

A Reporter's POV: How Marketers Miss the Mark With the Media



When reporters come knocking, marketers are often unprepared to deliver the expert sound bites and high-quality graphics needed to take full advantage of publicity opportunities.

You might think that smaller or newer firms would be the only ones struggling to maintain a well-stocked photo portfolio, or have few sources willing to be interviewed. However, this is not always the case. While it's understandable that companies big and small must juggle a variety of responsibilities to pay the bills, media opportunities should never be considered low priority.

I have enjoyed the unique privilege of working as both a magazine editor and a freelance writer. In my experience, employing the simple tips and tricks listed below can help your firm shine in the publicity spotlight.

Stay in the Loop

Writers are always on the lookout for interesting angles and scoops on different

topics. From detailed project stories and technical case studies to stimulating narratives about industry trendsetters, reporters are seeking unique intel to share with readers. So, what sets your company apart from all the rest?

One way to answer this question is to stay looped in on project activities—past, ongoing, and future. Make note of any significant feats or accolades. Were there any unique project considerations or challenges? How did team members overcome obstacles, or create solutions to mitigate potential difficulties? Did the team or project receive any awards or other recognitions? Did your company's efforts lead to new business alliances or job opportunities? The more details you have on hand, the greater the chance you'll have something the media's looking for.

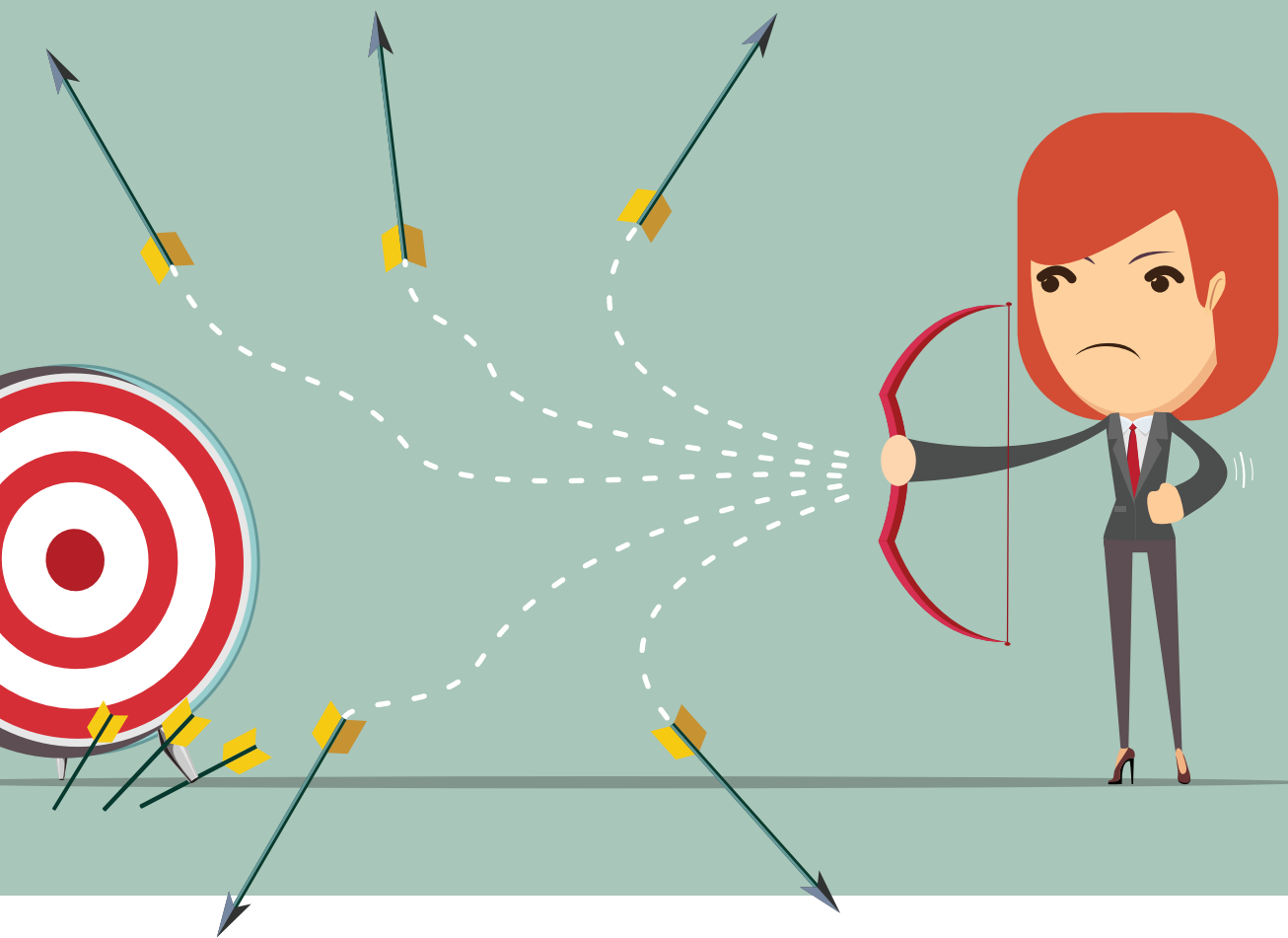
Get To Know Your Staff

Building bonds with customers starts with establishing personal connections. You build trust and camaraderie by helping them get to know the people behind the products and services you offer.

Hence, it's a great idea to keep up with team members' activities—both inside

and outside of the workplace. Are they working on new business initiatives? Does anyone serve as a leader in a professional or civic organization? Do any individuals volunteer in soup kitchens, coach Little League baseball teams, run in charity-sponsored marathons, or mentor kids in local schools? Also keep in mind that people's backstories can make for great article ideas. For example, a message centered on overcoming adversity can universally inspire and motivate individuals from varying backgrounds and circumstances.

It's important to keep in mind that high performers usually enjoy recognition. Rewarding a person's initiative, acknowledging his/her achievements, and providing regular feedback (both positive and constructive) is appreciated and positively affirms employees' sense of self and worth in an organization. By going one step further to share those accolades with reporters, you are fostering an inviting work culture that attracts and retains high-performance talent. This win-win scenario also enhances business efficiency. According to a talent management article published by *Harvard Business Review* a few years back, these highly motivated



individuals can be up to 400 percent more productive than an average employee.

Establish Protocols

Most reporters have tight deadlines, so you need to be prepared to act fast. Establishing a chain of command is critical to streamlining activities associated with confirming sources, providing answers to media queries, gathering appropriate images and graphics, and fact-checking materials. If you don't have a marketing team dedicated to this effort, you need to assign these tasks to reliable individuals who have the right type of temperaments to handle these responsibilities. (The last thing you want to do is ask someone who struggles with time management, or who gets easily rattled under pressure, to support this effort.) These individuals should also respect freelancers the same way they would respect a reporter from an industry publication or the local paper. Freelancers work just as hard as reporters. Plus, many of them will try to return the favor by making you aware of additional publicity opportunities as they arise. (So it's in your best interest to stay on a freelancer's good side!)

Build a Robust Image Portfolio

One thing I cannot stress enough is that *images are vital to reporters!* Without images, stories can be postponed or even dropped. You should always maintain a well-stocked portfolio of recent headshots of those in senior-level management roles and key team leaders (e.g., project managers, lead engineers, senior estimators, business development managers, etc.). Also, create a shortlist of local professional photographers whom you can call on for last-minute or special photo needs. Invest in a high-quality camera in case a photographer is unavailable (reporters rarely require an expertly-shot image, though the extra effort is always appreciated).

These days, most smartphones are powerful enough to shoot great-quality images for most publications' needs. Be sure to adjust the camera phone's resolution settings to the highest level to capture as much detail as possible. Also, stabilize the mobile device on a solid surface or hold it extremely still when shooting to avoid blurring the images.

Shoot photos in both landscape and portrait-oriented formats. Whether the photo subject be human or inanimate,

think artistically when you're staging photos. Consider flattering angles, bold colors, appropriate lighting choices, and creative props or backdrops to enhance your visual story. Take photos of everything, and encourage your team members to get involved in this effort. Take stills, action shots in the office and in the field, in-house meetings and staff development sessions, conferences and awards ceremonies, philanthropic activities—the sky's the limit. When it comes to photos, it's better to be overprepared—plus, you can always use them on your website or social media pages.

Be Ready

By proactively monitoring company and team member activities, you can certainly increase brand awareness by serving up fresh, engaging story ideas to writers and publications. And if you establish protocols for handling media needs, including keeping a well-stocked image portfolio, you're sure to deliver a strong, relevant message to your target audiences—and build credibility in the process. ■