

## Put It in Writing: Powerful Tools for Attracting Press Coverage

By Henry Stimpson

Press coverage should be part of every company's marketing mix. Press coverage intrinsically has more credibility than paid advertising, which is greeted with skepticism. In contrast, when a company spokesman is quoted in a news story, it has instant credibility. The implicit message is that the reporter chose to interview this person because he or she is a leading expert and/or the company is significant.

Why do some companies and individuals show up in the news media so much while most others are invisible?

The firms that get media coverage aren't necessarily bigger or better than others. The main ingredient is that they know how to work with the press and take advantage of opportunities.

Companies today have more opportunity than ever to get their views across in mass media ranging from The Wall Street Journal to the local business newspaper to online sites. The news media are always looking for sources of expert commentary. Magazines, newspapers and trade publications often use articles from experts.

So, if you agree with the premise that press coverage is worth obtaining, how do you go about getting your share of it?

Let's start with what you *don't* need: a six-figure budget, showy promotions or lavish press conferences. Instead, you need ways

to convey your company's ideas and expertise to the media.

Most of the time you'll be dealing with the print media—newspapers, magazines, newsletters, trade journals and, increasingly, online media. The people who write and edit these outlets live and breathe print. Not surprisingly, they respond to written materials—letters, news releases, articles, backgrounders and trend stories.

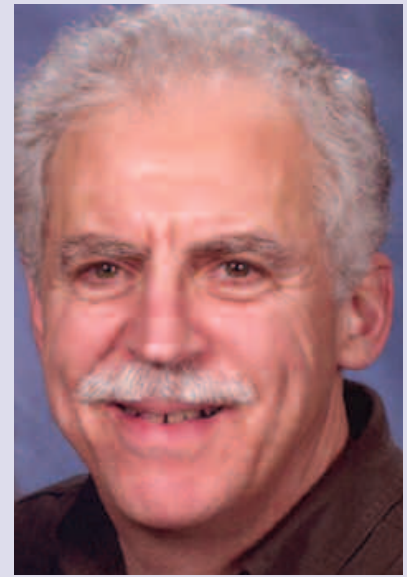
Developing well-written, thought-provoking materials and getting them to the appropriate media is the sure-fire route to gaining media coverage.

By mastering the basic written tools of media relations, your agency can gain valuable coverage. Here are the most important ones.

**News releases** are the workhorses of public relations. Editors, however, receive buckets of them every day and use only a small percentage. How can you make sure that your release has the best odds of getting used?

First, make sure it contains real news. Write news releases in a journalistic style—remember, it's a news story, not an ad. Avoid jargon. When possible, add a relevant photo or graphic—not everything can be accomplished with words alone.

Second, be sure to send news releases to relevant publications. Be selective.



**Henry Stimpson**, APR, "PR Czar" at emersongroup, has ghostwritten hundreds of articles and placed them in publications of all types, including The New York Times, and has written under his own name for The Boston Globe, Yankee and numerous trade publications. Henry provides public relations, marketing communications and writing services to organizations in many industries. He can be reached at [inq@thoughtleading.com](mailto:inq@thoughtleading.com)

There are some standard subjects for news releases. Hirings and promotions are newsworthy, as are major new clients, with the client's okay. Winning a precedent-setting case or a big jury award also merits a news release.

You can write a trend story—a news release that identifies key trends in some area in your industry. For instance, it could be the top 10 trends in the workplace this year. Editors find it refreshing when they get something that isn't self-promotional. A good trend-story release can get coverage in publications from your local business newspaper to The Wall Street Journal.

Don't overlook trade publications outside your industry as possibilities for news releases. Let's say you're a consulting firm with an industry specialty, such as high-tech or insurance. You can develop releases that address key issues affecting these industries and send them to industry trade publications like Computerworld and the National Underwriter.

News releases can be distributed by mail, fax and electronically. Electronic distribution via services such as Business Wire and MarketWire helps your release get placed on various Internet magazines and online databases.

A **story idea** doesn't deal with breaking news. Instead, it captures the essence of on a key trend in a few succinct paragraphs and offers you as a source of expert commentary. Keep it short and pithy. Story ideas can work remarkably well. The reporter may already be working on that idea and is looking for experts to interview—and your idea comes in at just the right time. Or it gives the reporter a compelling idea he or she can take to his or her editor and pursue. Send story idea individually by email.

Another key tool is the **press kit**. It gives an editor or reporter background on your organization and

its people. Press kits typically contain photos, a fact sheet, a backgrounder, and biographical sheets on key people.

A press kit serves at least two purposes. One is that it may get the reporter or editor interested in doing a story on something that stands out in the press kit, especially if you've hit on something controversial or newsworthy. Second, the recipient may keep the press kit in his or her files for reference. When an issue comes up, your company will likely be one of those called for comment.

The **bylined article** is one of the best tools available. It's called that because it includes someone's byline: By John Jones. Bylined articles can impart expert advice on an issue. Or they can be opinion ("op ed@) pieces or trend stories.

A bylined article gives you the opportunity to explain your views and position at length. It can be used to highlight your company as a leader in its field.

If you've ever written an article for a technical journal, try to get more mileage out of it by simplifying it and publishing the revised version in a trade publication or newspaper.

Again, consider a wide range of media—consumer, business and trade—as possible outlets for byliners.

Local business newspapers are always looking for good articles. What better way to get your name, photo and ideas in print?

**Case history articles** are often used by PR people for products—for example, how a company benefited by using a certain software program. But you can detail how your company's services made a big difference for a major client. Of course, if your client is named, you must get its enthusiastic consent. Case histories are powerful because they feature clients endorsing you.

As powerful as good written materials are, they're not the only route to media coverage. It's also important to get to know reporters in person when possible. A good approach is to send a letter or make a phone call offering yourself as an expert source. Some reporters like get-to-know-you meetings over breakfast or lunch; others prefer phone meetings. Go with whatever the reporter prefers.

Your message should be that you're willing to provide information or opinion when it's needed. If you know of an important issue that hasn't been covered in the press, you might mention it in your letter or call. When a reporter does call you, be as responsive as you can.