



# Media Pitching Best Practices Guide

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# What is a Media Pitch?

A media pitch is a letter to an editor or journalist to get you media exposure. Its main objective is to catch his or her interest – enough to want to call you for an interview, product demonstration, or whatever call to action you've indicated.

It has all the most important information, but not all the details. It isn't a complete story. Rather it's a teaser for a story. You can be more creative and less formal in a media pitch than in a press release.

**A media pitch has a purpose that is defined by a Call To Action (CTA).**

A media pitch can be the perfect complement to a press release that requires that newsworthy angle. The release is the supporting documentation of the pitch, not the pitch itself.

Hot industry news occurring now also makes for a great media pitch. Indicate why you would make a good follow-up to a story they're already covering, or share data they haven't found yet. The media also love experts with an opposing view.



# Why Send a Media Pitch?



1. **Exposure-** One media placement can open your business up to a whole new world, exposing your company name, product/service to hundreds (or more) of potential customers.
2. **Enhanced Sales-** Media coverage drives people to want to learn more about your business and what product/services you have to offer – which in turn drives sales.
3. **Expert status-** When you are quoted by the media, you and your business build authority as an expert within your field or industry. This carries a lot of weight with your current and potential customers.
4. **Unbiased reviews-** Objective reviews from independent third parties do wonders for your credibility. Word of mouth is the most trusted source of recommendations and gets you much further than a pay-for-play ad ever could.
5. **Search Engine Optimization-** If you include an inbound link within your email media pitch, your website SEO/ranking could improve if the reporter uses that link within an article.



# HARO

Help A Reporter Out (HARO) is one of the fastest-growing social media services in North America. Every day, HARO brings nearly 30,000 reporters and bloggers, over 100,000 news sources and thousands of small businesses together to tell their stories, promote their brands, and sell their product/services.

**HARO vs. Standard Media Pitches:** With HARO, journalists have a story in mind and are looking for experts to share their information. With standard media pitches, journalists may not have a story in mind and so it's YOUR job to give them a story idea.

## **How to Get Your Pitch Selected:**

- 1) Never pitch off topic
- 2) Read the query carefully and follow all directions set forth
- 3) Respond quickly
- 4) Keep it short and sweet
- 5) Be polite
- 6) Become a point of contact by referring other experts you know personally
- 7) Respect the reporters and bloggers you contact



# Do Your Homework

A few minutes of diligence will set you apart from the crowd.

**Read first, pitch second.** Reporters regularly receive requests to report on products/companies that have nothing to do with the news they cover. To avoid this, read at least 6-8 of the reporter's blogs/recent articles to see past topics the reporter wrote about so you do not duplicate topics and waste the writer's time.

**Engage.** Before you even pitch, follow targeted reporters on social media and add them to a list. Watch and read what they Tweet about. Start interacting and engaging with them on social platform. Subscribe to their blog and leave thoughtful/meaningful comments on interesting articles. Your first email to them should be an introduction offering to be a source for them the next time they write an article about your industry.

**Know the Reporter's Reader.** You should convey how your business will be relevant to the reporter's readers.

**Research the reporter.** Prior to reaching out to them, research the reporter and see how they wish to be contacted. Most reporters will mention their preference on social platforms or on their website. Keep in mind that reporters have deadlines. Most prefer emails and many of them do not want to be pitched via phone. If you know for a fact the reporter would be interested in your pitch, try other outlets like social media.

# Subject Lines Matter

**Grab the Journalist's Attention:** A striking subject line must communicate your pitch instantly and convey why the content is new and interesting. **DO NOT USE ALL CAPS.**

**Don't be Generic.** Always tailor each pitch to the specific reporter. The best subject line is short, catchy and clever.

Start by writing several subject lines and then combine the best of each, re-work and simplify so what remains is no longer than one sentence.

**Be Specific:** Don't pitch off-topic. Tell the journalist exactly what they can expect from reading the email. Capture their interest with numbers / facts with which they can relate and see themselves benefiting from.



# Email Body

**K-I-S-S -- Keep It Short and Sweet.** By keeping only the most important information, you won't lose your pitch to the pile of "off-topic" pitches. The pitch should be no more than 3 paragraphs. A journalist can tell after the first sentence whether to keep or toss the pitch. Be sure to quickly explain what you are pitching and why the media outlet's readers will care about the information at this point in time. Use bullet points as it helps the reporter read quickly without missing anything.

**Provide a "call to action".** If you want a response, a CTA is essential when making your pitch to a journalist – and it must be clear and to the point. After explaining your product, service or situation, ask a question or set up a clear action step. If you want the journalist to consider reviewing your product, offer a sample. If you want them to speak with a customer who might qualify as a third-party source, request it. It's essential to be clear and to the point.

**Develop angles.** Find and develop 3 or 4 story angles that you can pitch comfortably for a variety of situations. The media strive to be unique and different. If everyone is covering the same story, the media outlet needs something to set themselves apart so they don't lose readership. Offering each outlet an "exclusive" aspect is preferable.

**Provide All the Information.** Don't make a journalist hunt down additional information. Add a link to a website or video. Provide the names and contact information for sources. If you have images, let the reporter know that you can send them (but do not attach them in the pitch).

**Avoid professional jargon.** Journalists are human beings, and more importantly, so are their readers. Don't stuff a pitch with overcomplicated lingo – that will not appeal to journalists' readers, so it will not appeal to them. Only use words like "exclusive," when it is, in fact, exclusive. These words are often misused and can break your relationship with the reporter and ensure your emails will not be opened in the future.



# Pitch Offerings



When pitching to the media, it is important to keep the medium in mind. Broadcast relies on high-quality visuals (images/video/graphics) and sound, Radio relies purely on high-quality sound, and print/online editorials require experts they can quote.

- Exclusives or at least a unique angle
- YouTube videos
- Photos
- Graphics
- Case Study
- Fact Sheet
- Interview Opportunities
- Product Sample/Images
- Bylined Articles
- Links where more information can be found





# When's the Best Time for Distribution?

Most reports will say, "If it's a good pitch, it's always a good time." So really, there is no best time to pitch.

Some reporters prefer pitches bright and early. Though an eROI survey states, almost 50% of respondents report sending emails at midday (10 to 2 p.m.) is best.

Every industry and media outlet is different. Make sure you know the media contact's title. For instance, sending an email pitch to an evening assignment desk editor at midday would be the wrong time.

- Newspaper - Pitch 2-3 weeks in advance for an investigative story
- Newspaper - Pitch 2-5 days in advance for a breaking story
- Radio- Pitch whenever relatable to breaking news or buzz
- Broadcast- Pitch 1 week in advance
- Magazine- Pitch 4-6 months in advance or earlier if they can provide submission dates on an editorial content calendar on their website

Tuesday-Thursday work best for email pitch distribution. Take into account where the media contact is, and do not pitch during a National emergency unless your pitch deals with the situation.



# Try to Avoid:

The number one mistake people make when pitching is straying off-topic. Know what and who you are pitching so you can quickly get to the point.

Other pitching mistakes:

- 1) Making yourself the news
- 2) Pitch a product rather than a story
- 3) Mass media pitch emails
- 4) Launching into your industry history
- 5) Opening with an icebreaker line
- 6) Making false claims
- 7) Making a reporter dig for more information
- 8) Setting unrealistic expectations – Stay humble
- 9) Providing attachments
- 10) Follow-up calls



# Pitching TV

- When pitching local TV news , be sure to find a local angle tying the story to their locale or region
- Find a local person or local business that is affected/helped by your story
  - If you can offer up real people (not just CEOs) for them to interview, that will help the journalist - that's research they don't have to do
  - They might still find other people but it's nice to give them a starting point
  - Example: You are trying to get the word out about a product designed for restaurants or bars, find a local bar or restaurant near them that uses the product
- Don't expect the reporter to make any connections or any leaps about why your story would be good for them to cover – tell them directly
- Don't be afraid to mention other stories the reporter has covered to tie it into what you are pitching – it lets them know you watch the station (or at least you have done your research).
  - If you think they covered that previous story well, you can comment on it positively
- Do not use the word pitch to TV people, they usually do not understand what you mean
- Call and pitch the assignment desk
  - Sure, it sounds like it makes more sense to pitch a reporter since they actually cover the stories but the assignment desk often is the final decision maker in story coverage for the day
  - At many stations, the assignment desk chooses the stories and set them up for the reporters
  - Email the assignment desk and then follow up with a call.
- If the station has a futures/planning editor, they are great to talk to as well
  - They set up stories for the future and often have more time to review a new story

# Wrap Up



- Research first, pitch second.
- Media pitches must answer the journalist's question -- "why would my audience care?"
- Headlines must be short, catchy and clever.
- Focus on KISS – Keep It Short and Simple.
- In most cases, you are not the news. You are providing additional information on what's happening in the world.



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