

A TV Reporter Shares the Secrets for Getting Covered on the News

By Jeff Crilley

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Do you have a great idea for a story, but no clue how to get it in the news? Are you tired of pitching press releases the news media simply ignores?

After twenty years of beating the street as a TV reporter, I have a scoop for you: the media needs good stories. But most stories are pitched so poorly, they are lost in the blizzard of faxes that blanket every newsroom.

So, here are five steps to increase your chances of getting covered that even some PR pros don't know:

1) BE UNUSUAL

The old adage about "Man bites dog" still holds true. The news doesn't cover what's normal. We cover the abnormal.

PR whiz Carolyn Alvey knew this when she was trying to raise money for a charity several years ago. Instead of holding a garage sale, she sent out a press release announcing a "Celebrity Garage Sale." Everything from Bob Hope's old golf clubs to Roger Staubach's long-neglected neckties were for sale. By making an ordinary garage sale extraordinary, the media was instantly sold on the story.

2) BE VISUAL

Reporters tell stories with pictures. If the pictures aren't there, chances are the reporters won't be either.

Even the most non-visual story can be made visual if you're creative. A dog biscuit business? Boring. A dog birthday party complete with doggie guests and party hats? Now you're barking up the right tree.

That's what Michelle Lamont did to boost her dog biscuit bakery. She began baking huge dog biscuit birthday cakes and inviting the media to cover the parties. She's had reporters hounding her for stories ever since.

3) CHOOSE THE RIGHT REPORTER

Perhaps the most common mistake even some PR pros make is trying to sell a good story to the wrong person. Most reporters have a specialty, like "crime" or "business."

So, seek out the reporter who will have the most to benefit from your story. Start studying the news. Before you call a TV station or try and pitch the paper, become familiar with a reporter's work. Don't try and sell an investigative story to a reporter who covers entertainment.

4) WRITE LIKE A REPORTER

If I were going to send a press release to a reporter, I'd write the kind of headline that a newspaper would run. And I'd make the rest of the release so conversational that a TV anchor could read it right on the air.

Why is this so important? A major market newsroom gets hundreds of press releases every day. Often the decision on whether to cover your story is made in a matter of seconds. Many times that well-crafted sentence in the third paragraph of your press release is never read.

5) WAIT FOR A SLOW NEWS DAY

The holidays are the slowest "news times" of the year. When government offices are closed, so are most of our sources. Take advantage of it.

In fact, take out your calendar and begin circling government holidays. If the government isn't making news, we reporters are scrambling to find something to cover. Pitch even an average story on a day when the media is starving for news, and you're much more likely to get coverage.

There you go. Now you're armed with knowledge that even some well-paid public relations professions don't practice. If your idea is unique, visual, and pitched to the right person when the supply of news is running thin, you're in!

Jeff Crilley is an Emmy Award Winning Reporter and author of *Free Publicity-A TV Reporter Shares the Secrets for Getting Covered on the News*. It's available at bookstores everywhere or online at [">http://www.jeffcrilley.com](http://www.jeffcrilley.com)

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