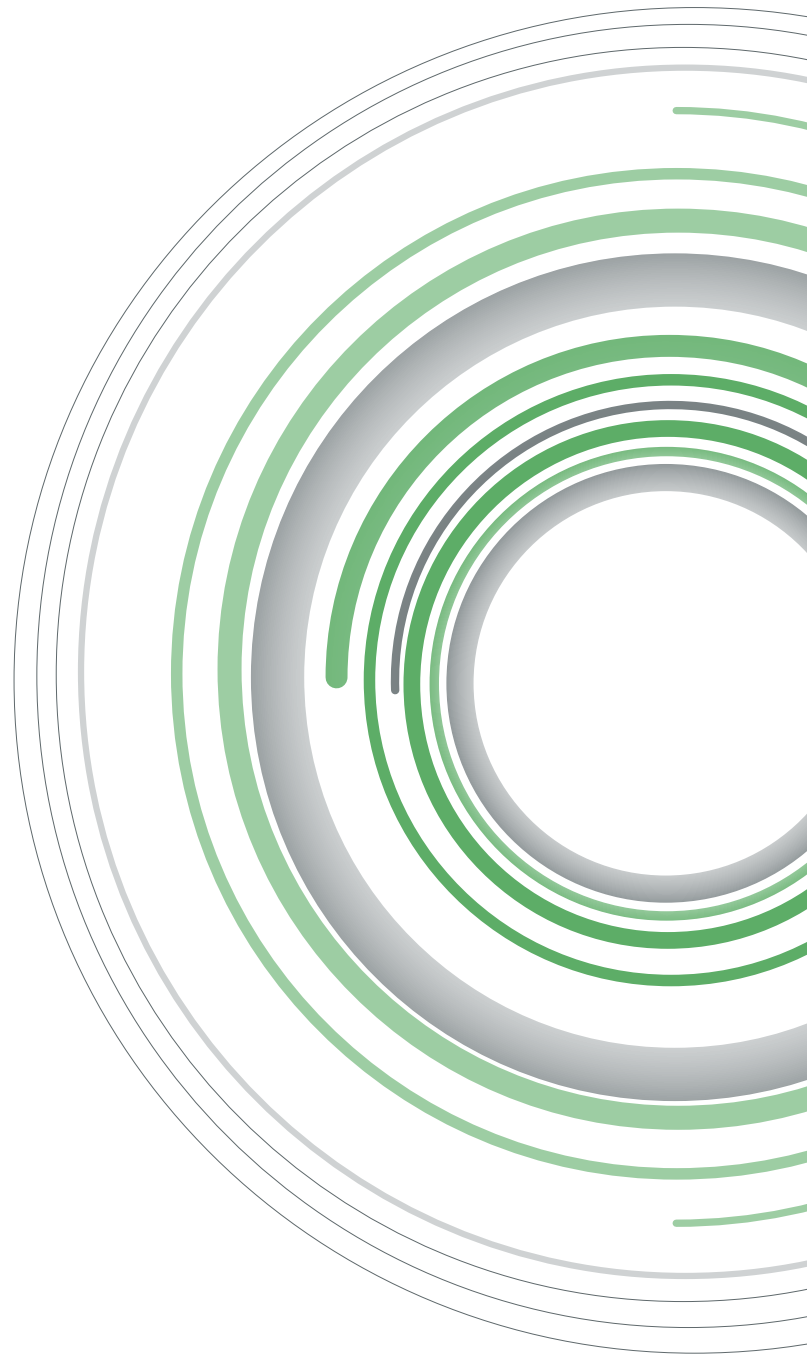


STARTER GUIDE:
Do-It-Yourself
Media Relations



OVERVIEW

So you're interested in a do-it-yourself starter guide to media relations, are you? Excellent. You've come to the right place. However, there are just a few quick points to cover before we dive right in.

First, best practices for media relations vary greatly from industry to industry and from company to company. The recommendations you'll find in this paper are made for small and mid-size business-to-business (B2B) technology companies, particularly those lacking a consistent stream of high-profile news items.

Second, media relations strategies and tactics will vary from practitioner to practitioner (and from situation to situation). Even among small to mid-size B2B technology companies, there is no single, all-encompassing mode of operating. We will aim, therefore, to cover a cross-section of ideas from which our readers can begin to build personalized approaches. And with that, let's begin.

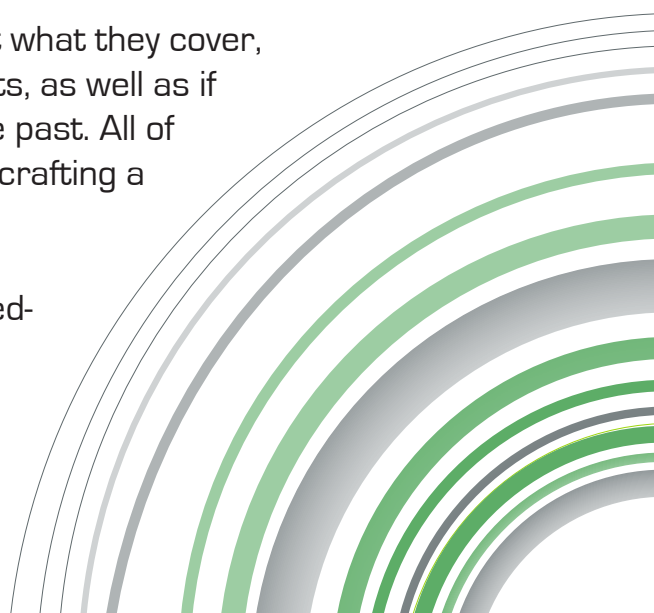
SO WHO ARE THE MEDIA, ANYWAY?

The "media" is often used as a catchall term and typically includes traditional print journalists, editors, wire writers and even bloggers and other non-traditional influencers (like a high-profile forums poster, for example). This then becomes the first task for any successful media relations campaign—identify just who exactly you are trying to target within the broad media spectrum.

Reaching out to a blogger who has a full-time job in addition to writing about networking technology is different than pitching an InformationWeek writer whose entire job centers around discovering new vendors and solutions. And even more different are writers for national outlets, like Wired or Mashable, who have, quite literally, seen everything there is to see and read every conceivable pitch.

So look into the history of each target and find out what they cover, how they cover it and if they have any side interests, as well as if they have covered your company or product in the past. All of this information is of great help when it comes to crafting a pitch and conducting follow-up.

Next, try to get a sense of what your targets' schedules are like—when do they publish? For instance, if a news outlet publishes on Mondays, its reporters need to hear from sources by early in the preceding week.



Finally, make a list of your top ten “wishlist” reporters and commit to establishing those relationships. Reach out personally, and provide them with useful, non-self-serving information as often as possible. Building these relationships will have enormous return on investment.

Key Takeaways:

- The “media” refers to a wide-range of journalistic endeavors; understand the roles of your key targets.
- Research is key to successful media relations—dig into the backgrounds and writings of media members with whom you want to build relationships; know what makes them tick.
- Timing is key—get a sense of publication and posting schedules so that you can plan pitches and conversations during research and down times.
- Make a list—determine your top ten “wishlist” reporters and begin to carefully nurture those relationships.

THE WORLD RUNS ON PITCHES

The truth is: No one is going to read your press release unless you pique their interest, and you do this via the pitch. No, just sending a press release is not a pitch. The pitch is what you’ll use to explain why your release should matter to a specific media target.

At a basic level, your organization will be looking at two kinds of pitches:

- An introductory pitch to a media member who closely covers your space but simply hasn’t looked at your product or spoken with your experts yet.
- A product/service-centric pitch that uses a timely and informative press release as its crux.

Going into even more detail, each of your pitches should generally draw from three components:

- Timeliness—does your pitch fall in line with current industry happenings, or are you referencing dated events, like “cloud computing will be big” or “Y2K might be a concern?”

- Relevance—does your media target have any interest in this type of information? Your pitch could be impeccable from a theme and grammar standpoint, but could still be ignored because you're pitching a mainframe guy on open source.
- Third-Party Validation—are there any customers or analysts who can give you a boost in your pitch, either by backing up your statements or providing their own information that dovetails with your own?

Ideally, the perfect pitch contains all three of these components, but if one is lacking, the other two must make up for it. For example, if you are deadset on pitching a mainframe blogger on an open source technology, you better have third-party validators backing it up and be releasing it during a major open-source-on-bare-metal event.

Key Takeaways:

- A press release is not a pitch—you must explain to a media member why he/she should care.
- Look at pitches from two basic standpoints—introductory/informative and product/service/news-based.
- The three components of a successful pitch are relevance, timeliness and third-party validation—if one component is lacking, the other two should compensate.

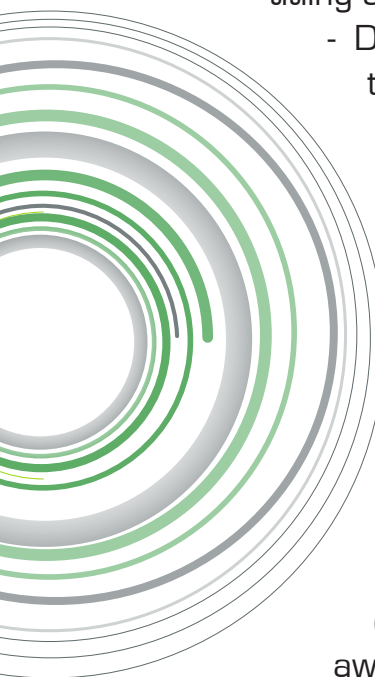
DON'T FLUNK FOLLOW-UP

A surefire way to ruin a relationship with a member of the media before it even starts is to harass him/her about a pitch. Reporters, bloggers, editors and other writers receive hundreds, if not thousands, of emails each day from companies just like yours—it takes time for them to determine what sounds interesting and what doesn't, especially while they're also trying to, you know, write.

To avoid any perception of harassment, it's essential to know your targets well and how each prefers to be contacted. Furthermore, an optimal follow-up strategy will often depend on the specifics of the situation and the type of news you're offering. Knowing when to pick up the phone, when to send a follow-up email, and when to simply give a reporter more space is one of the toughest parts of media relations (and a skill you'll improve over time).

Assuming you followed-up effectively and respectfully—and you've still received no response from your targets, it's time to diagnose your pitch:



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- What did you title it? Was it something catchy or a long jumble of buzzwords? Bad titling can kill pitches just as easily as poor writing.
 - Did your pitch meet the three critical components of relevance, timeliness and third-party validation?
 - Did you send your pitch during a major tradeshow or a huge announcement from a tech giant?

If your pitch is poorly titled, missed the mark on the three components or got lost in a huge news event, you have two options:

- If you think your pitch was just the victim of bad timing, wait until the timing improves and follow-up one more time.
- Revise the pitch and send a repackaged version.

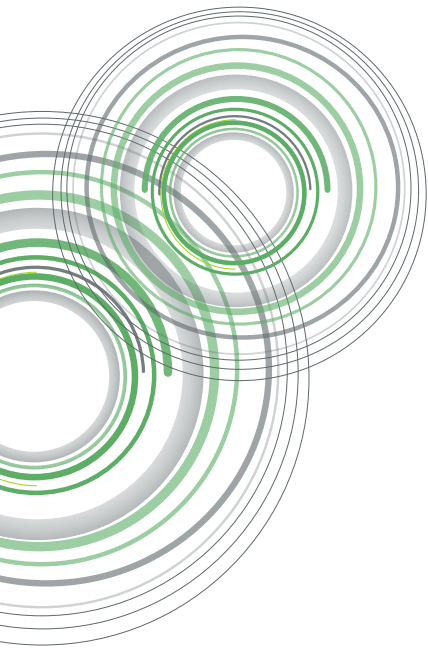
Pitching is not an exact science, which makes following up on a pitch even less so. Media members are individuals and each have their own ways of dealing with pitches—some will file interesting but not exactly timely pitches away for future stories, while others will let you know if they're not interested. The vast majority, however, will ignore you... and that's business as usual.

Key Takeaways:

- Know your targets and how they prefer to be contacted for follow-up. Assess the specifics of each situation and follow-up appropriately.
- Audit your pitch after the fact—did you meet the three critical components?
- Keep your cool—don't let silence or a negative answer sour you—learn from your failed pitch and do better next time.

LAST CALL

Media relations campaigns begin and end with research—you must constantly be aware of the ever-shifting media landscape, as the names and faces associated with popular blogs, publications and other outlooks are always changing. A reporter covering networks one day could be assigned to the hardware beat the next, and capturing this change as it happens can be the difference between success and failure.



NOW THAT YOU KNOW THE BASICS, ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT STEP?

(Give us a call, and we'll show you how to maximize your media potential.)

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