



Public Relations Primer

A guide to internal and external communications in the Greater Milwaukee area compiled by members of PRSA's Southeastern Wisconsin Chapter.

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Media Interactions 101

These ideas for making the most of your contact with reporters come from the PR professionals at Milwaukee City Hall. They certainly know that interview situations can be intimidating and confusing. The following information is intended to reduce those concerns.

- **Before the interview think about what you want from the interaction; prepare ahead of time**
 - What are the three most important points to make?
 - What quote or soundbite do you want the reporter to use?
 - What issues do you need to be prepared to address?
 - How do your comments fit in to the brand or overall goals of the organization?
 - Have you notified the appropriate people (colleagues, partners, press office) about your interview?

- **Be engaging and respectful; your demeanor is important**
 - Ask questions to gauge the reporter's level of knowledge and perspective
 - Ask who else the reporter has spoken to, and offer other people and resources
 - Ask how and when the interview might be used

- **During the interview**
 - Focus your full attention on the reporter; minimize distractions
 - As appropriate, smile, nod, and gesture; be aware of unintended nonverbal signals you might convey
 - Listen carefully to the questions

- **Content of your responses**
 - Prioritize your messages – the interview might be shorter than you anticipated
 - Avoid speculation; only say things you are confident are accurate
 - “Flag” your most important comments
 - “This is particularly important...”
 - “If there is one thing you take away...”
 - “Don’t ever forget...”
 - “Redirect” if the line of questioning gets off track
 - “That’s a good question, but the most important ...”
 - “Let’s remember...”
 - “Before we continue, let me emphasize that...”
 - “I think it would be more correct to say...”
 - “The key here is...”
 - It is entirely appropriate to say, “I don’t know, I’ll get back to you.”
 - If the interview will be edited (as opposed to a podcast or live television) repeat your most important points

- **In almost all cases, what you say to a reporter can be used and attributed to you without limitation**
 - Be very cautious about terms such as “off-the-record” or “on background”
 - Don’t offer off-the-record or background comments unless there is a substantial reason to do so.
 - If you do say something off-the-record or on background, be sure both you and the reporter understand what that means, and both formally agree to that before offering such a comment.

- **Share your contact information**
 - The reporter may want to follow for this or future stories

News Release Planning Worksheet

To select and structure the content of a news release from a public relations perspective, the writer should answer several questions before writing anything. The release should present information objectively and in correct newspaper or broadcast style, but it must also be carefully crafted to include key messages.

- What is the subject of this news release?
- What do you want to achieve with the news release? Is the objective to inform, to change attitudes and behavior, to increase attendance at a local event?
- Whom is this message designed to reach? For example, is it aimed at local citizens, or is it mainly for executives in other companies who read the business page and might order the product?
- What is in it for this particular audience? What are the potential benefits and rewards?
- What message or key idea should this news release convey? What angle or “hook” do you want to highlight in the lead?
- What are the news values you will reflect in this release?

Media Contact:

Your Name

Your Title

(414) 000-0000 *work*(262) 000-0000 *cell*

youremail@yourcompany.com



**YOUR
COMPANY
LOGO**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Main Headline

Sub-headline with More Info

DATELINE CITY, State – This is your lead paragraph. The job of the lead paragraph is to summarize the story and hook the reader into reading more. The dateline follows AP Style in that the city name is in ALL CAPS with the state abbreviation, followed by an “em” dash or two dashes and a space (which will automatically become an em dash).

The second paragraph is a continuation of the story. News releases should be written in inverted pyramid style – that means the most important facts come first and additional information is added in descending order of importance.

"Quotes are what people say and are very important to adding life and meaning to the story," said Patrick McSweeney, an adjunct instructor at Marquette University's Diederich College of Communication. "Never, ever use a quote of an executive stating 'we are pleased to...'" and fill in the blank. Use a quote that someone would really say."

Additional paragraphs will provide additional facts, figures, opinions or other information of importance.

Always do your best to write tight copy. Brevity is important. Make every word count. Follow AP Style, double-check all numbers and statistics and get another set of eyes to proofread your copy. Always check that phone numbers, websites and social media links are correct before completing a release. One trick to check for misspellings or incorrect punctuation is to read from right to left beginning at the bottom of the release and working your way to the top.

End with three hashtags (pound symbols) separated by one space to signify the end of the release.

About Your Company

This is called the boilerplate - usually a paragraph that describes the company, what it does, its history and possibly its value or the most recent year's sales figures. It can end with directions to the company's website with the website address such as <http://www.acme.com>. You can also add in hyperlinks to follow the company on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) or other social networks.

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Tips for Pitching Journalists

Full article available at the [Throughline Group](#).

When pitching to the media, the key to a successful “sale” of your story is twofold. A winning media pitch transforms your topic or issue from what you find important to what the reporter finds newsworthy. You do that by fitting your pitch into a broader story “theme.”

For instance, in the 2004 comedy “Anchorman,” the news that a famous panda was about to give birth at the San Diego Zoo had the news team for TV station KVVN on high alert. A series of “Panda Watch!” news reports by anchorman Ron Burgundy, played by Will Ferrell, ensued. They culminated in a live, on-location news segment that provided the dramatic climax to the movie.

The birth of a panda cub would be as newsy in real life as it was in the movie – albeit without the irreverence and absurdity of the KVVN team. That’s because, as a theme, animal arrivals make for a great news story.

Not everyone is able to deliver a media pitch about the birth of a rare bear. However, there are many other stories to tell, and reporters who want to share them. As part of our media training courses, we focus on building effective and memorable messages. By focusing on one or several of these 20 media pitches, you can transform your message and your story ideas from newsy to newsworthy.

Crafting a Media Pitch 101

The way to a reporter’s heart, and their ears, is to provide details that make for a compelling story.

Here’s an example:

Your media pitch is about a local student’s third-place win in a national essay contest. Reporters are more likely to find a first-place finish more newsworthy. Therefore, throw out those extra hooks that make this story compelling. Highlight what makes this third-place win as great as a first-place finish. Here’s how that conversation could go:

Intro: “I have a great story of a local student who came in third in a national essay contest.”

Hook: “I know first-place wins are more newsworthy, but this story has an interesting twist. This student moved to the United States as a non-native speaker a year ago. That’s the exact time she began to learn English.”

Angle: “She credits the teachers and innovative language instruction at this town’s middle school as helping her to succeed.”

There is always more to the story.

The following list includes scenarios, situations, and subjects that reporters find newsworthy. Find the one that works best for your story and tailor a compelling message. The ultimate goal is to hear the three words from the reporter that should be music to your ears: “Tell me more.”

20 Newsworthy Media Pitches

1) Conflict

Reporters are professional storytellers, and conflict is a key ingredient in dramatic storytelling. This doesn't have to be "War of the Worlds" level invasion. Rather, a contest of wills or an enduring disagreement can certainly fuel a story.

The Pitch: Say, for instance, you represent a preservation group working to save an old building. A reporter is likely to become more interested if the group's plan is facing a developer's deadline.

2) Local

Make sure the issue affects the market you are trying to pitch. Universal needs and concerns may appeal to larger news organizations, but smaller markets tend to cover particular geographic areas.

The Pitch: Find links to anything and anyone local before pitching a broad topic. Flood Protection Sandbags with flooded homes in the background.

3) Breaking News

These are often unexpected tragic events or dramatic events, such as a plane crash, a famous person's death, or a natural disaster.

The Pitch: If you are a spokesperson for a relief agency, you could provide details of local recovery efforts for a global disaster.

4) Extremes or Superlatives

Reporters gravitate toward extremes and superlatives – the first, the last, the best, the worst, the biggest, the smallest – because they are equally fascinating to their readers and viewers.

The Pitch: Look to see whether your story contains an extreme or superlative and highlight it.

5) New

People like new things, or the "latest and greatest" the world has to offer. Any launch of a new technology product should suffice as evidence.

The Pitch: This category is no slam dunk, however, even if your news is new. During the media pitch, reporters still need to be told why it matters, now.

6) Clicks

In the past, news organizations could deduce reader or viewer interest through the number of subscribers or the size of the audience. In the digital age, a story's news value also can be tracked by how many users click on it. More clicks mean more readers, and the possibility they will share those links on social media – thereby increasing the clicks. Those clicks not only generate advertising dollars but also reveal what readers want.

The Pitch: Journalists look for stories that call for strong visuals, such as photos and videos. While a media pitch still needs to be newsworthy, don't fail to mention if the story is a natural for visuals and likely to generate lots of clicks on social media.

7) Timely and Relevant

Timely stories about an upcoming event and stories relevant to the news organization's specialty are often considered newsworthy.

The Pitch: A good example would be an upcoming hearing at your statehouse about a topic that affects the state's senior citizens. The story will be of greater interest to a news organization that covers local politics than one that doesn't.

8) News You Can Use

Any story that provides practical knowledge to the reporter's audience has a shot of getting picked up.

The Pitch: Say a city changes the process of how people pay their taxes online. A reporter is likely to be interested in the change itself. However, if you also can provide information on how that specifically impacts readers – the new process shaves off 20 minutes of the typical transaction – you will likely attract more attention.

9) Scandal

The hedge fund manager rips off his clients. A town administrator pockets public tax dollars. An unsolved murder occurs in a sleepy, backwoods suburb. Frankly, scandals jazz up the day-to-day doldrums. Although you don't want to be the subject of a scandal, you may have some expertise or service that has a bearing on the story.

The Pitch: For instance, if you are an investment advisor, you could offer to talk about the services available for people who have been affected by financial scams.

10) David vs. Goliath/The Underdog

In many stories, there is a "big guy" and a "little guy." Since the media often view their role as being the protector of the exploited, the little guy usually receives more sympathetic coverage. Similarly, readers and viewers tend to love the underdog.

The Pitch: Go ahead and pitch that story of your neighbor who, after years of struggle, finally earned her college degree.

11) Incompetence

The corporate executive, politician, or celebrity who can't seem to get it right will almost always draw the critical eye of the press. To fill out their stories, reporters might look for sources that could speak to aspects of the story.

The Pitch: If you are a communications specialist, media relations professional, or PR firm, you could offer clients who are subject matter experts on say, falls from grace, public anger, or the impact on businesses or organizations affiliated with the executive or celebrity.

12) Surprising

Stories with unexpected hooks are potent bait to a reporter. Consequently, you leave word with a reporter that the results of your study reveal that eating ice cream while walking has more health benefits than walking alone.

The Pitch: Who wouldn't return the call?

13) Hypocrisy

There are few stories as delicious to reporters as powerful people betraying their own publicly-stated positions. A president of an animal shelter gets caught abusing animals. A pastor is caught pocketing church donations. A celebrity home organizer is cited for piles of debris in her backyard. These stories are almost guaranteed to remain in the headlines for several days or weeks.

The Pitch: Are you a researcher who just finished a study on forgiveness? Are you an author of a book about hypocrisy? You have information to offer – the kind reporters will be looking to share.

14) Emotion

The details of every story differ, but there are basic archetypes, such as quests, happy endings, and redemptions. Journalists are adept at creating and recreating stories every day. Propose new ways to look at old stories.

The Pitch: Your small gift store is celebrating its first year. A reporter may not find that interesting. However, you have a customer who comes in nearly every day. If you are celebrating her loyalty on that first-year anniversary, a reporter would be more likely want to share that story.

15) Milestones

Milestones mark significant events or developments in the life of a town or city, a person's career, an anniversary, a sports team's history, or a cultural or social issue. Reporters find these pitches newsworthy, but they are always looking for a fresh hook.

The Pitch: Perhaps, you are the author of a new book that explores a local milestone. Or, you are the architect who designed a well-known building that is turning 50. Reporters appreciate milestones, but also love the stories behind them.

16) Inspirational

This storyline is similar to the David vs. Goliath/Underdog category. However, in this case, it tells the tale of a person who suffered hardships or struggles, only to emerge a better person.

The Pitch: Perhaps you have a client who just opened a tutoring center. That might be newsworthy enough. However, a reporter could be more intrigued that your client struggled as a student, overcame those obstacles, and decided to open the center to help others like her.

17) The Follow-Up

Journalists often break a "breaking news" story only to scramble for second-day leads. These stories delve into the extra details or other sides they were unable to reach for the first one.

The Pitch: Say there has been a horrible accident on the highway. The story may shift to damage to the roadway. Therefore, reporters look for sources to provide expertise on any part of that story – traffic safety, road closures, or alternative routes.

18) Profile/Personality piece

Readers love to read about people. Journalists usually are open to in-depth profile or personality pieces.

The Pitch: Get a sense of the profiles or personality pieces that the news organization publishes. As a result, you can build a comprehensive and compelling profile of the personality before pitching to the media. Include challenges and other narrative twists to hook the reporter's attention.

19) Trends

News organizations often “localize” national trends, fads, or novelty. One example is the ALS Association’s Ice Bucket Challenge, which went viral on social media. As a result, the campaign raised millions of dollars for ALS research and advocacy. Many news outlets wrote stories and aired clips on people in their communities who had accepted the “challenge.”

The Pitch: As a spokesperson for a chapter of a large organization, you similarly could find ways to link your group’s national mission or events with local stories of interest.

20) Old story, new twist

Sometimes reporters revisit a decades-old story, such as a cold case. Or, they may be tempted by a pitch that suggests a historical event should be looked at in a new way.

The Pitch: Journalists like to dip into the past, but they don’t want to write historical accounts. For that reason, the story also needs to be relevant to a reader, who, like the reporter will wonder, “What’s next?” With a cold case, for instance, you would want to compile relevant historical information, as well as new material or ideas of where the investigation goes next.

The Proper Pitch

What makes a good story? It’s a question the American Press Institute asks and one worth asking. Here’s part of the institute’s answer:

Creating a good story means finding and verifying important or interesting information and then presenting it in a way that engages the audience.

That approach takes two – you and the journalist. Journalists often receive hundreds of emails every day – with dozens of tips among them. You and your story stand out when you create a compelling media pitch.

So, take out that story you’re about to pitch. See if it aligns with any of the 20 scenarios, situations, and subjects we have offered here. You probably have several angles. However, before you make the pitch, ask yourself: What makes my story newsworthy?

How to Build a Milwaukee Media List

Crafting a list of media contacts is an important part of spreading the word about your business and is something that you should try to update once per year. Use these tips to start building your list.

Building the List

- Assess which local publications would be most likely to cover your business or story idea and which publications you'd like to cover your business or idea.
- If you don't have any personal relationships with local media, use media websites to find general editorial email addresses (examples below). Use general editorial email addresses when you want a story idea or news release to have a wide reach, with the understanding that media outlets can receive hundreds of these types of emails daily.
- Look at an individual story for the reporter's byline or sometimes at the end of the story for that reporter's contact information. Check out their social media accounts, especially Twitter; some reporters include ways to contact them on their profiles pages.
- Compile these contacts in a spreadsheet with names, publications, contact information, and the types of stories each reporter covers. For example, if you are a restaurant owner and you'd like to create a media list, it would be helpful to note which food journalists review restaurants, and which only cover news about restaurants.
- Update, update, update! Make a point to update your list at least once a year. Add notes and links about which outlets have covered your business and which ones haven't.

Monitoring Media About Your Business

- If you've never done media monitoring before, the easiest way to do so is to create a Google alerts for the following information. You'll then receive an email every time your alert picks up mentions of the keywords you identified.
 - Your businesses' name
 - Your businesses' name plus "Milwaukee"
 - Your name plus "Milwaukee"
 - The industry in which your business operates
- Consider using a social media management tool like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck to track mentions of your business on social media platforms. Tools like Hootsuite, Tweetdeck, Buffer, and SocialOomph all offer limited monitoring services for free.

Other Helpful Tips for Building A Media List

- Attend Milwaukee Press Club events. Milwaukee Press Club hosts informal happy hours with members of the media, where attendees are encouraged to mix and mingle with reporters. Don't go in with a hard sell – these events are instead great opportunities to make new connections with local media from a wide array of outlets.
- Follow your favorite local reporters on their publicly available social media accounts. You'll not only stay informed with the news of the day, but you'll get a feel for what they cover on a daily basis. Avoid following them or requesting to follow them on private accounts – journalists are owed private social lives, too!

General Assignment Email Contacts

TMJ4	news@todaystmj4.com
Fox 6	fox6news@fox6now.com
CBS 58	newsdesk@cbs58.com
WISN-12	NewsTips@wisn.com
MPTV- 10	haysc6@matc.edu
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	jsmetro@journal sentinel.com
CW 18	info@cw18milwaukee.com
OnMilwaukee	info@staff.onmilwaukee.com
Milwaukee Independent	pr@milwaukeeindependent.com
Milwaukee Courier	editorial@communityjournal.net
Milwaukee Magazine	letters@milwaukeemag.com
Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service	info@milwaukeenns.org
Milwaukee Record (Tyler Maas)	tmass@milwaukeerecord.com
Milwaukee Community Journal	editorial@MilwaukeeCommunityJournal.com
Urban Milwaukee	release@urbanmilwaukee.com.
88Nine Radio Milwaukee	stories@radiomilwaukee.org
Key Milwaukee Magazine	info@keymilwaukee.com
WUWM – 89.7	wuwmnews@uwm.edu
El Conquistador	vhuyke@bizwi.rr.com
Suab Hmong News	suabhmongnews@yahoo.com
The Daily Reporter	jjovino@dailyreporter.com
Fox Sports Wisconsin	fsnorthinfo@foxsports.net
Shepherd Express	info@shepex.com
Milwaukee Business Journal (Mark Kass)	mkass@bizjournals.com
Catholic Herald	catholicherald@archmil.org
Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle (Rob Golub)	RobG@MilwaukeeJewish.org
620 WTMJ	wtmj-news-all@wtmj.com
103.7 KISS FM	kissstudio@1037kissfm.com
105.7 THE FAN	live@1057fmthefan.com
Jammin’ 98.3 FM (Lauri Jones)	ljones@jammin983.com
102.9 THE HOG FM	headhog@1029thehog.com

The Metropolitan Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce also updates [an extensive media list](#) and publishes it annually.

Best Practices for Internal Communications

Though some of these guidelines, [created by Sprigg HR](#), might not apply to your company, deploying many of them will help streamline communications, decrease confusion among employees, and make for a more efficient workplace.

Envision, Strategize, and Plan Communications

When constructing your internal communications plan, one of the best practices is to first understand the specific communication needs of your organization. Asking yourself the following questions can help guide you towards the best communications strategy:

- What do you want internal communications to do for your team and your organization?
- How will you get there?
- Where does it stand right now? What is working, and what needs improvement?
- How soon would you like to reach your goals?

A well-formulated internal communications strategy can be as simple or elaborate, as general or specific, as is best suited for your organization. The aim should always be to keep the business on track, making the company more efficient in reaching internal communications success.

Ensure Consistency in Communication

The absence of a strategic and effective internal communications system is what causes a business to fail in ensuring consistency between external and internal messages.

Especially in larger, decentralized companies, information does not always flow consistently through all departments and levels. This is largely due to the risk of individual managers sharing information at their own discretion also hinges upon their ability to communicate well in the first place.

Aim to continuously provide all employees, at all levels, with a “core story” that frames the organization’s strategy in terms of its overarching mission and values. Maintaining optimal and consistent internal communication relies just as much on the expectations of employees as on the potential effects of the organization. By communicating frequently, consistently, and fairly, you can work to build both trust and buy-in from employees and internal stakeholders alike.

Include Metrics Whenever Possible

Regularly measuring an organization’s performance is an effective way to gain insight into the team’s actual work ethic. Using metrics to track progress can be beneficial for employees, making them aware of the specific approaches that communicators use to demonstrate the ROI for their internal communications initiatives.

When involving intermediaries, such as departmental managers, in communicating with staff members, evaluations should include both intermediary engagement and the end-user engagement.

To achieve competitive sustainability in a job market increasingly dependent on technology, businesses can make use of internal communications software to share metrics more conveniently.

Provide Channels for Feedback and Ideas

Consistent, two-way feedback is an essential component of any strong internal communications program. Diverse methods and channels are available to organizations, including online software aimed at encouraging open conversation between all members of an organization. Channels for feedback can also be useful when discussing ideas regarding the workplace, products, working procedures, etc., not always limited logistical conversations to in-person meetings and keeping the conversation flowing.

Regularly receiving and sending feedback and ideas in an organization can help an organization to remain aligned to its goals, develop new strategies, create good products and services, improve interpersonal relationships, and much more.

Encourage Cross-Departmental Communication and Collaboration

Cross-departmental communication is essential if an organization wants its employees to be able to learn from one another. Holding Q&A sessions or special gatherings between different departments to communicate, collaborate, and share insights is an effective way of achieving this.

As an example, regular inter-departmental Q&A meeting sessions can work to encourage the sharing of knowledge across departments, enhancing overall employee engagement. Additionally, consistent cross-departmental collaboration prevents employees from feeling isolated from one another, making it one of the strongest internal communications practices.

Maintain Transparency

Transparency is more than just a business policy; it is an organization mindset. Transparency is a crucial internal communications practice, promoting trust, accountability, and open dialogue within any organization. When employees feel left in the dark on certain matters, this may discourage them from asking clarifying questions and sharing their thoughts and concerns on the matter.

Evidently, not all information can be made available to everyone at all times. However, maintaining some transparency on what is directly influencing an employee's work efforts can have tremendous effects on the harmony and rapport within the organization.

Avoid Communication Overload

Especially for larger and faster-growing companies, many internal communications practices run the risk of causing communication overload. While regular and consistent communication is essential, aim to keep messages simple, brief, and to the point. If larger chunks of information are needed to be sent out, communicate with relatively less frequency. Balancing communicating what is necessary with what your employees can handle at once can help you to cut down on communication overload.

In short, the aim to be to always send the right information, to the right people, at the right time.

Share Industry News, Trends, and Insights

Employees are valid contributors to the industry itself. All staff members, regardless of ranking, should be consistently updated on the latest industry news. To accomplish this, you can encourage your employees to share and discuss industry news, the latest market trends, and any other industry-related blurbs.

By keeping employees engaged in the bigger picture, it effectively reminds them that their efforts are part of something larger than their purview. This can be an excellent motivator.

Use Internal Communications to Recognize and Praise Success

The importance of employee recognition can never be understated. Consistent acknowledgment and rewards for employees performing well makes all staff members feel that their contributions are valued and appreciated. Recognizing employees' efforts and contributions through internal communications software can not only boost employee morale, but also maximize the organization's overall productivity and growth.

Promote Employee Resources and Training

Any strong internal communications program should be consistently relaying the benefits and resources that are available to employees. This could include information on a variety of things, from health insurance and dental coverage, to company-sponsored seminars, off-site training opportunities, and career-building workshops.

By using a combination of emails, chats, internal blogs and postings, and in-person team meetings to spread the word, regularly promoting resources ultimately encourages employees to invest in their own personal and professional development through the organization itself.

Best Practices for Crisis Communications

General Tips for Crisis Communications

- In the event of a crisis, media speculation starts immediately. Never pass along information that has not been verified.
- Any statement is considered on the record and could appear in print.
- If a reporter contacts you, be sure to get the reporter's name, media outlet, phone number, and specifically what questions were asked so that a designated spokesperson can follow up with the reporter if the situation evolves.
- When you let a reporter know that you will check on an answer for them, do so in a timely manner. Understand that media are generally on deadline and their job is to collect the facts to report to the public.
- Pass along any media inquiries to your company spokesperson as soon as you receive them.
- In lieu of answering interview questions, it is always acceptable to provide a reporter with an official statement.
- Never be afraid to say you don't know. While "no comment" is not an appropriate response, "I do not know at this time" or "I will have someone get back to you immediately" is acceptable.

Tips for Responding to a Crisis via Social Media

- Respond quickly by updating all websites and social media platforms with consistent messages
- Be polite, respectful, and level
- Correct inaccurate information
- Communicate what's being done to address the issue
- Provide offline contact info
- Don't censor or delete criticism on social media channels
- Strive to listen and understand

Resources

[Public Relations Society of America's Southeastern Wisconsin Chapter](#)

[National Black Public Relations Society](#)

[Milwaukee Press Club](#)

[Wisconsin Black Media Association](#)

[UWM Department of Communication](#)

[Marquette University's Dietrich College of Communication](#)

[Carroll Communication Major](#)

[City of Milwaukee News](#)

[Milwaukee County Historical Society's Research Library](#)

[Wisconsin Black Historical Society](#)

[UWM's Encyclopedia of Milwaukee](#)