

Guide to Building a Media Profile

GREEN

Guide to Building a Media Profile

A practical introduction to the media

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Why the media is important to your business

When you communicate—whether to journalists or as part of your networking - you should be connecting with the following audiences—all of which are important to you as an individual, in terms of your own personal and career developments, and your company or organisation:

- COLLEAGUES
- PARTNERS
- PROSPECTIVE COLLEAGUES
- CLIENTS
- PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS
- SUPPLIERS
- RIVALS
- PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT

The Media provides a potent gateway to these different audiences. BUT the onus is upon you, your marketing and PR support and your colleagues to ensure that you always connect with media and succinctly get your message across.

By developing a close relationship with a number of journalists in the Press and Broadcast you can ensure that you can effectively disseminate your key messages and achieve core business objectives.

- **Be proactive • Be forward thinking • Be prepared to engage**
 - **And remember journalists need your help**

There are only ten types of story in business

Just as there are only ten story themes in the land of myth and legend, there are only ten types of story that cover the gamut of all business and company related news.

Irrespective of whether it a newspaper, television news bulletin, radio show, online service or wire media, you can begin to understand the journalist's final agenda. So the all top ten Bladonmore stories are:

- **Consolidation or closures**
- **Company bust-up or management changes**
- **Pay, rewards and money**
- **Results and expenditure**
- **Economic stories**
- **Themed analysis of sector**
- **Commentary**
- **Product launch or demise**
- **Death and crisis**
- **Diary story**

If anyone can come up with an 11th version we will give £20 to charity! Recent examples of the above stories types are attached.

• Remember there are only ten kinds of story • Which one do you wish to tell • Understand how the journalist thinks • Be prepared to tailor you news agenda to the journalists

Who, what, why, when, where and how

Journalists are interested in stories—and stories have a set structure. They are written in this manner so that in the process of producing a newspaper, TV bulletin or radio broadcast they can be easily edited by the production team.

Rudyard Kipling wrote:

*" I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew)
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who."*

Every story appearing online, on screen or on paper must include:

Who is central to the story, who is doing what to whom?

What event, action, decision has been made or is about to be taken?

Why has it happened?

When has it happened? Yesterday equals news, tomorrow equals scoop.

Where will it impact?

How did it happen?

If it does not include any of these it will be amended to do so. Help the journalists by having these facts available. **Be prepared if you're not be prepared to fail.**

Trickle down to other sections

Business news might often be the mainstay of the business and financial pages or a trade magazine but when it comes to a wider package—for instance a regional or national newspaper, a radio show or television news, it often acts as a fountain for other parts of the newspaper.

In recent times stories such as Enron, Andersen and the recent pensions scandal at Equitable Life have moved from the business pages to the front page. They are local to a specific section of the newspaper and evolve over a short period to become more significant stories which have social, political and economic messages.

- **Be proactive**
- **Be prepared**
- **Think who, what, why, when, where, how**
- **Help the journalists shine**

How journalists operate and why they need you

Journalists have never been under so much pressure. As a career it is ranked as one of the most stressful and journalists pay the highest life and car insurance rates in the UK, alongside doctors and teachers.

Why? Because they live by deadlines. In print media they start the day knowing that they have to fill between 40 and 60 broadsheet or tabloid pages. At 10.00 when most journalists sit down at their desks in the morning they are confronted with the knowledge that they must hit the phones following up new leads on a breaking story or chasing a new angle on an old story. In broadcast media they must renew and embellish a news story at least every half hour to keep it fresh and move it on.

In TV, they must consider pictures, camera crews, set up interviews, ensure cable and satellite feeds are in place. And all the time editors are shouting for updates and new information.

If this was not bad enough — the media is chronically under resourced. Very often reporters are desk bound and have little opportunity to venture out of the newsroom. In these circumstances journalists depend — more and more — on third parties to provide them with news items. Moreover, journalists are seasoned laymen and women—their job is to explain complex issues in simple language to a wide audience. Therefore, do not expect a great degree of knowledge on a particular subjects other from seasoned correspondents.

Quiet simply **journalists need you**. You are the expert in your field, or you understand your organisation better than anyone else, or you understand your market better than others. You should position yourself to become an information leader with key journalists who report on your business or key market. The reporters are so busy that if a quick call to you or your colleagues can resolve a story they will always seek you out on a regular basis. If you can impart useful information, insight and analysis journalists will regularly call you and provide you with the opportunity to promote your business or your particular area of interest and engage with your key audiences.

- **Make friends with key journalists • They will be friends to you • They need you more than you need them • Remember your knowledge is narrow and deep— the journalists' knowledge is broad but shallow**

The geo-politics of a newsroom

All roads lead to the editor. But individual journalists, who are often given their own sectors to focus on, will report directly to the news editor. He or she will absorb all the details of the various news lines and decide who writes what, what priority it has in the news list, and where it will appear on the broadcast schedule or in the newspaper. He or she reports to the editor.

However, the media is not a democracy. Just as the chief executive, managing partner or chairman make the key decisions so too the editor. The editor is God and the editor is never wrong, especially when he or she is very wrong.

However keen an advocate of your business, the journalist may be, it is ultimately down to his or her boss — ie God — to determine how much coverage it receives.

On national and regional morning newspapers the news agenda is set through a series of News Conferences at 11.00pm, 4.00am and 7.00am when the news agenda is discussed and refined throughout the day. During this process stories will be discarded or refined and new ones will be allocated to certain reporters. The news list is constantly changing as reporters and editors react to events, news feeds (via Reuters and PA), press releases and speculation. All the time the reporters are feeding in their information

In this environment the journalist needs your help and the more you help them the more they will continue to use you. Like Claude Raine in *Casablanca* you will be on his list of **the usual suspects** — ie someone who can provide a nice quote, market information, informed comment etc.

- **Journalists work to deadlines**
- **Respect deadlines**
- **If you promise to call back CALL BACK!**
- **If you don't know the answer be honest and helpful**
- **Journalists are desk bound — take them out to lunch**

Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines

That's why they are called deadline—if the journalists doesn't meet his deadline he's dead: bollocked by the editor, ridiculed by his colleagues and, if he doesn't buck-up, ultimately out of a job. Many a flourishing journalists' career has died through an inability to meet deadlines.

Most journalists would admit that their jobs are a trade, not a profession or a craft like writers. The difference is that a trade involves the ability to meet deadlines.

So when the Queen Mum's death is announced at 5.30 on Saturday evening or Barings Bank collapses at a similar time, and the deadline for the first edition is to be printed at 6.00, the best journalists can write a succinct piece of news or comment in 30 minutes without flinching.

This is not the time to be phoning them offering details or your next launch or arranging to meet up for a cup of tea

Events happen. Space is created and the news desk needs 1,000 words in an hour. If a journalist phones and points out they are working on something near to deadline and ask for help, do not be upset if you phone back after the deadline with the information he has requested and it does not appear. In fact, apologise for not being able to meet his deadline, he will respect you more for that.

- **Journalist are under time pressure, help relieve the pressure**
- **Always respect the deadline • Help a journalist in his hour of need and you have a friend for life**

The editor's decision is final

As with all the best cereal competitions, the Editor's decision is the only one that counts.

What does this mean for you?

You can have the best relationship with a reporter who buys into your story with great gusto, but if he or she fails to sell it properly into the editor or the editor just does not think it is that interesting it will be spiked!

The best stories will sell themselves (remember who, what, when, where and how!) but it is the marginal ones where the benefits of a good PR professional can possibly help as they can tailor the pitch so it chimes effectively with as many different people within the media you are targeting as is possible.

The editor is never wrong — especially when he is very wrong

- **Journalists have to sell their stories, help them become a better salesman**
- **Don't be aggrieved if your story doesn't appear**
- **The editor's decision is final**

Newspaper and broadcast production

There is no better example of a fast moving consumer good than a printed newspaper, magazine, website or news programme.

No two editions are the same. There are millions of letters that could be mis-arranged or spoken and the newspapers somehow get distributed all over the country or world within hours of dancing off the journalist's keyboard. How does the story get from his keyboard to your letter box.

Simple. It's all dictated by strict deadlines:

The print process

Reporter files story or copy

News editor reviews it and passes it to production

Sub-editor checks for grammar, accuracy, sense and fits it around adverts

Designer prepares page for press

Editor or section editor signs off the page

Page designer send the page down the wire to the printer

Printer sets press

Newspaper printed

Bundled into vans

Distributed to newsagents

The broadcast process

Reporter reports as camera rolls

Images and sound reviewed

Images are transmitted to news centre

Editor prepared it ahead of release

Broadcast to TV or radio

- Understand the production process
- Always respect the deadline

Competition between Sundays and Dailies

The Sundays and the dailies are very different animal. They will not share the same staff, even if they do share the same back office resources with access to printers, libraries and canteens. They even not share the same office.

Dailies spend all day trying to pull that day's news into understandable content and will treat the same story differently across the different news organs. They view Sunday or weekly trade journalists as lazy beasts who do not have to start work until Friday afternoon.

Sunday or weekly journalists spend all week trying to dig up stories which will set the following week's news agenda. They must analyse and try to add value to events which have happened or about to happen. They view daily journalist as copy monkeys who would not know a scoop if it slapped them in the face.

No love is lost between the rival groups. Do not think that because you have good links with the Times, you will automatically have good links with the Sunday Times. You don't!

• Tailor your news for each group • Sunday and Dailies are completely different • Look for new angles on a daily story which might appeal to a Sunday

Difference between tabloids and broadsheets

Don't be a snob. Never underestimate tabloid newspapers or their appetite for business and money-related news.

They are peppered with senior business journalist. The editor of the Sun is a former business journalist — Northern Echo, Sun, New York Daily. The current business writer for the Sun (Suzy Jagger) used to work for The Guardian and the Mail while her rival at the Mirror previously worked for the Telegraph.

Just because tabloids might not be your natural newspapers of choice, you should not ignore their strengths and dangers.

The broadsheets are very hypocritical of their coverage of tabloid stories. Ostensibly they would never claim to be interested in tabloid stories but their pages are invariably filled with tales that began in the tabloids.

The rule is that most tabloid journalists are more than capable of transferring across to work on broadsheet newspapers, but most broadsheet journalists would fail miserably if they had to do in the other direction.

- **Don't be snob • Tabloids are a good medium to get your message across • Broadsheets often follow the tabloid news agenda**

What do wire, online and trade journalists want?

Tomorrow's star business reporters are today's oppressed one. Or at least that is how many wire, online and trade journalists feel. Under-paid and under acknowledged they learn their trade the hard way and will bond with contacts with whom they will remain in touch with for the rest of their career.

Common sense will dictate that you will treat them no better or worse than any regional or national newspaper journalist, given that is where some of them are liable to end up within a year.

Secondly, just as newspaper business sections act as a fountain for other news sections, so too do these folk who end up drafting up the first draft of most business stories. Given that many newspaper journalist do not get to their desks until 10.00, the best wire and online journalists will have been working for a third of the day before their more pampered colleagues pick up their quills.

Their coverage is also what many daily journalists use as the basis of their coverage. Having just the vanilla company announcement without commentary is not easy to turn into succinct copy quickly. This is a tremendous skill which is why the best wire and online journalists quickly find themselves promoted.

Trade journalists are a different animal entirely. They get the opportunity to embrace a specialist sector and can use that as a springboard to bigger roles. For instance the former editor of Money Marketing is banking editor of the Sunday Telegraph and the co-founder of Biopoly, the healthcare newsletter is now the Sunday Times Health Correspondent.

Trade journalists are very likely to have a detailed and depth understanding of your business and your marketplace.

- **Trade journalists are the newspaper reporters of tomorrow**
- **Treat them as you would anyone else**
- **National titles follow up on their stories**

The role of the freelance

Freelance journalists are the poor relations of the newspaper world as their only brand is their own personal one. This means that there is the widest gulf in quality amongst freelance journalists.

Some make great amounts of money as they are exceptionally good and realise it is better not to be tied to a single outlet, if there is a market demand for what they do.

But most do not enjoy that position and scrimp hard to make a sensible living. This makes them a competitive lot who are often the most commercially minded of all journalists and truly understand the process of “selling” a story.

The bottom line is that if a journalist has a commission to write a piece for any medium and it is on a topic that you wish to contribute to, you will do so, and treat them as if they were any other type of journalist.

But if they do not have a commission and are on a fishing expedition to research a subject ahead of them trying to sell it into a publication you will probably not wish to invest too much time on the process, unless you have a particular interest in the journalist or the subject.

It is up to you to ensure you ask at the outset what the position is but most journalists will be very happy to explain what they are trying to achieve in any given piece.

• Freelance journalists can be powerful allies • Treat them as you would anyone else • Many freelance journalists work for some flagship national newspapers and broadcasters

Patch or contact protection

Irrespective which organ the journalist works for, they will not be satisfied until they have a defined brief or sector to cover. They are all aiming to become named correspondents – on the FT it might be Energy Correspondent, on The Times Media Correspondent or on the BBC Political Editor/Correspondent.

Once they do, they are as protective of it, as any lioness is towards her cubs. This is fine, so long as you get on well with the individual covering your sector or the company that you are involved with.

Where the relationship is more difficult and people do not get on with each other, the benefits of a good PR firm can be seen. Just as you might be possessive towards your clients and contacts, so too is the journalists.

Mutual respect comes about when the journalist recognises that you do understand the company or sector as well if not better than they do. That is when you move towards having a dialogue.

- **Don't sell stories to rivals within the same paper**
- **Respect patch protection**
- **Named correspondent love exclusives in the patch**

Think pictures

You should ALWAYS be willing to invest in good photography whenever you dealing with the press.

The best stories are always the best illustrated – invariably with a photograph. Frankly men in suits are dull, unless you have a brilliant photographer who is able to capture the character of the subject. Men on the phone are boring. Extended group shots end up looking like a firing squad, so avoid all the clichés.

Scantly clad women are always found in the business pages promoting new product launches or products. But be careful – they can be cringe making and should only be used for an appropriate client such as the fashion industry.

The best images are of people, products and infrastructure. Industrial images always go down well with picture desks. More important is to review it on a case-by-case basis and to accept the expertise of the picture editor in tandem with the journalist who is covering the story. And don't be too clever – picture editors hate "wacky".

Newspapers in particular have ever more limited resources and so it becomes central to the companies to make some effort in thinking about and supplying quality photographs to ensure that they maximize coverage.

- **Men in suite are boring**
- **Invest in a good photographer you can trust**
- **The best pictures focus on people, products and infrastructure**
- **Avoid wacky pictures and do not try to force incongruous images together – they do look forced**

The value of networking

The worst journalists are those who have shiny backsides to their trouser suits – they are always sat at their desks. Good journalists know that they will be lucky to get a single news story in the year from their own office. The best ones accept and enjoy the human element of the job, although respect that they must be able to show a return on their networking in terms of the quality and quantity of the stories that they write about.

Do not be surprised if journalists who originally contact you via the phone ask to meet you for a breakfast, coffee meeting or lunch. Indeed, consider inviting them out to lunch – dinner is normally reserved for their best contacts or more trusted senior businessmen or even sometimes their families.

You will also come across a number of rather shy and retiring journalists. This might appear to be a contradiction in terms but there are an amazing number who do not enjoy human company as much as you would think they should, given the nature of their job.

Journalists who meet you will be less averse to asking you for your home number or out of the office contact details. Do not be surprised if they phone you if you give it out. If you really don't want to, the easiest way of dealing with it is to give them your mobile number and then if they ring refer them to your press office or PR company – unless you are particularly comfortable in your relationship with them.

Dependent on your role and the size of your company, you could spend your life in meetings with journalists which would be an unproductive use of your time. However, it is by a process of meeting them, that you will best decipher the ones who can be most helpful to you in terms of trading information as you develop your business.

- **Be prepared to break bread with journalists**
- **Never under-estimate the power of networking**
- **It's okay to be friends with journalists**

The myth of “on the record” vs “off the record”

Countless stories have been printed and careers destroyed by the lack of understanding surrounding what constitutes on and off the record.

Journalists exist to convey news. Do not be surprised if you say something that they will want to use. Every journalist is amazed when they write something following an interview and the person they have spoken to is surprised. This is what they do.

Always presume that everything you do say is on the record, even if it is off the record. You should, by dint of who you are and what you do, be measured. Therefore do not be surprised if what you say is wanted to be reported on, however measured it maybe.

If you judge the situation calls for more detailed background briefing but are adamant that it must not be attributable to yourself, you must literally state that:

“This is for your background only and under no circumstances to appear.”

Be clear and do not leave any scope for misunderstanding. If anyone breaks your trust, do not over-react, but try not to deal with them again. This is difficult but possible.

Finally, remember journalists' access to stories depends on them being trusted by their contacts and they will respect that trust. But, if they think they have got a scoop many of them will use it.

- **There is no such thing as off the record**
- **Be clear what you want to achieve in an interview**
- **State your attentions**
- **Never lie**

The games we play

This is what the outsiders might view as the Black Arts of the media and public relations.

From the journalists' perspective, they should be willing to trade information and stories as it is a commodity, so long as they believe they are always going to get better and better stories.

There are two times when games might be played:

When you really want something in the paper

Or

When you really want something out of the paper

On both occasions you must ask yourself two critical questions: Do you trust the journalist? For if things go wrong there could be some nasty consequences. And two presuming you do trust them – is it really worth calling in a favour for this specific instance?

If the answer to both is yes, then you must have something to offer the journalist in return for putting in a story or keeping one out. Invariably it will be another story that is better than the one you are angling over. Journalists are not there to be bribed, even if some do engage in that kind of activity.

It is a very simple equation. Any senior journalist will not withdraw or insert a story on demand, unless they have a very good reason to. The best reason are best stories.

- **Be prepared to trade in stories**
- **Understand your journalist contacts and what they are seeking to achieve**
- **Never ignore a request and if the worst comes to the worst be prepared to put your side of the story**

Checklist

The GREEN Communications checklist for finding, minding and grinding out media relationships

Have you applied the Who, What, Where, When, Why, How test to what you want to say?

Remember a journalist's knowledge is broad and shallow. Yours is narrow and deep

Take control quickly. You should be in charge of the interview: the journalist is the medium to sell the message

Explain as though you are speaking to a five-year-old or ageing relative

Never assume any knowledge on the part of the interviewer

Never use jargon

Always try and return a journalists' call within three hours.

Never miss a deadline

If you do not have the answer—DO NOT LIE

Give your self time. Take ten minutes to think what you want to say before you go into an interview

Do not under-estimate the importance of face-to-face contact. Breakfasts, lunch, dinner, cups of tea. Networking is key

Crash Course - How to build a media profile

It's time to tell the world about your business. But how? There are hundreds of magazines, newspapers and TV and radio stations out there. You don't want to make a mess of it and win the Duchess of Wessex award for PR. So how do you get the right headlines?

SET YOUR OBJECTIVES. Don't seek publicity for publicity's sake. Consider which audiences are pivotal to the success of your business and then decide on the best channel to communicate with them. Via the media isn't necessarily the best option. However, a media profile can play a secondary role in helping to recruit staff. The Institute of Public Relations, says the main point of coverage is to get your product or service more widely known. The advantage of media coverage is the third-party endorsement it confers.

IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET. Rather than scattering press releases in every direction, concentrate on the media outlets that matter to your key audience. Ask your customers what they read. Get to know specific publications, and identify the individual journalists covering your sector.

BREAK THE ICE. Don't wait until you have a big story to make contact. Establish a relationship so that when you have something to tell, journalists will be more receptive. Well-placed journalists can provide a good sounding board for your ideas. Ask them for information - their impressions of the marketplace, advice to a new company and what information they need.

GET TO THE POINT. Journalists are time-starved and under pressure. Press conferences are now considered a waste of time for all but the most earth-shattering announcements, and if you persuade a journalist to have lunch they will expect to go back to their office with a story they can use. If you've something good to offer then phone them up.

TREAT THE MEDIA AS A BUSINESS. The magazines and newspapers you'll deal with are in fiercely competitive markets of their own and will be interested in your story only to the extent that it enhances their product. Don't expect them to publish your news and views from a sense of duty.

AVOID PURPLE PROSE. Stick to the facts: don't use the same language in your press releases that you would deploy in your brochures and advertising. Pepper your prose with superlatives and hard-nosed hacks will just yawn.

HAVE A POINT OF VIEW. A good way to generate media coverage is to become an authority on an issue relevant to your sector. Invest in research, but be wary of dressing up a half-baked straw poll as a serious survey. It can help to be controversial, but only if you have a credible base from which to say it.

RESTRICT ACCESS. With a small enterprise, journalists expect to speak to the organ-grinder, not the monkey. Restrict media contact to as few people as possible to keep the message consistent. Get media training for anyone who will

Speak for the company.

EVALUATE. Don't just weigh your press cuttings; what do they say about the company? Are your key messages getting across? When you're talking to a journalist, it's a good idea to have the headline you'd like to see in the back of your mind. You won't get it, but you might get something like it.

DO SAY: 'I've got a good story involving a lot of money and an unusual twist I'd like to offer you on an exclusive basis.'

DON'T SAY: 'Can you fax the finished article over to me? By the way, that stuff I said about the competition being a bunch of thieving jackals was off the record.'

Crash course - Managing in a crisis

For Allied Bakeries, it was finding needles in some of its loaves. For accountancy firm Weeks Green, a hospitality day out which ended with a client fined for being drunk on the plane home. For Railtrack it was the horror of Paddington. One day it's business as usual, the next day you are in the midst of a disaster. The media is ready to crucify you, and your company's very future is in doubt.

EXPECT THE WORST. Plan ahead for a crisis. You need a business continuity plan to keep operations going in the event of a warehouse fire, systems failure or any other disasters. You should also have a communications plan which outlines how you will communicate quickly and effectively with key stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, shareholders and the media. Make it clear who has specific responsibility for contacting particular individuals, and how other groups will be contacted.

STAY COOL. In practice most crisis-hit executives run round like headless chickens. You need to take a cool strategic overview. Ask yourself if everyone has a common view of the situation. How bad can it get? What message do you need to put out and how?' The first 24 hours are often crucial.

HOW DO OTHERS SEE IT? What counts are other people's perceptions, not your own. To you, it might be a storm in a teacup, but if your customers, investors or other audiences perceive the situation to be damaging, that's what you must address.

GET THE MEDIA ON YOUR SIDE. Hold a press conference or issue a statement, and give journalists maximum access. You need to provide absolute transparency to the media. Demonstrate from the beginning that you'll cooperate with them, and they can be your best allies. But if they believe that you are slow in providing information, they'll lose confidence. Your aim is to become the 'Single Authoritative Source' of information.

BEWARE OF CRISIS CREEP. Sometimes an issue creeps up on you. Issues like BSE or the problem of oilrig disposal were around for years before hitting the headlines. Watch for warning signs. A story that features repeatedly in the trade press will soon be picked up by the national media. An independent investigation may also force an issue to come under the national spotlight.

TELL THE TRUTH. Tell a lie and you die. You may not be able to tell everything you know - for example, if an issue is *sub judice*, or the stock market needs to be informed - but at least try to explain why you can't tell all.

SAY SORRY. An apology usually helps to diffuse the situation. You may not want to admit liability but express your regret that it occurred and your determination to prevent it happening again.

TAKE PERSONAL CONTROL. Don't try and hide behind spin doctors or consultants. Use them but make sure that you are the spokesperson - after the Kegworth air crash, British Midlands chairman Sir Michael Bishop dropped eve-

rything, went straight there, and took personal responsibility. He gained a huge amount of credit for doing so.

BE HUMAN. Crisis management isn't a black art. If you behave as a human being, then you can't go far wrong.

DO SAY: 'We would like to express our deepest sympathies to those who have been affected, and shall leave no stone unturned in our efforts to establish exactly how this happened.'

DON'T SAY: 'Crisis? What crisis? Let's just keep our heads down, chaps, and in a week's time it will have blown over.'



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