

MEDIA RELATIONS INSIDER

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

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JOURNALISTS SPEAK OUT

Ready for Some Good News? The Press Praises Standout PR Pros and Their Exemplary Practices

► *You're not alone if you've had it with media gripes. These journos break ranks and celebrate the PR pros and practices that make their jobs easier.*

Not a week goes by without your hearing another media complaint about misguided PR practices. Chances are most of what you've heard boils down to these common gripes: too few pitches are targeted, releases are hyperbolic and "fluffy," access to execs is inadequate, PR copy isn't newsworthy and contact information is hard to come by.

Enough already, right? Fortunately, the following reporters agree. Rather than follow their nay-saying peers down the

easy path, they break ranks with the rankled and shower praise on those who've helped them do their jobs—while revealing how you, too, can generate good will *and* greater coverage:

"Curse of the Missing Contact—Provide Backups"

—Christine Carson, *Arizona Republic* assistant business editor

"Reaching live contacts can be a real problem," asserts Carson. "For example,

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TIMELY TIPS

Contrarian Advice: Don't Reject Jargon Outright

"Here's an alternate thought on the subject of jargon-filled press releases," offers Naylor Gray, with Frost & Sullivan. "The major newswires have agreements with many online news services, and these online services agree to run wired releases verbatim. Packing a release with technical jargon improves the chances that your target reader will locate that release via a search engine such as Google."

For example, Naylor recently "Googled" jargonistic phrases culled from a release lambasted by the executive editor at *Dig iT* magazine for excessive technospeak. "The search returned several valuable top-ten ranking references to that release," he says. "Getting those top search rankings on Google is worth more than the cost of wiring the release."

"Consequently, releases should be

comprehensible and relevant to these niche audiences, who might be searching the web for information that relates to their specific needs," Naylor concludes. On the other hand, it's not a good idea to alienate reporters who don't understand industry-specific jargon.

Naylor seems to suggest that sending out two releases might be a viable option—one for the press that's jargon-free, and another for those who might be searching online using the same, jargonistic phrases the media warns us against.

"The major wires need to offer a segmented service that hits journalists only or their affiliated online publications only," he elaborates. "This would please the Googlers and spare the journalists nightmare press releases loaded with technical terms." ★

we'll sometimes get a PR contact listed on a release—but they're not even on hand to take calls. We'll keep calling, only to find out that they're out of the office on vacation or something—especially during the summer. That's usually the case if the release is prepared in advance and the PR person has had no control of when it's sent out. It's frustrating," she says. "PR people should be waiting by the phone when an announcement goes out." Similarly: "Check the arrival date to ensure you'll be on hand when sending releases out through online or [PR wire] services."

Even better, "Make sure there's a backup available—go the extra mile and provide additional contact information," suggests Carson. She offers this example: "I got a release this week from Phoenix-based **ON Semiconductor** [Everett Tackett, director of public relations], announcing their stock had received permission to transfer from the NASDAQ small cap [market] to the national market. It was a newsworthy, clearly written release. But the best part was that they had listed the PR person's phone and email at the bottom—along with a few backup numbers, including contact information for their investor relations officer. They didn't give a cell number—but that's a great idea, too. Even though I tend to see cell numbers listed on releases sent from solo practitioners, I think it's a good idea for everybody—even corporate giants using services like Business Wire."

In addition: "Complete contact information is a necessity because a lot of the releases we see are incomplete," adds Carson. "For example, I've seen releases announcing quarterly earnings where the copy doesn't mention total revenue for the quarter. Or, the copy might be missing a quote from a top executive. Another good thing about ON Semiconductor's release is it includes a pretty strong quote from the company's president and CEO, Keith Jackson. On another note, PR people sometimes even forget to include the company's ticker symbol. When we're on deadline, we don't want to look that stuff up—instead, we'll call to fill in the blanks. We'll just move on to the next story if nobody's there to give us what we need."

Carson also suggests PR pros invest more time in crafting company, product or service descriptions. "I see it all the time—a lot of people don't provide accessible descriptions. Since they're usually tacked onto the end of the release, it's like they're an afterthought—like they're cut-and-pasted straight out of a sales or marketing brochure," she explains. "The copy should be in plain English. Avoid jargon like, 'X company is the premier provider of Y or Z.' I'm not a trade pub—no daily is. We serve general interest audiences. We need to translate your

copy so it makes sense to our readers—people for whom you can assume some general business knowledge, but not insider status. The simpler the description, the less likely it will be that we miss something in [translation]."

"Don't Cry Wolf—Target Every Pitch"

—Dave Graveline, "Into Tomorrow with Dave Graveline" radio host

"Journalists may be quick to condemn—but we're often just as quick to commend," assures Graveline, the pitchable host of "Into Tomorrow with Dave Graveline," which airs on 104 radio stations across the country, on Sirius Talk Stream 146 and worldwide on the Armed Forces Radio Network. "When we get to work with good PR people, we appreciate it."

That said, Graveline concurs with Carson regarding contact information—but adds the twist that he'd like to see more email addresses, not phone numbers. "PR people seem stingy with contact information. We need it to be easy—and for me, that usually means an email address. If I talked to every PR person who called, I couldn't get the show done. What I see in press releases are names and numbers—many come in without email addresses. When that happens, I have to key in a URL to find an email. That's frustrating, especially for a tech [journalist]. If you're pitching people who cover technology, you should use the same methods of communication they do. At the very least, ask what they prefer—or check with [media directories] to get pitching [preferences] in advance."

Similarly: "Stop with the faxes," he pleads. "We kill forests every day in here because we get releases or announcements through the fax machine—and a lot of them don't even pertain to our coverage."

This last comment presages Graveline's primary peeve: "Sending us information that isn't even close to pertaining to our coverage—we hate that. Again, use the technology available—visit our websites to see what we cover before sending an item. For example, five seconds on [www.graveline.com] will tell you we don't cover cooking, politics or abortion issues. We cover consumer electronics and technology—if it draws current, we'll cover it. But anything else misses the mark and proves that you're not doing your homework. It's like crying wolf—and that'll catch up with you eventually. If I see a header or an email address that doesn't fit, I'll remember it next time. I won't even bother opening your emails if it seems you haven't taken the time to see what I'm about."

So where's the good news? "I work with a lot of PR people who make life easier," says Graveline. "For example, **Dawn Myrah** with **Wagoner Edstrom** is great at

her job. Most of our contact is on behalf of Microsoft,” he continues. “I think that’s why she understands how important email is to journalists—she gets it. If she has to call me, she’ll email first and ask if she can phone with further details. But 95 percent of the time, we work online. More impressive, she’s not afraid to keep me up-to-date—even if the news has nothing to do with her client. For example, she just forwarded me email contacts for the people at Weber Shandwick for another, unrelated product. She made a few calls over there and found out who I needed to talk to—that’s a great help.” In addition: “She’s a hard worker who tells it like it is. So when I see an email from Dawn, I pay attention. She’s shown us that she has our best interests at heart—along with those of her client. She also makes sure her client sends out products quickly. She doesn’t have to wait to be asked, which isn’t always the case with other PR people.”

“Less Bias—More Honesty, Please”

—Alan Fischer, *Arizona Daily Star* business reporter

“There are lot of skilled PR people I love to work with,” says Fischer. “For example, the Tucson Airport Authority [TAA] oversees two airports in town, as well as properties incorporating business and manufacturing concerns like Raytheon. They have an in-house PR department that works hard to make our jobs easier. In particular, I like working with airport information director Paula Winn.”

Here’s what Winn does right, according to Fischer:

- **Concise copy:** “Her releases are great in the sense that they get to the point immediately. They’re clear, concise—and they don’t go on forever,” says Fischer. For example, a September release featuring the headline “TAA Board Approves Leases: Leasing Development Policy” ran only four graphs long—with each graph consisting of bulleted copy packed with precisely the types of hard figures and financials beat reporters like Fischer typically find so frustratingly elusive while on deadline.

- **24/7 contact:** “Her releases also provide all the contact information I need—namely, her number and even her pager. I can find her after hours, no problem,” says Fischer. “I don’t have to dig around.” [Note: This contact information isn’t as readily accessible online; TAA numbers are listed by department, but no media contact names—or pager numbers, for that matter.]

- **Quick turnaround:** Fischer praises Winn for her timely turnaround, top-tier access and industry savvy. “She typically has the answers I need on hand. But if she doesn’t, she gets it to me in a timely manner,” he says. “That’s something a lot of PR people don’t do. For example, I made calls for a story last week—and I was

getting calls from PR people five days later, even though the story already ran on Monday. It’s now Wednesday. They not only missed my window for the story—but they proved to me that they’re not reading the paper.”

- **Honesty—and an aversion to fluff:** “I’ve also found that she’s been up front with me,” says Fischer. “I trust the information I get from her—it’s generally dead-on and newsworthy,” he adds. “That’s my biggest peeve about PR—the way PR people slant the story or release to place their companies in a better light at the expense of accuracy. Specifically, they’ll delete important information or move negative news down the page. That means they’re opening with secondary news, which is obvious to any decent reporter. This is a typical problem with PR—people burying their most newsworthy leads.”

He offers this example: “I just got a two page release that started talking about a business owner by saying he was an Eagle Scout, that he’d received an MBA—it went on and on like this. Then the last graph said he’d doubled the size of his business. What a mistake—that’s the real story here. The other stuff was irrelevant fluff. I called the business owner and told him that his PR people were doing him a great disservice. There’s a general ineptitude among PR people—they think [fluff] sells the story, not facts.” After pausing, Fischer adds this: “I also gave the PR person a call. It’s only fair.” ★

ONLINE PR

New Study, Experts Unveil Five Easy Ways to Boost Your Online Accessibility for More Ink

► **Does your online newsroom pass the media’s “one-click” rule? Here’s how to make sure your site survives media scrutiny.**

Journalists frequently complain that it’s hard—if not downright impossible—to call up PR contacts online when they’re jammed for time. For example, “Just having specific sources and numbers to reach people quickly on deadline” is the one thing *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram* education reporter Martha Deller would change about PR. And Christine Carson, assistant business editor at the *Arizona Republic*, says she can’t stand it when PR pros “don’t put a person’s number on the release as a contact—we see this all the time online.”

These two are not alone—far from it. According to this month’s “Creating a Good Impression Online” white paper published by *Vocus*, nearly 80 percent of surveyed journalists say lack of adequate contact information

online is their number one peeve. Similarly, one out of every six reporters says corporate sites provide complete information “never” or “almost never.” To top it all off, approximately 45 percent of respondents say not finding the right information on corporate websites affects their decisions about which companies to include in the story. In fact, 86 percent say they look to other sources if they can’t find the information they need on your website.

Worse, some reporters believe such obfuscation is intentional—how else to explain the contact names, numbers and email addresses so often buried three to four links into any given company’s website? Follow these quick tips to counter these negative impressions—and to boost not only your online accessibility, but also your coverage:

1. Follow the “one-click” rule. “One of the biggest problems with online press rooms is they hide the pressroom so you can’t even find it,” says **B.L. Ochman**, online marketing strategist and moderator for I-PR, the world’s largest interactive community of public relations and marketing professionals.

“Simply put, they break the ‘one-click rule.’ And some don’t even give the names of the PR people journalists are trying to reach once they click through to wherever that newsroom is buried.”

She offers this example: “The General Motors site is content rich, and they have a pretty exhaustive library—but you can’t find a PR contact number anywhere. That’s

the first reason a journalist visits a website, so don’t force them to drill down for the information they need. Instead, offer a drop down menu labeled ‘Press Room’ or ‘Media Hotline/Contacts’ near the top of your homepage.”

Similarly: “Avoid using separate URLs for press rooms,” advises Ochman. “You’d never know some companies even have a pressroom because they use a completely separate URL that’s not accessible from the main site. Only the incredibly persevering or the invited may visit those pressrooms—God knows why.”

Kay Bransford, author of the Vocus white paper, concurs: “Make it as easy as possible for journalists get to the right information,” she reports. “The best way to do this is to make a link right off your home page that is prominent. Today, 90 percent of the Fortune 50 include a direct link to a site for journalists off of their home page. That’s up from less than 10 percent when initially surveyed in 2001. The faster journalists can get to the information, the better. For example, Alcon—with over \$3 billion in annual revenues and locations all over the globe—includes ‘News Center’ as one of the five options right off its home page.”

2. Archive releases—but don’t cut PR contact names. “Surprisingly, many corporate sites don’t archive their releases,” says Ochman. “Of those who do, many cut contact names and numbers from those releases—that’s not a good idea, since journalists search releases for contact information.”

She returns again to the General Motors example: “They offer a nice list of archived releases—but the contact information has been cut. If a reporter can’t track down contacts from a link on the homepage, the next place they’ll turn to will be an archive of releases.”

Bransford elaborates: “Another benefit of keeping an up-to-date ‘Media Contacts’ area on [your site] is that you can eliminate contact information on your online press releases,” she writes. “[That way] you don’t have to spend your time updating hundreds or even thousands of web pages when a contact leaves or moves to another department.”

3. Don’t provide generic emails. “You may be tempted to offer a generic email address for reporter requests—like pr@mycompany.com,” continues Bransford. “Consider how this type of address makes you feel when you find it on a website ... If a topic is time-sensitive, you may just get passed over. Considering that your function is media relations—ask yourself how well you’re ‘relating’ if you want the media to talk to you through a generic email account.”

4. Don’t force reporters to register. “Not only do
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TOP TEN ITEMS JOURNALISTS LOOK FOR IN ONLINE NEWSROOMS

- Press releases [65%]
- 24-hour contact information [57%]
- Corporate background [52%]
- Photos [28%]
- Media kit to support news releases [27%]
- Past media coverage/clips [22%]
- Corporate financials [19%]
- Executive bios/info [19%]
- Upcoming events [15%]
- Links and resources to related sites [12%]

Source: “Create a Good Impression Online,” a white paper published by Vocus; approximate percentages represent the ratio of media respondents who checked each particular item in an online survey.

► **Pitch These Hot Online Outlets: Top Newspaper Sites**

According to this month's ranking of leading news sites online prepared exclusively for *Media Relations Insider* by comScore Media Metrix in partnership with PRtrak, the following sites are the best bets for PR pros seeking to pitch newspapers with the largest online audiences. Rankings are based on "unique visitors," which denotes the number of home, work and college/university Internet users who visited each site at least once during August:

- Nytimes.com [7,104,000]
- Washingtonpost.com [4,557,000]
- Usatoday.com (3,467,000)
- Latimes.com (1,641,000)
- Boston.com (1,444,000)
- Sfgate.com (1,384,000)
- Chron.com (1,260,000)
- Bizjournals.com (1,234,000)
- Azcentral.com (1,222,000)
- Nypost.com (1,139,000)

► **Another Argument for Media Training—CEOs Must Face the Music**

A recent Burson-Marsteller study entitled "Building CEO Capital 2003" asked 1,040 business influentials whether a company could rebuild a damaged reputation. Initial findings indicate that 97 percent of business influentials believe companies can rebuild a damaged corporate reputation. It just takes time respondents say—about 4 years.

Of all the influentials surveyed, only the business media took exception to the four-year finding, believing that it takes companies slightly less than three years (2.96

years) to rebuild reputations. All respondents indicated successful turnarounds rely—no, depend—on a strong CEO presence.

When Burson-Marsteller first conducted its CEO reputation research in 1997, business influentials estimated that 40% of a company's overall reputation was attributable to its CEO. This figure has grown steadily since, increasing to 45% in 1999, 48% in 2001 and 50% in 2003. More information is available at www.ceogo.com.

► **Tired of PR Bashers? Blogs to the Rescue—Bookmark These PR-Friendly Sites**

Visit the "PR Machine" [<http://prmachine.blogspot.com/>] for uplifting commentary on PR. For example, a recent posting defended a Hill & Knowlton release that had been picked apart because it included a mistake. "It happens," wrote the blogger. "Down folks; back boy!" Also included: a list of eight "fun and insightful" blogs written for or about PR pros, among them FlackLife (www.flacklife.blogspot.com/).

► **Which Companies Get the Most Coveted Coverage—And Is Yours Among Them?**

The following U.S. companies were ranked by the number of articles that contained a mention during the months of June, July and August. Data for this ranking was prepared exclusively for *Media Relations Insider* by Millward Brown Precip [www.mbprecip.com], and was taken from all articles published during this time in the top 25 metro-daily newspapers:

Pharmaceuticals

- Pfizer
- Merck

- Johnson & Johnson
- Eli Lilly
- Wyeth

Healthcare

- Tenet Healthcare
- Aetna
- Cigna
- HCA
- Humana

Telecommunications

- Verizon Communications
- AT&T
- Comcast
- SBC Communications
- BellSouth

Gas and Electric

- Southern
- FirstEnergy
- Exelon
- PG&E Corp.
- Xcel Energy

General Merchandising

- Wal-Mart
- Kmart
- Sears
- J.C. Penney
- Target

► **Experts Score More Ink—Now Yours Can Too**

The National Speakers Association recently released a 12-page white paper entitled, "The Expertise Imperative," which promises to be a valuable tool.

Visit www.nsaspeaker.org to access the free PDF—and download it for your CEO or chief spokesperson to review. The report outlines tips and suggestions for getting yourself or your spokesperson recognized as an "expert" by the media and others.

many websites make their online pressrooms hard to find, but they also make reporters go in and out of password protected areas,” bemoans Ochman. “It’s a widespread practice that makes no sense. A lot of companies require registration for entry—and some take 24 hours to provide

MEDIA-FRIENDLY FEATURES FOR EVERY ONLINE NEWSROOM

“The point of an online press room is to make finding information about your company easy for a reporter,” says **B.L. Ochman**, online marketing strategist and moderator for I-PR, the world’s largest interactive community of public relations and marketing professionals. According to Ochman, companies that understand this have media-friendly press room features including:

- search of the press room by date, topic, keyword, type of file, archive or current
- PDF documents available for download
- statements to the press on breaking issues
- background/public record info on legal issues
- email alert for journalists tracking your news
- links to sites which may contain alternate views
- graphics in three resolutions and download sizes
- product, R&D info with tech specs in lay terms
- forms for reporters to order video and stills
- a list of the company’s key competitors
- customer demographics
- name, address, home and work phone, fax and email of PR staff and key personnel
- calendar of trade shows and industry events
- industry studies/white papers by research firms
- webcasts from live events, speeches and conferences
- details of the company’s good works through charitable foundations
- explanation of the economic impact of the company through lists of jobs created, money spent on suppliers, building, etc. in each state; contracts to top five vendors; total taxes paid; financial contributions to communities

a password. That can get tiresome—it’s a real beef for a journalist working on a story at 4:00 a.m. If you think the reporter is going to wait for a PR person to review their credentials—you’re wrong.”

If you’re worried about the general public getting hold of that contact information, then label your online pressroom with a “For Media Only” header. “If necessary, go one step further,” Ochman advises. “For example, Gateway [www.gateway.com] has the best way to say their PR staff only works with the media: ‘Gateway press contacts are only able to provide assistance for qualified members of the news media. They are not qualified to respond to product or technical support needs, nor donation requests. If you are not a member of the news media, please feel free to visit our pages for Product Service and Support and the Gateway Foundation.’”

One caveat: “If you’re willing to provide cell, pager and home numbers of key PR contacts, you might want to reconsider this point,” she adds. “It’s a catch-22, but you really don’t want the public to have access to your home number—just the press. One solution is to make only this section of your online newsroom password protected. If a journalist wants that level of access, she probably won’t mind the extra step.”

Bransford offers a slightly different take. “For after-hours options or for large companies concerned with the consumer calls that would result by posting contact information [online], consider a pager or an answering service that provides you with a way to screen calls, but allows you to respond in a timely manner,” she reports.

5. Add a newsroom search function. “Most major corporate websites offer a search function,” continues Ochman. “But that doesn’t always extend to the press room, for some reason. That’s a big mistake—there’s absolutely no excuse for not adding a search function to this particular [page]. Journalists might be looking for a particular quote, financial figure or even a PR contact from a past announcement. They shouldn’t have to scroll down and read every archived release to do that.” Specifically, Ochman recommends a search function that can rank searches by keyword, topic, names and dates.

“Journalists specifically mentioned [in our survey] that they want a way to search your press releases,” reports Bransford. Her advice: “Include an archive of all of your news and offer key word or topic searches so they can quickly find what they’re looking for.” Similarly: “If your PR group is fairly large, include a searchable database for specific experts or spokespeople by topic, division or even continent. Do whatever it takes to make it easy for a reporter to get to the person he or she needs to speak with on the first try.” ★

PITCHING TIPS

Is Gotcha Journalism Abating? PR Vets Advise Seeding Trades Now with Turnaround Tales

► *Turnaround stories loom on the horizon, our sources say. Here's how to get yours into the mix.*

Scandal-hungry business reporters have been lurking around every corner ever since the bubble burst. But that may be changing, according to **Michael Hackert**, PR director for **Sun Microsystems**. “We’re seeing hopeful signs that the media is looking to the future—calls are coming in asking about what we’re doing now, instead of focusing on past difficulties,” he says.

Dan Miller, PR manager for **Pacific Healthcare Systems**, agrees: “The press no longer seems to be beating up on companies and bad HMOs—I think it’s just gotten tired,” he says. “Businesses have adjusted their practices, and there’s just less negative sentiment out there. We’re emerging from a flat-line in media tone to more positive press. Any new scandal will change that, but we’re headed in the right direction.”

Here are their tips for taking advantage of this shift in tone—and for ensuring that your company lands its share of ink when this “flood of positive coverage” breaks:

- **Target the trades.** “The mainstream business press is more cynical,” says Miller. “That’s because mainstream readers prefer to read about corporate downfalls than about the good guys reinventing their businesses or contributing to charities,” he explains. “On the other hand, the trades are on your side—for the most part. Sure, they’ll print bad news. But they’re looking for trend pieces about their industry—so they’re usually hungrier to break good news than the national business press, which seems to enjoy riding scandals.”

His point: “Take the trades very seriously,” Miller advises. “Business reporters at bigger papers look to the trades for story ideas and trends—so these smaller players can be your gateway toward better coverage nationwide. For example, Jill Brown with *Managed Care Week* and Steve Larose with *Managed Care Outlook* have the respect of everybody on the beat—including reporters at leading dailies. If you can seed these smaller pubs with positive turnaround stories, chances are they’ll get picked up elsewhere.”

- **Prepare your turnaround story now.** “Negative stories seem to be tapering off,” continues Miller. “In fact, I think we’ll see more positive sentiment in the media

during this last quarter as the economy gains momentum. Right now, everyone wants to write the turnaround story. As soon as we turn that corner, there will be a flood of positive coverage.”

The key, he adds, is to “feed into that trend from the ground up. The trades are scouting around for emerging trends and data that support turnaround claims,” Miller says. “If you can pull those things together in a [pitch] right now, your company might find itself ahead of the news curve.” Similarly, he advises working alongside your industry or trade association to generate data that support your claims.

- **Track qualitative metrics.** “It’s not enough just to be a part of a turnaround story,” concludes Hackert. “You should also draw management’s attention to the part you’re playing in making it happen. To do that, strike a balance in your [measurement dashboard] between quantitative metrics and qualitative metrics like key messages,” he suggests. “Since qualitative metrics drive topline growth, push these front and center. Package them in a way management can understand. For example, we give ours a three-to-four slide presentation covering metrics like tone, key messages, competitive coverage and quality of coverage. That’s it—you don’t want to get too complicated.” ★

MEDIA STRATEGY

Thinking of Hiring a Former Journalist? Read These Tips from Eight Who Crossed Over

► *PR pros agree that former journalists help boost placement and improve media relations—here's how to court your next superstar.*

Journalists everywhere are saying they’re sick of the grind. They’re increasingly discouraged by newsroom politics. They’re tired of questionable ethics and scandals at media monoliths. They’re weary of the rising status of celeb journalists—and, quite frankly, they’ve had enough of the low pay.

In fact, with job satisfaction among reporters at an all-time low, now might be the best time to bring a primed and ready journalist on board. And as you know, reporters appreciate working with PR pros who think like they do—and who understand the day-to-day realities of the job. So how can you leverage all this to your advantage? Seven PR pros who used to work in the media offer these tips for finding, hiring and keeping former reporters on staff:

1. Look beyond bylines. “Prior to my work in PR, I spent eight years as a television news anchor and reporter,” says **Ryan Gerding**, account director for California-based **INK PR**. “My advice is to look to assignment editors. They’re the true gatekeepers in any newsroom. They take most of the PR phone calls and read the most releases.”

In addition: “Photographers are another great resource,” he assures. “In television, they’re the most important part of a news story. Yet they’re largely ignored. Many of them have just as keen of an eye for news and news packaging as reporters.” News producers top Gerding’s list of prospects—particularly for more senior PR positions: “They have the news judgment, as well as extensive experience managing a lot of people,” he says.

2. Give radio a shot. “I’d look to radio,” suggests **Jim Cameron**, president of Darien, Conn.-based **Cameron Communications**. “The best writers don’t come out of print—they come out of radio.”

He should know. Cameron’s drawing on a career in broadcasting and journalism that began in 1967 and which included stints at NBC News, *Inc.* magazine and local and national radio. “The reason is that radio people write their own copy—unlike TV,” he continues. “They have to take the same story and constantly rewrite it to make it fresh [throughout the segment or day]. Even TV news directors like to hire radio people—because they write fast and they really know how to deal with deadlines, since they have newscasts every hour.”

3. Eschew hired guns. “A lot of people bring moonlighting journalists on board,” says Cameron. “I know for a fact that there are CNBC anchors out there freelancing as media trainers—they’re hired guns who role-play interviews. But there is a real risk in [cutting corners] and hiring journalists part time.”

Why? “A good reporter won’t accept these assignments if he’s still on staff somewhere else,” Cameron explains. “There’s a real risk that they might have to report on someone they’re freelancing for.” His advice: “Don’t hire moonlighters—there are too many mixed loyalties. This is a highly dangerous and unethical practice. If you can, bring somebody on full time.”

4. Target media vets. “You can’t convert someone with a savior complex into becoming a PR pro until they’re ready,” believes PR practitioner **Laura Raun**, who worked as an anchor and business reporter for CNN and the *Financial Times*. “Focus on those who don’t feel challenged anymore—like veteran journalists. They’ve been through the savior complex, and may feel they’ve paid their dues. They’ll let you know if they’re not happy.”

“Look for a journalist who has had a long career in

the media, and who is looking to move that career in a new direction,” concurs **Andy Lax**, with the **IMG Group**. “The move should be looked at (by the applicant and agency) as ‘evolutionary.’ The ideal former journalist should look at an agency as an opportunity to ‘broaden’ his skills and experiences. Know-it-all applicants need not apply,” he adds. “A young journalist who has only worked a couple years in the news business is, more often than not, looking at a career change out of necessity, and does not bring depth and understanding to the client.”

5. Network, network, network. “Don’t ever recruit directly out of a newsroom,” warns Raun. “But networking venues like PRSA panels are perfect. Feel the situation out in a casual manner—through relaxed conversations. Show a real interest in your prospect’s job,” she advises. “Ask if they’re happy with their work, if the news business has been rewarding for them and if they’re still getting the same benefits out of it. Be alert to signals that they’re disillusioned or looking for a different challenge.”

“My advice is to attend a meeting of the Society of Professional Journalists, or the Radio-Television News Director’s Association,” adds **Jon R. Weiner**, a former journalist now working as the media relations director for the Health Sciences Campus at the **University of Southern California**. “These groups welcome PR and professionals,” he says. “But perhaps the best place to look is in the pool of reporters or producers that you work with day in and day out. You might be surprised at their answer if you ever ask them, ‘So, how do you like your job?’”

6. Alleviate “sell out” concerns. “Every journalist considering a career in PR is terrified that we will have to sell our soul, compromising the value we all have in common, which is a passion for the truth,” says **Chris Lancette**, a former journalist turned account rep with **Jackson/Spalding**. His advice is to nip this concern in the bud. “For example, I was told in my first interview here that [Jackson/Spalding’s] number one agency value is ‘We tell the truth.’ That resonated.” Similarly: “Journalists, by nature, are very independent types,” he adds. “We need to hear that we’ll have the freedom to get the job done the way we see fit.”

One caveat: “Understand that we’ll always be journalists at heart,” Lancette cautions. “You can take a reporter out of a newsroom, but you can’t take the newsroom out of a reporter. In the end, that will only help you and help your company.”

7. Appeal to journalistic instincts. “Journalists get into the media profession because they see themselves as agents of change,” Cameron asserts. “They may leave because they need to make more money, but they typically still see themselves as righting wrongs.”

His advice: “Leverage this when you talk to reporters—bring them on board as change agents. I left journalism for PR because I had higher access to decision makers,” he illustrates. “As a reporter, I couldn’t really help people fix what was wrong. But in PR, I’m being paid for my advice—and I can point out inequities. So, appeal to the reporters’ instincts in this area when you’re courting them.”

8. Offer an adventure—not just a job. “Make sure you can offer the ‘intellectual exercise’ reporters need,” advises **Steve Capoccia**, a former tech reporter now working as general manager at **LEWIS**, a PR shop specializing in technology. “If you like to talk about image and brand, but rarely comment on news trends in your own industry—then recruit outside of the newsroom. If you value breaking news and operate like a newsroom—with an open office plan in what we call a ‘corporate journalism’ environment—then a reporter can be a good fit. Like other top breeds, smart reporters need plenty of intellectual exercise (fast comprehension of complex issues), attention (rewards and structure) and adventure (breaking news and dealing with a new world everyday).”

9. Emphasize reporting skills. “Many journalists are feeling disenfranchised,” continues Cameron. “They might see the media as changing—becoming more about fluff and infotainment. It seems as if everybody is *USA Today*-ing the news—and nobody has the time to develop stories that deserve attention. Work this angle by telling prospects that their journalistic chops could get a real workout with you. Explain that they’ll be writing white papers, positioning papers and other reporting-oriented [documentation]. Hook them with the fact that they’ll have more time to research, report and dig up adequate resources. They’re not getting that in the newsroom.”

10. Entice with intangibles. “I’d focus on intangibles,” agrees Raun. “For example, veteran journalists may want more control of the process.” Or they might seek more recognition. “In that case, emphasize that they’ll be recognized and rewarded when they bust their butts in PR. Focus on things [that are missing in the newsroom]—like greater respect. Explain that they’ll be respected in your organization for their individual skillsets—not for the outlet they’re currently identified with. The rewards for their hard work will now go to them—not to Mike Bloomberg or some other media titan. Tempt them with more control, better job security, increased decision-making power, greater autonomy and added flexibility.

Gerding elaborates: “The working atmosphere and the working hours [in PR] can sometimes sell

themselves,” he says. “For example, in television news, there is never an 8-5 day. That’s not to say there won’t be long hours and late nights from time to time in the PR business. But when that happens, at least you’ll be working inside—instead of standing in 40 below wind chills doing a live shot to tell viewers it’s cold outside.”

IT’S TRUE: JOURNALISTS ARE NOW PRIMED TO JOIN PR—HERE’S WHY

“Now’s a great time to think about hiring a journalist,” according to **Ryan Gerding**, an account director with California-based **INK PR**. “There are a lot of experienced journalists out there that have been forced out of work because local television news reporters and producers, for example, are getting younger and younger. Because of consolidation, because of the sagging economy, and because of the need to show a strong bottom line, [many outlets and] local stations are looking for young, inexperienced journalists who will work for much less. Why hang on to the 45-year old veteran reporter who’s making \$65,000 when you can hire a kid straight out of journalism school and pay him \$30,000?”

To illustrate, a recent survey by University of Missouri-Columbia Professor Emeritus **Vernon Stone** [visit www.missouri.edu/~jourvs/index.html for details] reveals that 44 percent of people in television newsrooms are in their twenties. The study also found that 57 percent of people in television have seriously thought about leaving the profession. Similarly, survey results indicated that older reporters, producers and managers consider leaving the business much more often than their younger counterparts.

Jon R. Weiner, media relations director at the **University of Southern California** adds this: “There’s no question that the last years have seen an increase in journalists’ disillusionment with their industry. From the *New York Times* scandal to Geraldo Rivera, I see more and more journalists wondering where their ‘noble’ profession is headed. This disillusionment is making many of them reconsider their occupation. What we’re also seeing is that media consolidation is leading to layoffs of experienced journalists—and the younger ones are finding fewer and fewer jobs available to them. That’s making it easier than ever to hire a journalist for a PR shop.”

Finally: “Bring up the rear with monetary incentives,” adds Cameron. “Tell them that they’ll have an expense account, benefits and better pay. They’re not getting that in the newsroom.”

11. Don’t expect a slam dunk. “Don’t expect all journalists to make the transition successfully,” warns Lax. “[PR] life is quite different. Ultimately, the client is in charge of the account, and patience, insight and understanding are important. In journalism, patience is often seen as not being aggressive—an unattractive quality [for reporters].”

Alex Zavistovich, VP of the **Strategic Communications Group**, agrees: “The transition from journalism to PR can be difficult. Journalists are not accustomed to accounting for their time in 15-minute increments. They don’t understand the nuances of account management, if they understand that there is account management at all. So, keep in mind that time management may be a problem. They may be more interested in getting the hit than in understanding how to get a placement that fits your strategy. Similarly, they may be frustrated that some of your customers are unwilling to speak on the record, which they see as hurting their chances of placing a story.”

Lax offers this advice: “Be prepared to mentor the applicant and make sure [he] wants a mentor. As in newsrooms, [PR people] learn by doing.” ★

MEASUREMENT

New Data Implies Ad Value May Be a “Good Metric With a Bad Name”—Here’s How to Use It

► **A controversial study seems to validate ad values as PR metrics—particularly when used to correlate share of discussion with outcomes.**

“A lot of what people read still says the case is closed on ad value equivalency (AVE)—that it’s not a worthwhile PR metric,” says **Angela Jeffrey**, VP of Surveillance Data’s **PRTrak** subsidiary. “I’m raising my hand to say the status quo on this is bunk. Ad value equivalency—what we call media value—is just one metric in a PR person’s arsenal. It can help index and measure results over time or against competitors. It can be used incorrectly, particularly when it’s viewed as an outcome to be valued unto itself. But it’s not the wicked, dishonest metric others make it out to be,” she asserts.

“It provides valuable information, helps predict outcomes and is a valid part of the measurement mix—

CALCULATE SHARE OF DISCUSSION USING AVE—OR IMPRESSIONS

1. Capture coverage of company and competitors
2. Obtain audited media values or impressions, and apply to all coverage
3. Measure tonality of each mention; subtract negative stories to get net favorable media value
4. Divide each company’s net favorable media value or impressions by the total of all competitors to obtain share of discussion.

Source: *PRTrak/SDI*; www.prtrak.com

particularly when it’s used to measure things like prominence,” Jeffrey adds. To support her claim, Jeffrey’s parent company [SDI] spent the last month analyzing close to 4,000 articles to determine whether share of discussion using “media values” [AVE] correlates closer to outcomes than share of discussion using story counts or impressions, as past studies had indicated. Here’s a sneak peak at the results—for more analysis, visit www.prtrak.com:

• **The study:** PRTrak analyzed media coverage for five northeast colleges, comparing 3,700 articles with a survey indicating parental preference for each. “We calculated the share of discussion for each college based on tonality-adjusted story counts, impressions—and media values [AVE],” explains **Gary Getto**, who compiled SDI’s data.

“Stories with negative tone were subtracted from positive or neutral stories to obtain a net positive value,” he continues. “For example, if College A had a net positive score of 370 stories out of the 3,700 total stories, it had a share of discussion based on story counts of 10 percent. Similarly, if the total impressions were 185 million and College A had net positive impressions of 1,850,000, it would have a share of discussion based on impressions of 10 percent. Similar calculations were done for media values.” Getto adds that impressions and media values were culled from the PRTrak database, which is based on audited values from Arbitron, Nielsen, SRDS, comScore Media Metrix and SQAD.

• **The results:** “The study showed that media coverage was highly correlated with parental preference—the higher the share of discussion, the higher the parental preference,” Getto says, stating the seemingly obvious. “However, there were clear differences between the metrics,” he adds—and this is the clincher. (“Share of discussion based on media values provided the best correlation (R=.993) to (parental preference). Share of

discussion based on media values was 12.4 percent better than share of discussion based on impressions (R=.883), and 25.6 percent better than share of discussion based on story counts (R=.791).”

According to Jeffrey, “The study clearly showed that ad value refines correlations—that share of discussion using this metric correlates closer to business outcomes [in this case, parental preference] than article counts or audience impressions. [As a result], it is probably the best measure of ‘prominence’ we have,” she says.

• **What this means to you:** “The point is simply to show that AVE is not all bad,” says Jeffrey. “There are those who want to brand AVE as witchcraft—and those who claim it’s the best metric out there. Neither is true. In fact, AVE has been misused. People have confused the value generated by PR as measured by ad value as an outcome, rather than as just a metric to be compared against true business outcomes. For example, a PR campaign that costs \$10,000 but which generates an AVE of \$50,000 can be mistakenly viewed as a success—even if it fails to generate sales, which was the true objective.”

The upshot: “PR people need to support any and

every effort toward responsible measurement, rather than focusing on any specific metric as being inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad,’” suggests Jeffrey. “As management increasingly questions the value and effectiveness of all marketing and communications tools, failure to measure can quickly become failure to remain relevant. The good news is there is substantial current research that demonstrates the favorable impact public discussion has on business outcomes. Much of this research has used the ‘media value’ metric to provide convincing evidence that PR often deserves a greater allocation of resources.”

In conclusion: “Whether you’ve been convinced that you should begin to use AVE or media value as a metric is far less important than whether you are convinced that you must begin measuring your results—using whatever consistent metric provides the best insights for your business,” says Jeffrey.

Note: MRI will cover ad value equivalency in greater detail next month when Mark Weiner, VP and CEO of Delahaye Medialink Worldwide; Pauline Draper, senior VP at Millward Brown Preciis, Bruce Jeffries-Fox of Jeffries-Fox Associates and others offer tips to help PR pros negotiate the ongoing debate. ★

WHY ALL THE AVE CONTROVERSY? MEASUREMENT EXPERTS SUGGEST COMPETING INTERESTS MIGHT BE TO BLAME

Perhaps no two media evaluation and measurement providers epitomize PR’s polarized perspectives toward ad value equivalency more potently than **Angela Jeffrey**, VP of Surveillance Data’s **PRTrak**, and **Katie Delahaye Paine**, president of **KDPaine & Partners**.

In fact, Paine’s online newsletter, “The Measurement Standard” (www.themeasurementstandard.com) regularly tags PR pros who use AVE as “Measurement Menaces”—a designation Jeffrey resists, to put it mildly.

The debate may not be entirely philosophical, bystanders allow. “As always, consider the source of opinions and breaking research on this topic,” advises **Bruce Jeffries-Fox**, president of **Jeffries-Fox Associates**. “If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. There’s a lot of that going on right now.” Consider this:

• **PRTrak** licenses a web application that delivers media metrics and provides reporting options for both quantitative and qualitative measurement. The application includes audience impressions and a rating scale for tracking metrics like slant, message-point conveyance and story position. Not surprisingly, it also

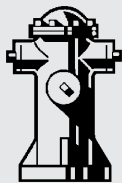
leverages ad value [media value] as a key metric.

• Conversely, **KDPaine & Partners** uses a customized platform that incorporates impressions as a key metric, rather than ad value equivalencies. “Their latest campaign against AVE coincided with the introduction of this service,” says Jeffrey. “I guess there are commercial intentions involved in this on both sides,” she concedes.

Mark Weiner, CEO of **Delahaye Medialink Worldwide**, puts it this way: “I am more of a moderate on this issue—[Paine] and [Jeffrey] are the two extremists. [Jeffrey] has done a lot of work to validate this measure, and [Paine] has come out very strongly against it—in every issue of her newsletter, she’s pointing to somebody who is using AVE.”

“I disagree with using ad values—but I also accept that they may be a necessary evil,” sums **Pauline Draper**, senior VP at **Millward Brown Preciis**. “My advice to PR people is to be aware of where your [measurement] provider is coming from. Everyone will have strong, convincing arguments for or against AVE—and a lot of it will be based on their menu of services.”

FIREPLUG AWARD



Journalist Slips When He Pillories a PR Practitioner for Recalling an Incomplete Release

Let's face it—PR pros can't catch a break. Not only are hard-working practitioners lambasted by the press for minor transgressions, but they're also called to task when rectifying honest mistakes.

That's precisely what happened last month when **Joe Mandese**, acting editor of MediaPost's "Real Media Riffs" e-newsletter [visit www.mediapost.com for archives], took it upon himself in a September 8th piece to pillory a press release distributed by the Magazine Publishers of America (MPA).

According to Gaffney, the MPA "issued a press release about an upcoming event on, of all things, public relations. Moments after transmitting the press announcement, the PR staff of the MPA issued an 'URGENT-RESEND.'" What was wrong with the original version? "It left out the date of the event, which will be held November 11 at the Harvard University Club in New York," he chided. "As for the topic, 'Mastering Magazine PR,' the MPA might want to pay apt attention itself to the pearly wisdoms of keynoter Howard J. Rubenstein."

Here's our take: Kudos to the MPA—better to recall incomplete or incorrect announcements and risk fielding misguided potshots from the press than to face an empty house at your event. As **Patrick McSweeney**, senior account exec for Florida-based **St. John & Partners PR**, said in these pages last month: "Don't be afraid to recall—reporters realize mistakes happen." Apparently not Mr. Gaffney. That's why this month's Fireplug Award goes to him—not the MPA.

COMING UP IN FUTURE ISSUES:

- Three Ways to Save Your CEO Valuable Time During Media Interviews
- How to Get What You Want from Reporters—Without Coming Across Like a Control Freak
- Online Monitoring Tools Cutting Prices—How to Pick the Right Service on the Cheap
- PR Vets Share Why—And How—They Use Ad Value Equivalency to Prove PR Value to C-Suites

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