



HOW TO PITCH THE MEDIA LIKE A PRO

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Introduction

If you've purchased this book, you most likely understand the power of publicity coverage. Publicity lends credibility to your business. Landing a placement on a national show such as *Oprah* can catapult your business into a multi-million dollar operation. Securing publicity is not easy and requires a lot of time, patience and persistence. By understanding what publicity is and how it works, you can position yourself as a go-to expert and a mediagenic personality.

What is publicity?

Publicity is spreading the word about you and your product/service through the media. The goal of your campaign is to land media coverage on TV, radio, print or online in the form of an interview, profile, commentary, anecdote, product coverage, book excerpt, byline writing opportunity or guest blog post.

Why do some people refer to it as public relations?

Public Relations is comprised of other elements such as crisis communications, event planning, and annual reports.

Why do I need publicity?

Publicity is objective coverage of your business/product/service and lends credibility. If a reporter chooses to do a story on your business, the public perception is that it *must* be noteworthy. People flip by print advertisements and change the channel during commercials, but it's harder to ignore media coverage when it's surrounded by a story. Publicity is primarily about exposure and becoming widely recognized.

Are you ready for Publicity?

Before launching into your publicity campaign, understand what is required. Many people start campaigns and are easily disappointed with the results. Set your expectations properly in the beginning by following these rules:

Publicity Takes Time

Expect coverage in 6 months, not 6 weeks. Publicity should be an ongoing effort and not a short campaign.

The Media has No Obligation to Cover your Story

If the media is unresponsive to your pitches it's because of *your pitch* and not because of them. No matter how wonderful you know your business is, it's your job to convince the media why it's newsworthy.

The Media are Inundated with Pitches

Larger outlets may receive thousands of calls/emails a day. Even local outlets get hundreds. Many of these pitches are poor, not relevant, and just plain awful. Be respectful of their time.

Be Prepared for Last Minute Interviews

You may get a call from an editor at 4:00pm from a national magazine wanting quotes for a story due by 4:30pm. A TV show may expect you to fly out and be on air the next day. If you're not willing to 'drop everything' for opportunities, then publicity is not for you.

Treat the Media like a Boss

In any coverage situation, the media is in control. They can change interview times. They can decide not to use your quotes or your product in a feature. Their job is to put out the best possible stories and they are not concerned whether your business gets exposure. Do not be difficult. Cater to their needs. Understand if you don't fit into a particular story. If you want to control a story or insure your product is featured, then you must use paid advertising.

You Have No Control Over What they Say

You may be featured along with 3-4 of your competitors in a story. They may do a review that turns out unfavorable. You cannot proofread an article before it goes to print. You can't force them to include your biography or complete product information. Understand that free publicity means zero control over how they will portray you and your business.

Become Someone the Media will Love

Put time and effort into media training. The media want guests with charisma! Practice providing information in a clear, concise and compelling manner. Your goal is to become a go-to expert, study other correspondents or regular guests. Listen to their sound bites and watch their presence. How can you infuse your unique qualities into becoming a guest the media will love?

Creating a Publicity Plan

The most important element of a publicity plan is determining *what you want*. Is your goal to sell products? Book more speaking engagements? Become a nationally-recognized, quotable expert? Determine this up front so you can craft your press materials, pitches, sound bites and overall message to fit this goal.

Your plan should include the following elements:

1. Identifying angles or 'hooks'
2. Writing and designing your press materials
3. Creating media lists with appropriate outlets/contacts
4. Pitching and follow up schedule
5. Leveraging your exposure

If your business includes a product, understand the following statement:

The Media Does Not Want to Interview a Product, they Want to Interview a Person

This poses a challenge for product-based businesses, as your ultimate goal is to sell your tangible item. While there are certainly product features, gift guides, fashion spreads and product reviewers that provide plenty of opportunities to pitch, you must also pay attention to the ‘human’ element that the media craves in a story. The media doesn’t want to know about your product, but rather the story *behind* the product. If you open yourself to this type of thinking, you will substantially increase your media opportunities.

Your publicity plan should be two-fold. The first should be to position yourself as a go-to expert in your field. If you’re an author or a professional speaker, this comes natural. If not, you may have to do a little digging into your personal branding. Are you an expert in apparel or garment making? Do you have a unique back story that inspired your business? Are you donating proceeds of your business to charity? Look for that human element when pitching your product.

The second is about pitching your product. Most important here is to be timely. Understand how far ahead media outlets work so your product is relevant for a story. Both the ‘Interview Pitch’ and the ‘Product Pitch’ are covered in-depth below.

Identify your Angles

Identifying angles is all about discovering what is newsworthy about your business. Why should the media care enough to cover your business?

Start thinking like a reporter. Pay attention to the stories in the outlets you want to target. Constantly evaluate what angles you are pitching and if they are truly relevant.

Many business owners are caught up in telling a ‘business story’ and not a ‘media story.’ As mentioned before, reporters don’t care how great your product is – they care about the *newsworthy elements*.

Here’s an example:

The Business Story: A toy designer created an educational learning game to teach children mathematics using the exciting and engaging concept of car racing.

The Media Story: A father and entrepreneur developed a board game to provide an engaging tool for his son to learn mathematics.

See the difference? By extracting the ‘human’ element of the story and adding an emotional component, it now becomes a much more interesting angle. Reporters know that this will tug the heartstrings of audiences and the product will still receive plenty of exposure.

Challenge yourself to extract the newsworthy elements of your business. Here's a list of angles that work best:

- Look at current hot topics and how your business fits in (Economy is a hot topic – are you thriving? Did you start a business because you were laid off? Does your business solve a problem for those that are struggling?)
- Study a reporter's story and offer a unique perspective or new development
- Partner with other businesses and pitch a 'trend' topic (three moms in a specific geographic area launch thriving businesses)
- How-To Pitches - share your unique wisdom with the audience with industry 'tips'
- Use statistics from various organizations (make sure to attribute) and how they are relevant to you and your business

Additional angles:

- Opening a new business
- Launching a new product/offering a new service
- Expansion/growth
- Award announcements
- Promoting a special event
- Announcing a charity partnership
- Announcing a business partnership
- New website/blog
- New name/logo/brand image
- Staff promotion announcements
- Joining an organization
- Speaking at an event
- New client announcements

Drafting your Press Materials

The media world is changing, and reporters are relying less and less on press releases and newswires for stories. However; press releases are still widely accepted by some media outlets. They also still produce benefits in increasing your SEO ranking through newswires.

As a publicity specialist, I've achieved the greatest results from using pitch letters in lieu of press releases. I still write formal press releases and design press kits for clients, but rarely do I send them to a reporter unless they request.

The pitch letter is what I use to successfully get coverage for clients. The reason? A pitch letter is always *customized*. It lets the reporter know you are reaching out to them personally and not sending a mass email to hundreds of reporters. It tells them that you understand what they cover, and what they've recently covered. Simply put, you can't pitch *Oprah* and your local news station the same way.

The Interview Pitch™

I started what I refer to as the **The Interview Pitch™** a few years ago. This pitch lets the reporter ‘experience’ what it would be like if you were featured on their show or in their article.

The Interview Pitch™ has four parts:

Part 1: Tell the reporter who you are and why you are qualified as the go-to expert for a particular industry.

Part 2: Let them know you want to contribute in the form of an interview, profile, byline writing opportunity or guest blogging opportunity (dependent on the outlet). If there is a particular section or segment that you know you’re a great fit for – mention it!

Part 3: List 5-6 topics you can discuss in bullet format. Make certain the topics are timely and relevant.

Part 4: Write a brief biography that communicates your expertise. List your website at the bottom and any other pertinent contact information.

The Interview Pitch™ Example *(names and information are fictitious)*

Dear <<reporter name>>,

Eco-Fashion Expert Gina Tall is dedicated to teaching others to ‘be aware of what they wear.’ Gina started as a small, home-based designer of bamboo fiber accessories and quickly grew her sustainable fashion empire to include a designer jean and t-shirt line and recognition by top media networks. Today, Gina appears on the Martha Stewart Show, Rachael Ray Show, and has been featured in *Glamour* and the *New York Times*.

Gina would love to provide commentary to <insert media outlet name> on any current eco-fashion features or on any of the following themes. Please contact her at <<phone>> or <<email>> to set up an interview. Thank you for your consideration!

Sustainable Celebs - Recreating your favorite celebrity looks eco-style

Eco-Chic on the Cheap – save the earth without spending a bundle. The best eco-friendly fashion picks at the best price.

Eco-Designer Spotlight – Gina interviews the most fashion-forward eco designers on the market

Ethics and Fashion – top tips to remaining ethical without sacrificing style

Holiday Fashion – Eco-Style – how to dress for <<insert closest holiday>> in eco-friendly and fashionable looks

ABOUT GINA

Gina Tall is the founder and designer of Eco Pop, a stylish and wearable jean and t-shirt line for today's woman. She currently appears as a fashion/style expert on Martha Stewart Living and the Rachael Ray Show. She is also the host of radio show EcoGals broadcast in New York City. Tall is a nationally-recognized eco-fashion expert and has been featured in hundreds of national and local outlets spreading the message of fashion ethics.

Website: <<insert address>>

The Product Pitch

Product pitches make your product/service/business the focus. The product pitch follows a similar 4-part format:

Part 1: Tell the reporter who you are and what your product is and why it's interesting enough to fit into this particular outlet. Is it for review? Is it for a 'hot picks' section?

Part 2: Include price information, where they can see photos (do NOT attach), and where the product is available for purchase. Be aware that many local outlets only cover locally-available products (not those that are only web-based). If you are willing to send samples, mention it here. Be aware that samples may be requested to arrive overnight. Also include contact information here.

Part 3: Let them know if you're willing to offer a discount code or a giveaway to their readers

Part 4: Write a brief company biography.

The Product Pitch Example *(names and information are fictitious)*

Dear <<reporter name>>,

Please consider BeautyBelle, an eco-friendly, chemical free shampoo line for possible inclusion in your 'Hot Buy's' section. BeautyBelle recently won the *Salon Best Award* and provides an affordable means to wash your locks while remaining safe and organic.

BeautyBelle is available online at <<insert website>>. An 8oz bottle is available for \$3.99 and available scents are Orange Oasis and Lemony Zest. Hi-resolution photos, additional product information and samples are available upon request. Please contact BeautyBelle publicist Melissa Cassera at <<phone>> or <<email>> to set up an interview. Thank you for your consideration!

We would also love to provide your readers with a 10% discount using order code BB100.

About BeautyBelle

BeautyBelle is about living life clean and loving it. We provide natural products that are environmentally safe and make you feel beautiful and pampered. BeautyBelle donates 5% of all proceeds to the Eco foundation. We are also committed to various environmental efforts such as the Safe Cosmetics Campaign and Eco-Beauty unites. More information can be found on our website at <<insert address>>

How to Write a Press Release

Your press release can be repetitive of the information included within your pitch letter. Its purpose is to provide additional information on your business/company/product and provides a concise format for uploading to newswires or free press release engines.

If you are unfamiliar with the tone of a press release, visit www.prnewswire.com or www.prweb.com and view the samples. A great tool can also be found at <http://www.bookmarketingworks.com/InstructionsforPressRelease.htm>

Standard formatting for a press release is on 8.5" by 11" paper in a readable font (Times New Roman or Arial work well). The top of your press release should read like this:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

<Contact Name>

<Phone>

<Fax>

<Email>

<Website>

Headline (Bold type – slightly larger font)

CITY, State, Date – (example BLACKWOOD, New Jersey, January 1, 2000) – Widget Company announced today....

Make sure the first paragraph includes the Who, What, When, Where and Why

**QUICK TIP - How to Develop Headlines

Headlines are tricky and take practice. Check out magazine and newspaper headlines and clip the ones you like best. You'll begin to get a feel for how they are written. Brainstorm various headlines and jot down each one. Start to connect words together to determine the best fit. Use your headline clip file for inspiration!

Other tips include:

- Use the word (-more-) at the end of the page if your press release continues onto a second page
- Make sure to note your business name, headline and date at the top of the second page in case the two pages get separated
- Use the symbols ### at the end of the page so the editor is aware the release is finished

The release should also include a quote from the business owner or another expert on the subject to increase the chances of publication.

How To Create a Press Kit

Press kits are highly unique, and the components really depend on your individual business.

There are two types of press kits:

Hard Copy Press Kits - a printed press kit usually contained within a folder or some type of packaging. These are sometimes requested by the media, often required for trade shows, and can be given to customers. Be sure the folder is customized with your company name, or that you print a sticker to include on the front with your company name.

Electronic Press Kits- a press kit saved into a PDF format (much like an electronic brochure) or a dedicated page on your website featuring news coverage, press releases, images, etc.

I would suggest if you're making a press kit to make BOTH and electronic kit and a hard copy kit to prepare for any situation. For both press kits, keep a consistent theme and 'look.' If you're good with graphics, you can design one yourself. You can even use Microsoft Word to play around and design something professional. Or you can always enlist the help of a graphic designer to put something together if you have the budget.

Your press kit should include the following (if applicable):

- Brief introduction with **contact information**
- Biography of owner(s) with headshot(s)
- Current press release
- Company background
- Hi-res product images (if applicable) on CD or DVD
- 'As Seen In' and a listing of all the media placements you've achieved (logos of those media outlets work as well) and can be listed all on one page
- Business card
- Catalog
- Line Sheet (for multiple products only)
- Samples

Your press kit can also include:

- DVD, Reel or B-Roll
- Sample interview questions
- Testimonials/reviews
- Book excerpts (for authors)
- Hard copy headshot (8.5" by 11")
- Marketing piece (brochure/postcard)
- Reprints of articles you've appeared in

Frequently Asked Press Kit Questions

1. Is PDF the only type of file you should use to create electronic press kits?

I'm sure PDF is not the *only* type of file - but it is a universally acceptable file, and I personally prefer to use it. I think it's important to 'lock' your content into a specific format, and PDF allows you to do that. If the file is too large to email, you can always 'zip' the file with a program like WinZip. You can create PDF files for free by downloading software such as www.primopdf.com

2. How often do reporters ask you for an electronic press kit?

Rarely unless it's a larger media outlet such as Rachael Ray or Oprah.

3. I want to build a media page on my website - how do I do it?

Unfortunately I'm not too savvy with web design, so I can't give HTML codes or even basic knowledge on designing pages. I believe you have three options:

- Have your web designer build you a page. Ask them to include all press releases, press kit, photos, and media coverage (reprints of articles and video clips). If you're going to invest in a designer - you should go all out to design a useful media page to attract reporters.
- If you use content management for your website - you should easily be able to copy/paste in your current press releases and attach PDF's and images for the media to download.
- Use an external site to house your press page and link to your website. PR Newswire offers 'Media Room' - I'm not sure how expensive that service is.

What are the most important components?

1. Professional photos of you and your products, ready to email. These photos should be professionally taken, and may include a headshot, 3/4 body shot, product photos, book cover, logo, etc. Photos should be at least 300dpi and either in jpeg, tiff, eps or pdf format.
2. Well written biography. Have a brief version (limit to one paragraph) and a longer, more eloquent version. Reporters will need the brief version to include in a piece, or may request the longer version for additional background information.

3. Sample interview questions. These can help guide reporters (if they ask) - but more importantly - help you prepare for possible questions and craft clear, concise, natural-sounding answers.
4. Invest in B-Roll. What is B-Roll? B-Roll is video footage (usually without narration) that broadcast media uses to supplement a story. B-Roll can be cuts of press interviews, footage of you speaking or giving a presentation, footage of your store or products, etc. Contact a digital video editing company for information and prices. If you're pitching well-known shows such as Oprah, CNN, or Rachael Ray - they will request this footage if you're booked.
5. Prepare sound bites or talking points for interviews. Have at least 10 prepared and then stories, statistics, information to back up each point.
6. Demo reel. This is not relevant until you've built some media coverage. A demo reel is edited by a professional video services professional into a 3-minute story including various clips of your media interviews. Begin collecting DVD copies of all of your television coverage to create your reel. Reels prove that you are media-savvy!

How to Build Media Lists

Now that your pitch letter and press materials are ready, how do you spread the word to appropriate media outlets? There are a few ways to find the appropriate contacts you need.

Media Query Sources

There are several sources available that reporters use to post queries looking for expert sources or products for review. I can only vouch for the sources below, as I use them myself in my publicity firm. If you come across other sources that are not listed below, they could certainly be reputable and worth checking into.

Remember that you are competing against hundreds of responses when responding to 'query' based services. Follow these guidelines when responding:

- Do not reply to something if you don't fit the criteria. If you feel you're stretching to fit, forget it. Reporters are easily turned-off by off-topic pitches or by those that aren't equipped to help with the story. Don't suggest another angle or topic. Stick to the query.
- Respond quickly. You are competing against hundreds of other responses. Some reporters choose quickly and turn off the query
- Pay attention to instructions in the query. Include all of the information the reporter asks for, including the subject line

- If there is no direction for the subject line, a general rule of thumb is to write the name of the query service and then the query title. Example: HARO – Best Gifts Under \$100
- Personalize your response. It's fine to take elements from your pitch letter, but make sure it really fits the query. The more effort you put in to craft a great response, the more responses you will get.
- Pay attention to geographic guidelines for the story. If they only want sources in New Jersey, don't pitch if you're in California.
- If the reporter asks for actual tips or quotes to be sent with the pitch, send them. I would recommend in this circumstance to ask if they can notify you if they plan to use the quotes or tips.
- Copy and paste the query into the body of the email (at the bottom). This way if reporters have multiple queries, they know which one you're referring to.
- Don't repost the queries anywhere else. This is a violation of the rules of these services.
- Keep pitches short and to the point. It's fine to provide a link to your online press page so they can view additional information if needed.
- Short and to the point **does not mean** just sending your web address or saying 'call me.' Give them a reason to choose you through the written response.
- Do not harvest reporter emails for future use. It's against the rules to build a media list using the names and emails from these sources.

Sources I Personally Recommend

HARO - Helpareporter.com

Free service providing queries in the form of an email three times per day, Monday through Friday. Sign up at the URL above and read the 'Five Rules of HARO' before attempting to pitch.

Profnet

Paid service through PR Newswire where leads are also emailed to you throughout the day (you set the notifications for frequency). They also have an expert page function where you can list yourself as an expert in a particular area and reporters can search for you.

Savor the Success

Boutique women's network (sorry guys!) offering exclusive leads to members. Many members are also radio show hosts or magazine editors and often search the site for people to profile.

Media Databases

Media databases make your job easy when looking for journalist contact information. Simply type in the particular outlet name and you'll immediately get a list of almost every producer, reporter, editor, program director and blogger.

Media databases are also expensive and sometimes not an option for small business owners or even freelance publicists. Here's a breakdown of each database including my opinion.

Vocus

The best (again – in my opinion) database out there with the most comprehensive and accurate information. It's offered in an efficient and easy-to-use format and has excellent reporting capabilities. It's also the most expensive of the choices below.

Cision

Cision is quite accurate and comprehensive. Also easy to use with excellent reporting. I find Vocus and Cision to be quite close in benefits. I personally prefer Vocus, but Cision is also a wonderful service.

Media Atlas

A service by PR Newswire and powered by Vocus (so you receive the same efficient format). This is a more affordable option and they allow you to pay in quarterly payments. The databases are not nearly as accurate and up to date as Vocus and Cision, but it's a great alternative for those on a small budget.

Gift List Media

Not a full database – but offers a Holiday and Spring issue featuring a cross between a database and a leads service. Great for product-based businesses, it offers the deadlines, accurate contact information and pitching profiles for all the national magazines, and many national and regional TV, radio and newspaper outlets. They also have a web and blog database for a separate charge. I've found this service to be invaluable when pitching products – and very affordable.

Media Bistro

Not a full database or query service, Media Bistro offers a great source for those on a very limited budget. For under \$100 per year, you can become an Avant Guild member and have access to mastheads of major magazines. They also have a 'How to Pitch' feature, where they interview a top editor or writer on how they like to be pitched.

Do-It-Yourself Lists

If you want to take a stab at creating your own list, here's an easy and practical plan.

1. Choose 50 media outlets you want coverage in.
2. Write the outlets down in an excel spreadsheet.
3. Visit the website for each outlet. Look for the appropriate section and find the right contact. Often contacts can be found under the 'About Us' or 'Contact Us' section.
4. If you're having trouble locating an email or phone number for the particular contact, try Google and type in the person's name, outlet name and then the word email. Sometimes it will come up.
5. You can always call the outlet directly and ask who the appropriate person is for sending information on your particular topic.

How to Send Your Pitch

Now that you've compiled your media list, you're ready to start pitching. Well...maybe.

Before you set out, really examine your list to make sure you're pitching the appropriate contact. NEVER send a mass email with the same pitch letter to several contacts. If you use BCC, or mail merge – they know it's not personalized and it will result in little, if any, coverage. Look for the contact that covers your beat. A beat reporter is someone that covers a very specific area.

Each pitch should be personalized to that contact. Do a Google search on them before sending the pitch. Is there anything clever you can include? A comment on a recent story?

Remember to tell them exactly why you are contacting them and where you would fit in that particular outlet.

If you are responding to a query, follow the guidelines above.

****QUICK TIP – Build a Relationship with the Media**

Another option is just to introduce yourself to the reporter by email or a quick phone call. Don't bother pitching anything but let them know you follow their coverage and if they need anything at all in your particular industry to contact you. Consider it the equivalent to a handshake without a hidden agenda. You're starting to build a relationship.

Methods of Pitching:

Email

Email is the preferred method for most media to receive news (unless otherwise noted).

The email subject line should include:

- If applicable, include the section or segment you're pitching (example: Mother's Day Gift Idea or Hot Picks Section).
- If pitching a product, list the name of the product in the subject line next to the appropriate section.
- If it's an expert pitch, try something like 'Eco-Fashion Expert Provides Insight on Sustainable and Affordable Style'
- You can also use your press release headline as the subject line or something catchy like 'Why Milk Can Save Your Life' – grab their attention and want to read more.

Use the body of the email for The Interview Pitch™ or for the product pitch letter. Customize it to your recipient. Don't send attachments – they often drive your message right into the spam folder or reporters delete them because they clutter the inbox.

Phone

I often use phone only for follow-up or if I have an established relationship with the reporter. I do not use it for an initial pitch unless I know ahead of time through my media database or my personal efforts that the contact prefers to be reached by phone.

Before you pick up the phone to call a reporter, write a 15-30 second pitch. This is often the most time you will have if you're lucky enough to catch them on the phone. Make it count.

Clearly state your name and where you're calling from. Add a quick sound bite and ask if they need more information than what you provided, samples, etc. (Example – this is Gina Tall owner of EcoPop and expert on providing affordable and eco-friendly solutions for fashion forward folks. I'd love to contribute to <<insert media name>> and wanted to see if you had questions on the information I sent over.) Use the same 15-30 second pitch for voicemail and clearly state your phone number. Also send a follow-up email if leaving a voicemail.

Watch your pitch timing. Mornings usually work better for reporters than afternoons, when they are likely on deadline. Morning show producers often get in early and leave early, so be mindful of their time. Also don't call when the show is live. If they answer and it's not a good time, ask when they would prefer to be contacted. Do not pester the reporter by phone!

Mail

If sending by regular mail, include the pitch letter as your cover letter and send along with your press kit. You can also include samples. Mail is best for product samples – though I would try and connect with the reporter first by email or phone and let them *request* the sample.

Fax

Never send unsolicited faxes (I believe it's actually illegal now to do so). Only fax your pitch letter and press materials if asked.

Methods of Pitching Specific Outlets

Pitching to Magazine Editors

Next to being on Oprah – the second most requested outlet for media coverage is national magazines. Magazines receive thousands of submissions per day – how do you stand out above the pack?

Make it Timely

Realize that magazine editors are working 4-5 months ahead of the issue date. Pitching Valentine's Day stories in December won't work. Pitching summer-themed stories in December will. Pitch your holiday stories around June.

Do Your Research

Have you read the magazine? Understand the sections and where you can fit in. Check the backlog to make sure a similar story wasn't already covered.

Choose Which Product to Send

Editors want something statement-making and unique. Your product must photograph exceptionally!

Make sure your website is up to date with plenty of products to choose from. You may also want to include a brochure or postcard with additional items, just in case another product may be a better fit.

Who to Pitch

Look at the magazine and tell them where your item would fit. Do they have a 'hot picks' section, a career section, a beauty section, a fashion section, a parenting section? Pitch the section that the item would fit and specifically tell the editor you want to be considered for that section. Always send your pitch to a specific person.

'Market' editors are typically good choices for fashion magazines as they tend to make the picks and fit items into a trend page.

Assistant editors are another good choice as they receive less pitches and samples. If they like your product, they may help champion to the decision makers.

What to Say

Use a clear, concise and catchy description of the product and why it's newsworthy. Offer links to your website where they can view photos and product descriptions. Mention you have samples available upon request. (outlined in the product pitch above!)

Appearance Counts

High quality product photos will yield a better response than poorly-lit, blurry photos. Invest in a professional photographer! Make sure your website, packaging, email signature, business card and marketing materials all reflect the same branding and communicate your unique message.

Follow Up

Follow up about a week after the initial pitch to see if they editor needs anything additional. I often follow up by phone and then send another email. Don't be offended if they don't respond, and don't continue following up about the same pitch. Think about how you can tweak your pitch - a new section you can fit into, a new product that may work better - and try again in another few weeks.

Sending Samples

Samples are not returned and don't guarantee coverage. You may only want to send samples upon request. If you're planning to send unsolicited samples, include professional packaging and a handwritten note. Another idea is to host a media event at your store, salon, or a place that carries your product. Invite the media to experience your product – sampling, fashion show, beauty treatment, book reading, software demo, etc.

Don't Forget Freelancers

Magazine's often use freelance writers that are responsible to find the expert sources or products to feature. Google the writer's name that corresponds with your industry and see if they have a website with contact information. Send them a pitch. Larger media databases like Vocus and Cision also list freelance writers.

Don't Forget Online Components

Check out their web edition. Many times they have exclusive web content or the editors have blogs. Spend some time searching for how you can contribute online. Many times the expert sources or products featured online appear in the print edition in the future.

What to Expect When Working with a Magazine

- They will often expect you to be available last minute for interviews and to provide quotes.
- You may have to overnight or messenger products for a photo shoot happening the next day.
- Don't expect product samples to be returned.

- If you are loaning something expensive to be photographed that needs to be returned, keep a log of your contacts.
- Prepare for a photo shoot. Ask if hair/makeup and wardrobe will be provided and what the expectation is if not.
- They may want to conduct the interview in your place of business. If you don't have a place of business, offer to meet at a coffee shop or other public space.
- Most interviews will be conducted by phone.

Pitching Newspaper Editors

Newspapers have a different tone than magazines, and you'll want to mirror that tone when pitching a story. Read articles in the appropriate section of the paper to get a feel for how they cover stories and hone your pitch to match it.

Shift Focus Locally

Many newspapers work locally and are very interested in covering local stories, especially human interest stories, local business profiles, and trend stories with a local focus.

Understand the Scope of the Paper

Some newspapers are very limited geographically. Take a look at what area they cover and realize they do not step outside that area.

Be Aware of Deadlines

Do not bother an editor when they are on deadline.

Be Aware of Who to Pitch

Newspapers can be tricky in determining who to pitch. Smaller papers often require all pitches to go to the editor who then assigns them to individual reporters. Larger papers you want to look for the right beat reporter or even a columnist. Never just send a pitch to the top editor. If you are feeling confused, call the newspaper front desk and ask for the appropriate contact.

What to Expect When Working with a Newspaper

Newspaper interviews are conducted by phone or in-person. If you're a home-based business, you can either invite the reporter to your home or meet at a coffee shop or local venue.

Most newspapers will want photos to accompany the story and often send the staff photographer (even if the interview is done by phone). This is simple with a brick and mortar business, but a home-based or web-based business will need to make arrangements to shoot outdoors or get permission to shoot indoors at a public place. If a photo shoot is not an option, offer to send hi-resolution photos of your product, business and your corporate headshot.

Phone Interviews

Use a land line to avoid any break-up in the connection and disable your call waiting (not as important as radio interviews - but still a good habit to start). Keep all of your company information in front of you, even if you think you have it all memorized. Reporters will ask when the company started, how many employees, type of clients served. They will ask about your background (having the dates and former positions written down is helpful). Write down key points that you want to get across in the interview.

After the interview, send an email to the reporter with the correct spelling of your name, company name, product name and any other imperative information to avoid spelling errors in the article.

Ask the reporter if they have an anticipated date that the article will run and if you can obtain a copy.

In-Person Interviews

Look your best - although the interview is not televised, you still want to project a professional image. Avoid clothing with busy patterns if you're doing a photo shoot. Clean your office/place of business and have products ready to show and be photographed. Have marketing material ready to leave with the reporter so they can fact-check post interview.

If you're meeting in a public area, choose somewhere that's quiet. Get there early to find a place to sit and make sure there is parking. Ask the owner of the establishment if they will allow photos to be taken in their place of business before scheduling the staff photographer.

Rehearse and memorize sample interview questions. In-person you can't read off of a paper like a phone interview. Keep your marketing material handy and even bring a copy of your resume to refer to past experience. If you don't remember a date or person/company name, let the reporter know you will email it to them that day.

Additional tips:

- Newspapers work on a tight deadline - expect the interview to be completed within 24-48 hours of initial contact.
- Always tell the truth.

- Never speak 'off the record.'
- Never say 'no comment.'
- Ask them to repeat or rephrase the question if you don't understand.
- Be positive. You got the interview because you are an expert. Speak to the reporter as confidently as you would a client.
- Think of 2-3 quotes on your industry to work into the interview. Reporters appreciate good quotes.
- Most newspapers have policies not to show the article before it prints. Some will allow you to review your quotes.
- Don't badmouth the competition or say anything you wouldn't want to be public. This is a representation of your business.
- Think of case studies/examples to prove your points.
- Don't mention your client's name(s) unless you have their permission.

Radio Pitching

Radio is often touted as the easiest place to get coverage' – but only if you know how to pitch. Producers are always searching to credible experts to feature that tie in with current topics.

Seek out National and Local News Talk Stations

For public radio stations with in-depth news coverage, contact the reporter that covers your area, or beat. You can also seek out the assignment editor or news director

Look for Morning Shows on Music Format Stations

Direct morning show pitches to producers or guest bookers (if applicable). Make sure your topic fits within the morning show – know your audience.

Localize Your Pitch

Tell them why your topic is relevant to their local audience.

Try the Expert Angle for Products

Radio is an excellent 'excuse' to use your two-fold campaign. Since there is no visual for your product, work the expert angle.

Give Products to Hosts or Participate in Contests

Restaurants do this frequently – bring in breakfast for the morning show hosts hoping they will give a testimonial for how delicious the food is. Some jewelers and florists may donate contest prizes to be part of a 'bit.' Although there is no guarantee your product will be mentioned, or mentioned favorably, it's a risk you can decide to take if the potential exposure is high.

What to Expect With a Radio Interview

- Get the call-in information and ask what time (pay special attention to time zone and if they need you to call in 5 minutes ahead). Many times they will ask for your phone number and call out to you.
- Use a land line - no cell phones. Make sure that distractions (doorbells, pets) are taken care of. Choose a quiet room.
- Disable your call waiting.
- Put your mobile phone on silent and turn off the volume on your computer.
- Keep a glass of water at your desk in case your throat gets dry from talking.
- Prepare talking points ahead of time. Create a one-sheet, or one page document often used by authors and artists to communicate their most important information in a clear concise format. Put one together with a short introduction, bullet 5-6 talking points, and a brief bio. If you have a product, mention the product name, the cost and where to buy.
- Give your contact your name, correct pronunciation, title and company name before the interview.
- Practice answering questions beforehand, record yourself if possible and play back
- Relax. If you're asked a question and don't understand right away ask them to repeat the question or say 'Thank you for that question' to give yourself a second to compose
- Don't Make a Hard Sell. Especially for live interviews, make no more than two mentions of your product during the interview. A great time to bring it up is at the end of the interview – and often the host will bring it up for you.

Television Pitching

Television is possibly the most coveted media outlet among clients. Audiences that watch the top shows are often a highly coveted demographic. As mentioned earlier – a spot on Oprah could elevate your business to heights you never thought imaginable.

Pitch the Right Producer

Identifying contacts is very difficult with television as they don't often make this information public. This is when it pays to have the larger media databases such as Vocus to obtain this privileged information. Some of the high rated morning shows have a place right on their website where you can enter your information to get on the show. They do read these pitches!

If you're pitching local news, check the website or call the station to get the appropriate contact. You'll want to reach out to the reporter covering your particular beat.

Visualize Your Segment

Be very specific as to how a segment would look if you were to appear. If you're showcasing fashion or accessories, will you provide models? Will you perform a cooking demonstration or a craft demonstration? Tell them exactly how the segment will play out and why an audience would be interested.

Looking comfortable on camera takes preparation, even for someone who spent their life performing in front of thousands of people. Follow these tips to appear comfortable and confident in your next television interview.

What to Expect with a Television Interview

How to Dress

- Avoid busy patterns
- Avoid white (it washes most people out)
- Try solid, basic colors (navy blue, hunter green)
- Wear minimal jewelry - no long earrings that could brush the microphone or bracelets that bang together
- Glasses often cause glare, try contact lenses instead
- Adjust your clothing before the camera rolls, tuck your blouse in tight - men, try sitting on the back of your coat to avoid the shoulders from raising up
- If the shot is full body, have matching socks, polished footwear, and pantyhose
- Keep makeup and hair clean and natural. Bring makeup (especially powder), a hairbrush, hairspray and lotion. Harsh studio lighting often wash out your face - put some color on your eyes, cheeks or lips (but don't go overboard). Men should be clean shaven. Have your hair trimmed. Keep nails short with clear polish.
- Avoid clothing with logos (unless you are promoting your own clothing brand)
- Bring a few different shirts or outfits with you in case the producer wants you to change

Know How You Look on Camera

Tape a mock-interview at home on your personal video camera. Pay attention to eyebrow raising, head positioning, body positioning, etc. Sit up straight, avoid fidgeting and nodding. You'll never know you do it unless you see it!

Know How You Sound on Camera

Practice the tone and volume of your voice. You may have a body microphone for the segment, so you want to decrease the volume of your voice if you tend to talk loudly. Speak slowly and clearly and practice emphasizing words and key points.

What Not To Eat

Avoid dairy products (cheese, milk, yogurt - which sometimes make you sound congested). Drink plenty of water and eat something light beforehand.

Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

- Provide sample interview questions beforehand to the reporter
- Expect questions you haven't prepared for
- Be as concise as possible - don't ramble
- Identify your 'goal' for the interview and write down the key points you want to mention

Watch the Show Beforehand

Get a sense for the questions they ask and the overall 'vibe' of the show. Watch the reporter that will interview you.

Confirmation and Arrival

- Confirm the interview 24 hours beforehand
- Ask the time of arrival, directions and map, who to ask for and a cell phone number for that person, what door you enter, where do you park, what does the security desk need.
- Arrive early and leave time for traffic and parking issues
- Expect to wait when you do arrive

If the interview is at your place of business, make sure the reporter has parking for a van (they usually arrive with camera equipment). Give them accurate directions. Make sure the place is clean. If you're meeting at a public venue, get permission to film there.

What To Do in the Moment

- Thank the reporter for having you on the program
- Smile!
- Look at the reporter rather than directly at the camera the whole time (this will appear more natural and conversational)
- If you're on satellite, look into the camera
- Don't interrupt the reporter
- Listen to the question before answering
- Ask to repeat or rephrase if you don't understand a question
- Emphasize key points 'Everyone should know the following three items about _____ 1. 2. 3.'
- Say the message up front and then explain why (example - 'It's important to adopt eco-friendly business practices to save your company money. Why? Because.....')
- Turn questions into opportunities (example: 'Your question proves our point of _____' or 'Great question, but the real issue is _____')

After the Interview

- Thank those involved with the segment
- Ask how you can obtain a copy of the segment
- Ask if the 'air date' is scheduled
- Mention you'd love to become a regular guest or contributor and have a new angle ready to pitch

Blog Tour Coordination and Pitching

Blogs are an excellent source to spread the word about your business. Blog Tours are essentially virtual tours that happen over a scheduled period of time (usually 6-8 weeks) and include 'stops' on various targeted blogs where they would review your product/service, conduct an interview, or would require a guest post (write a post for that blog with a link back to your own).

Blog Tours work best when you are a blogger yourself. It's easier to post the tour dates and provide links back to those that cover you. If you already have a following with your blog, you'll become more attractive for other bloggers to cover.

Blog Tours are also great to coordinate around a holiday (Christmas or Mother's Day) or around your book or new product release.

Find Blogs that Reach Your Target Audience

Check out larger publications for 'blog features' where they list the top traffic blogs in your industry. You can also do a search through Blogger or Wordpress using industry keywords. You can also check out Bloggerschoiceawards.com for award winning blogs. Don't forget blogs that correspond with major magazines and newspapers (NY Times has a blog as well as most major magazines). Make sure the blog is a good fit for your pitch. Bloggers are notoriously critical of off-topic pitching.

Find Blogs with a Following

Possibly the most difficult part of blog tours is finding those that have good traffic. It's very difficult to judge the traffic of a blog. One way is to use Technorati.com and their 'authority' tag. Visit the site and search for your industry under the blog section. Next to the blog name it will have a little 'authority' tag with a number. The higher the authority, the better. Try to target blogs with at least 100 in authority.

Create your Plan

Choose the timeframe for your blog tour and schedule accordingly. If you need to write several guest posts, make sure you have enough time to complete. Let each blogger know you plan to link back to them if they cover your story and that you'll announce them as a 'stop' on your blog or website. Keep track of this on an Excel spreadsheet or whatever system you use to stay organized.

If you plan to offer a discount, determine up front what that will be. Many blogs are also more open to reviews if you offer a giveaway to their readers. Your giveaway doesn't have to be your product. It could be a tip sheet, eBook, white paper – something that's less expensive to send but still provides value.

Pitch Bloggers

Many blogs only list an email or just have an online form. It's rare that you will find a phone number to follow up. Send your pitch letter customized to the blog as you would any other outlet.

Decide if you'll Provide Samples

For reviews, bloggers often require samples. This is where it's crucial to determine if the blog has enough readership for you to warrant spending the money on sending a sample. Decide up front how many samples you have to send and the criteria for sending.

Promote your Blog Tour

You should announce your blog tour on your blog, website, marketing material, press page and in your other press coverage if timely. If you're doing a radio interview, for example, you'll want to mention you are running a 6-week tour and still looking for a few more stops.

What to Expect from a Blog Tour

- Most interviews will be conducted by email.
- Most bloggers will ask for samples to review.
- Many bloggers are not full-time writers – it may take awhile for them to respond to your pitch. Send a follow-up email about a week after your first pitch just to see if they need any more information.
- After you send the sample, follow up by email to determine when they will run the review. Bloggers are often very busy and may forget to do the review. Give them a gently reminder.

Smaller Outlets to Consider

Amidst tweaking and perfecting your pitches to Oprah, Good Morning America and the NY Times - don't ignore the media that are right in your backyard. While hometown media may not reach the audience that Oprah does, media coverage in smaller outlets can lead to great things - often you will be splashed on the cover or receive a prominent story with plenty of pictures, helping to build a local buzz about your business. I've also seen these local stories grab the attention of the larger media outlets.

If you haven't considered these outlets already, take a little time and pitch, pitch away!

Township Newsletters/Small-Town Newspapers

These publications are often starved for news (especially if it's a really small town) and are looking to profile people doing great things. Many believe that people don't read these papers, but results have been quite the contrary. There *are* groups of people that support local businesses and want to know about yours.

College Alumni Publication

Are you a member of the alumni association? These publications are always on the lookout for who's doing what. And what leaves a better impression than successful graduates doing wonderful things? Don't forget your high school alumni association as well.

College Student Newspaper/Radio/TV

Does your product/service appeal to the college-aged audience? Do you have an exciting success story to tell to help mentor a young student?

Trade Publications/Newsletters

Most industries have them, and are looking for content. If you're in the B2B market, this is a great crowd to reach.

Chamber of Commerce Newsletters

Most of the time you have to be a member, but how many of you 'members' contribute anything? Take advantage of your membership benefits and ask if you can submit a monthly article/column.

How NOT to Pitch

Over the years I've listened to many complaints from the media about the laziness of publicists and DIY publicity seekers. Although these were covered above, this is a gentle reminder to be aware of the following gripes:

Pitched off-topic

Food editors are pitched to cover fashion designers. Sports editors pitched to cover manufacturing companies. Some reporters think it's *obvious* that the off-topic offender used a media list and pitched everyone at the entire publication - from executive editor down to every freelance writer. Another complaint is the responses to queries, such as those on HARO, that are completely off-topic.

Pitch was lazy

Getting a response such as 'Call me' or 'I/my client would be perfect for this. Check out my website' is *not* a pitch, and sending something like that is the fastest way to end up in the trash folder. Put some effort into each pitch in a clear, concise manner. Read it before you send it - are you proud to send this response? Have you put your best work forward?

Incessant badgering by phone

Don't call and hang up until you've got someone on the phone (they have caller ID). Don't continue to call after you've followed up by phone and email and haven't heard back. Chances are, if you didn't wow them with your pitch, you won't be able to convince them by phone either. Think of another angle or

something fresh to present about the material sent you over. Write up a 30-second phone pitch-script with your new idea.

Remember; don't be disappointed if you haven't gotten any coverage. Re-evaluate your pitch. Is it newsworthy? Am I pitching the right person? Have they covered this before? Are you presenting a fresh spin on a current hot topic? Are you pitching at the right time? (remember magazines have long lead times!)

Leveraging Your Publicity Efforts

In advertising, there's no guarantee your paid advertisement will translate into sales. With publicity, there's no guarantee you'll sell 1,000 necklaces or achieve coverage in your most coveted outlets. However, by securing a guest post on a well-read blog, landing an article in a top newspaper, getting a segment on your local ABC affiliate you're broadening your reach to a whole new audience - an audience that may turn off commercials or flip by ads but will watch/read your news story.

Remember your goal from the beginning of the campaign. Did you want to increase sales? Become a quotable expert? How can you now leverage the coverage you've received to attain that goal?

Use National Coverage to Publicize Locally and Local Coverage to Build a Buzz Nationally

Featured in the Wall Street Journal? Your local news source may want to know about this national recognition. On the flip side, reporters at larger outlets will scour blogs and smaller news sources for story ideas.

When pitching your local media, mention any national coverage you've received. When pitching national media, you can mention you or your company has appeared in <<insert number>> media outlets.

Update your website media page regularly with links to coverage. Always ask for copies of magazines, newspapers a DVD copy of TV coverage or mp3 of a radio interview. Include all of these on your media page and in your press kit.

Communicate Coverage to Clients

Let your clients and followers know about your coverage! Post it on your blog and make a page on your website featuring links to the coverage. Print copies of the articles to include in your handouts. Hang them in your office lobby as a 'wall of fame' or in your store/restaurant/salon, etc. Promote links to your coverage on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or other social networking sites.

Help Reporters Communicate your Brand

Give them a copy of your biography, full contact information, and even sample interview questions. A good trick is to use your web address as your business name (example - Omaroma.com instead of Om Aroma). People can then easily find your website for information on you and your products/services.

Set up Google Alerts

Want to know what others are saying about you? Set up a Google alert for your name and your company name. You can also use keywords to search for your competition and where they are being featured and how they are positioned.

Use Social Networking to your Advantage

Social networking lets us become very visible to a broad audience. Your customers and the media are using social media – are you? Work on your social media presence and building a following there. Popularity is a matter of perception; if you have a significant number of followers - people will take notice. Reporters also use sites such as Twitter.com to network and find sources.

Don't End the Interview without Asking for Another Opportunity

Your goal should be to get repeat exposure. If you've done a great job in an interview, why not ask if you can come back next month? Have a list of topics ready to present to the reporter before you leave the interview or end the call. If you want to be a regular guest, columnist, regular contributor, official blogger or correspondent – let them know! Ask their permission to follow up at a later date for another segment, article, interview, etc. Always send a thank you note to the reporter!



Remember, pitch the RIGHT contact something that's NEWSWORTHY, FRESH AND UNIQUE. Work on creating relationships with the media and become a go-to resource that they trust. While a great story will always trump a personal relationship, the media will listen to your ideas if they know you follow their work and know what they need.

Happy Pitching!

Need some additional guidance and support for your PR campaign? For information on one-on-one private consulting with Melissa contact Melissa@casseracommunications.com