist could very well find annoying) you leave the door open for future pitches.



6

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STRONG PRESS RELEASES

Journalists consistently say that press releases are the item they most want from PR teams. You should be aiming to make your release as easy for them to use as possible.

More than one third of journalists [reported](#) putting together more than seven pieces of content each week. With a heavier workload and fewer resources, journalists are always in search of content, and it needs to be high-quality.

You can make their job easier by writing a clear news angle and providing the key elements like contact information, multimedia, and quotes. They'll appreciate it and remember it later.

ANSWER THE “SO WHAT?” IMMEDIATELY:

Journalists need to know right away why your news is important to their readers. So don't bury the main story. While you don't want to tell a journalist the angle they should take with a story, you can suggest a possible angle that could appeal to their audience.

SENDING OUT AN EARNINGS REPORT?

Instead of a headline reading “Company ABC Reports Second Quarter Earnings,” give journalists the important figures up front: “Company ABC Sees 10% Revenue Growth in Second Quarter.”



LAUNCHING A NEW PRODUCT?

Make it clear what makes the product unique in the industry. Is it faster, easier-to-use, or eco-friendly, for example? Let readers know why they should care. Product announcements also are perfect opportunities for photos or videos.



RELEASING ORIGINAL RESEARCH DATA OR SURVEY RESULTS?

Include a unique finding in the headline. Elements like numbers and adjectives will help draw eyes and interest readers.



PERSONNEL ANNOUNCEMENT?

What does the promotion or new hire actually mean for the company? Will they be working on sustainability, diversity, or international growth initiatives? Let the media know up front. (Don't forget to include unique quotes that add to the story and make sure they sound natural – like an actual person said them.)



BE ACCURATE:

According to the [2020 State of the Media Report](#) 51% of journalists say that ensuring accuracy is their top priority. It may seem obvious, but if your release has inaccuracies or is missing information, it can erode the trust journalists have in you. Don't leave holes in the story for reporters to fill in — make sure you cover the who, what, when, where, why, and how.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT MULTIMEDIA:

- Not only will embedded multimedia boost the visibility of your release online, infographics and photos are journalists' preferred types of visual media, according to the State of the Media survey findings.
- Including high-quality, relevant assets with your release makes journalists' jobs easier. More than 70% of journalists say they [always or often include multimedia](#) with their stories. Providing your own assets helps them avoid having to resort to stock images.

To craft a press release that appeals to journalists, you should think about writing like they would.





7 STAY IN TOUCH

You've done the work of building a relationship with a journalist. Now you need to maintain it.

REACH OUT REGULARLY:

You should be interacting with journalists on a regular basis, whether it's related to your brand or not. Keep sending ideas, sharing insights on a recent story, or offering quotes for a story they are working on.

- **Be patient:** Be patient and respectful of journalists' time. In a 24/7 news cycle, reporters are always chasing the next deadline and may not get back to you. For freelance journalists who are paid a fixed fee for a story, time absolutely is money.
- **Ask questions:** Ask what you can do to strengthen the relationship and make their job easier. This team player attitude will help build trust.



TO WRAP UP

Making meaningful connections with journalists requires hard work and takes time. It's not as simple as sending out a mass pitch email. If you do the research, get to know reporters as people, and find ways to bring value to the relationship, your efforts to get coverage for your brand will be more successful.

If you create a strong enough connection, over time you may find that journalists are coming to you as a source.