

## How to Develop an Effective Media List

If you're lucky, you have a friend who can give you a media list or the names of some reporters who cover your subject area.

But, if you're like most people, working for an organization just beginning to use public and media relations as a tool to achieve an organizational goal, you'll have to develop the media list yourself.

Before you begin, there are two important things you should note:

- A good media list is about quality, not quantity: your list should contain only those reporters you believe will likely cover your story
- Effective PR is not about getting any coverage, it's about getting the right coverage: your media list should only contain the media outlets that will help you achieve your goals

Unfortunately, there are no Cliff's Notes or shortcuts to developing a good media list. You could purchase a media directory like Bacon's, to help you better understand the outlets that might be interested in covering your story, but in the end, developing a good media list will come down to: reading, listening, and watching.

### Steps to Developing an Effective Media List

#### Identifying media outlets

- When deciding to add a media outlet to your list, ask yourself, "Does this outlet cover my subject area? Organizations like mine? Is there an angle to my story I could get them interested in?"
- Start with the outlets you know.
- Search the internet to identify additional outlets, including blogs, TV and radio shows, and special interest publications.
- Look around your neighborhood for local publications. Banks, libraries and other community centers often carry community newspapers and magazines.
- Visit a newsstand. Large newsstands often carry specialty publications.
- Check out the TV Guide and websites for cable stations to identify shows that could be interested in your story.
- Watch local news programs to understand what they cover and how they report it (my experience is that most local news stations cover essentially the same issues) – [www.december.com](http://www.december.com) lists local and national TV stations and provides links to station websites.
- Listen to local radio stations ([www.nyradioguide.com](http://www.nyradioguide.com) provides a listing of AM and FM stations, along with station information, program guides, and links to websites).
- In case you have breaking news to report or have something relevant to add (usually in the form of an interview or quote) to a breaking story, you should have on your media list the phone

numbers and general emails for the outlet newsrooms. You can usually find this information on the outlets website. Newspapers usually list this information towards the front of the paper.

### **Identifying reporters**

- Pay attention to bylines (the name, and often the position, of the article author. Usually appears between the headline and first paragraph). And keep track of reporters who cover your subject area or similar organizations.
- Identify bloggers/blogs that cover your subject area. But, be specific. If you provide early childhood education services, identify blogs that cover this subject, not just education, as a broad category. Try [Google Blogs](#), or [Technorati](#).
- To identify TV and radio reporters, you'll need to watch and listen to the outlets. Sometimes, stations have assigned beat reporters who cover subjects like education, healthcare, or politics. But, often general assignment reporters are assigned to cover a story by the newsroom. In this case, your media list should contain the phone number and email to the newsroom. After you successfully pitch a story, you might get to know the assignment editor, and then add her/him to your media list.

### **Create a database**

- I recommend Excel because it's easy to use and you can export and import contacts from Outlook. Excel also allows you to sort and mail merge.
- Organize your database by type of outlet: Daily Newspaper, Weekly Newspaper, Magazine, Television, Radio, Blog, Freelance
- Each contact should contain the following fields

First Name	Last Name	Title	Outlet	Section or Beat <sup>1</sup>	Email	Work Phone	Cell phone	Deadline <sup>2</sup>	Days worked <sup>3</sup>	Recent stories <sup>4</sup>
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<sup>1</sup>Weekend, business, other specialty section or specific beat, like education, transit, politics, etc.

<sup>2</sup>Know the deadlines, like what day of the week a community paper closes out its issue.

<sup>3</sup>Many reporters do not work a typical Monday – Friday schedule, knowing when they are working will help you plan out when to pitch

<sup>4</sup>Tracking recent stories will both force you to better understand what they cover and how they cover it, and could help you with your pitch (“I saw that last week you reported on... so, I think you might be interested in a story I have for you.)

### **Using your media list effectively (and selectively)**

Even though you now have a media list of outlets and people who *should* be interested in your story, you still shouldn't pitch them the same story, the same way. For example, if you are pitching a story about the opening of a new center, you might emphasize that:

- it's a “community-based center serving area residents” for local community papers
- it's the “first of its kind” or “provides innovative programming to address...” for daily papers
- there will be clients that can be interviewed in this interactive center (providing a visual) for TV stations

Take the time to target your pitches, and you'll be rewarded with better coverage.