

Cultivating Media Exposure

"I'm going to be interviewed on the radio this Saturday," an attorney client of ours announced at the conclusion of a recent meeting. Hearing this comment another attorney in the group piped in, "How do you manage to get so much press? Every time I turn around you're in the local paper or you're being interviewed on the news." He sounded agitated and several other attorneys who looked on seemed equally put out. "No one's knocking at my door to interview me. Are you just lucky, *or what?*"

In this third section of our series on law firm public relations, we'll explain that luck has nothing to do it when it comes to garnering media attention. If the information age in which we live has produced anything it is the ongoing need for more information. The 24-hour news cycle, the proliferation of cable channels, radio stations and thousands of specialty print publications have a voracious appetite for news, commentary and perspective on the issues of the day. This constant need presents a wealth of opportunities for those interested in raising their profile and becoming known for their expertise.

But how do you start? How do you find your way in to the media outlets who might be interested in what you have to say -- if only they knew who you were? Well, not unlike the approach you must take in any aspect of client development, you must know *Who to Talk to, What to Say* and *How and When to Say It*.

Who To Talk To

To figure out Who to talk to you must first ask yourself who you are trying to attract with the press you seek. Keeping that answer in mind, ask yourself where those types of clients or (or referral sources – your media efforts might be focused only on building credibility with or attracting new referral sources) tune

in for the nightly news. Think about what newspapers they read and which drive-time radio programs they are likely to listen to. Then identify the reporters, journalists, editors and producers associated with these programs or publications. Look at newspaper by-lines, read the editorial staff listings, or spend a little time on the program or publication's websites for locate their names. Assemble a list of these names, and then study their reporting history to learn what they typically cover. Since a great deal of work goes into creating a list like this, it's a good idea to delegate this research to an assistant who can help you with your marketing efforts.

Once the list is done you've established *Who to Talk to*. Now you must focus on *What to Say*.

What to Say

What you say will be determined by the event, issue or commentary you are presenting. There are two ways to go about getting your message across – either through a *press release* or a *media advisory*. The first method is to persuade a wide variety of journalists, reporters or producers that you or your firm has news worth reporting. This means that when a case, a client, a result or event that you are involved with is newsworthy, a press release is and submitted by e-mail or fax to all the different media contacts you've collected and for whom it is appropriate. These are the news organizations that are likely to use it on-air or in print, either as a stand-alone piece or as part of a larger story. Refer to the second part of this series on public relations for further detail on the contents of a press release.

The second way to get your message across is more *personality-driven*, but still often involves a written document – the *media advisory*. Here the goal is to persuade reporters that you - because of your experience, perspective or specific expertise - are worth interviewing. This approach is generally targeted at

particular reporters and journalists and is decidedly opportunistic because your commentary may piggy-back on an event of national interest currently in the spotlight. If you watch your local news station, this is a common occurrence. If, for example, a story about underage drinking or the plight of the elderly has captured the national spotlight, a hometown reporter or journalist may call upon a local attorney to provide the local perspective.

Always in search of interesting viewpoints, the media cultivates the local perspective because they want to align themselves with the most important stories of the day.

Generally, the attorney they interview is not chosen at random out of the phone book, but because they've either cultivated a strong relationship with him or her, or they've been sent a *media advisory*. Also known as a "pitch," a media advisory is a one page document that spells out how an individual is especially suited to comment on an issue and outlines their particular angle or perspective. If done well it contains only those issues of interest to the audience the reporter or journalist typically serves. A hard news piece about white collar crime, for example, would be inappropriate for an arts and entertainment publication. To maximize its effectiveness, always match the topic of the advisory to the audiences' interests.

How and When to Say It

There are two differences between a press release and a media advisory. The first concerns how it is tailored and the second, when it is sent.

When you write a press release, you're packaging ideas for reporters en masse and writing a one page memo describing an event, case, client or action with which you are associated. The success or failure of the release is not based on how well you know the intended reporter or journalist (though targeting the right

publication is critical), but more on how interesting your story might be to the readers or viewers. Press releases are often sent in advance of an event.

When you write a pitch or Media Advisory, you're tailoring an idea for a single reporter and you are often sending your pitch out after the news has been made. As we have mentioned, this only works if you've done your homework and have read the publication, or watched the show and know what kind of commentary they seek. You've researched the reporter's work and know his or her recent reporting. The message sent by your media advisory is in essence, "I think you'll be interested in speaking to me because..." and you go on to state compelling reasons.

Here's what's in a media advisory: this one page document starts out with a prominent headline announcing the topic and letting the reader/reporter know who the expert is and what he or she has to offer. This is followed by a short introductory paragraph. Below this, using bullet points made up of sharp, to the point sentences, the topic is expanded upon. Keep in mind the reporters and journalists who receive these media advisories are going to scan them quickly looking for the most important information and an angle they think their audience might find interesting. Make it easy for them to grasp the subject.

Also make it easy for them to connect with you. At the bottom of the page make sure your contact information, is available at-a-glance in an easily accessible format. The whole point of writing an advisory is to alert reporters to the availability of you or your spokesperson, and his or her position on the topic, in a timely fashion.

If you've sent your alerts to a radio or television program and they like what you have to offer you will probably get a phone call from the editor or producer. If this happens you must be enthusiastic and engaging on the phone as this call

may actually be a “pre-interview” in which your viability as a guest speaker or interview subject is being tested. If you sent your alert to a print publication and it’s a story they wish to explore further, you’ll receive a phone call or an e-mail to gather additional information.

If you don’t receive a response from your advisory, whether it was sent to a media outlet or a print publication, call to check on whether or not the information was received. Sometimes, opportunities will arise in these conversations which are difficult to predict, so stay alert for productive tangents. In any case, your ability to sell yourself plays an important role here.

No matter how you get your message across, using various media to build your credibility and attract new clients should be part of your overall client development plan. In the words of Oscar Wilde, “The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.”