

# The Art of Selective Pitching

By Kimberly Schmitz

Finally, the project that has consumed you and your team is ready to share with the world. You've researched thoroughly, outlined every significant detail, created a press release, struggled over a good headline, and finally hit "Send" to get the news out. After calls to confirm receipt and follow up e-mails, the phone still doesn't ring. So you ask, "What did I miss?" If you're lucky, a writer will let you know why he/she didn't pick up the story, but mostly, they don't have the time. Reporters and editors receive hundreds of e-mail and phone pitches on a daily basis. Unfortunately, most are deleted before that first perfectly crafted paragraph is read. At a recent conference, I was reminded of some key strategies to keep in mind when seeking a placement in local or national media.



## Slingshot not Shotgun

Fight that temptation to blast out your press release to everybody on your mailing list. I know it's hard. You want to shout about a great project from the mountaintops, but don't e-blast it to the world and expect your story to be picked up. If a reporter or editor has to continually delete e-mails from you that don't pertain to their beat, eventually it will become an automatic response. An editor I met with from national news outlet said that she would actually block e-mail addresses that continue to send her information she doesn't need. She is a travel section editor; news about an innovative new medical product just jams up her inbox. It's fine to send newsletters or even forward press releases to peers to keep them informed. However, if you're sending something to a news medium for coverage, send it to the writer who covers the appropriate beat. Don't submit a travel piece to a political cartoonist! You can always post your releases in your online newsroom for other interested parties to visit at their leisure.

## Why here, Why now?

When writing a pitch, there are many questions that must be answered. Of course, we put on our "Scoop" hats and answer the "Who, What, When, Where and Why" of it all. (It's the basic anatomy of a pitch that can't be left out.) But there is one more question to ask and answer – "Why here, and why now?" Every day, awards are won, programs are launched, people get promotions, and new businesses open. Why is it we only hear about certain awards, programs, people and businesses? Answer: Because they are significant – whether it's good timing with a social issue; a way to address a hot topic; a local arm of a national trend; or a program that will change the face of an industry. Writers and editors will follow up on news that is pertinent and timely. Be prepared to answer the question in several different ways. Ensure that it is included in your press release or written pitch, and prepare a verbal response for the phone calls.

## Personalize that Pitch.

Make it part of your daily routine to read articles by your target reporters and/or publications. (RSS feed subscription options on most publication websites make this extremely easy.) Not only does this allow you to grasp what these writers and editors are looking for in a story, but it gives you an instant "in" when initiating conversation or drawing a parallel of significance. Use the recipient's name in an e-mail. If you know the writer, don't hesitate to offer a few words of greeting before you dive into your release information. In fact, this opening sentence is also a great place to quickly inform the writer of the "Why here, Why now?" aspect of your pitch. It will mean more to the recipient to know that you are taking into consideration their current needs and previous bodies of work.

It's easy to get so carried away with organizing and seeking publicity for a project that we neglect to consider its significance is not immediately clear to others. Creating clarity and explaining relevance for non-insiders is not always easy. Yet, it's such an important part of a solid PR plan it must not be ignored. A wise colleague of mine always says, "If it were easy, everyone would do it." Remember, help is just a phone call away. Enlist the services of a public relations professional if you don't have the time or resources to devote to a good PR campaign. Visit [www.prsaTucson.com](http://www.prsaTucson.com) for a comprehensive list of local firms and practitioners well versed in the art of selective pitching.

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