

Do journalists need PR people?

I'm surprised anyone would question the value PR practitioners provide for journalists. The truth is there are still many journalists who rely on public relations practitioners for story suggestions and sources. Most journalists I am sure will admit that they have used information provided by a PR practitioner in a recent story.

Journalists need practitioners who can provide something newsworthy and relevant to them. Besides the usual press releases, journalists also need from practitioners solid story suggestions, industry data and expert sources.

Below are some suggestions that will make a practitioner valuable for journalists. This is what we can refer to as PR 101, basic principles for a successful relation with the media:

- **Learn what their needs are** – there are probably networking events in your area where you can meet journalists. Meet journalists socially and learn more about what they do, what their needs are and how you can help.
- **Read what they write** – Read and engage with journalists. If you like what they write, tell them. If you have something of value to offer, provide your thoughts in follow-up. Let them know you're interested in more than getting your clients covered. Let them know you're a consumer of information first and a publicist second.
- **Do some extra legwork** – if you're pitching a story on a topic related to a client, offer other examples of organizations or individuals that might also be good for the story. Provide links and references to objective, third-party data that validates (or contradicts) the points you're trying to make. The more objective you can be in your pitch, the more journalists will respect your efforts to "think like a journalist." Try to avoid being self-serving with your pitches.
- **Suggest sources that aren't clients** – can you help a reporter with a story that doesn't benefit you? Using this approach you may help a reporter find the best source for a story. This also will help cement stronger relations with the journalists helped, and everyone wins.
- **Give them the scoop** – whenever you can, give your "favourite" reporters the scoop on a big story. When you get wind of big news, or a big announcement with clients you may offer them as tips or exclusives to the journalists who are in your inner circle. Journalists are competing for the "big news", if you can help them land an exclusive on a big story, they'll be more likely to give you some attention on your less sensational pitches.
- **Stay top of mind** – find excuses to give a journalist a call, beyond wanting to pitch them something. Have regular chats about what's going on in your industry. Are there any story angles you wish were covered, but nobody seems to be paying attention to? Have you come across some new services or tools that might help a journalist to his/her job better? Let them know about it. Again, you're looking out for their best interests. Be transparent about it. Sure, you're going to call them when you want something, but why not call them when you don't have a need as well. Nobody likes to feel used. Build genuine relationships with your media contacts.