

# Phone Pitches Can Pay Off

By Marcia Yudkin

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More than a decade ago, Colorado consultant Debra Benton gave her career a lasting boost in less than one minute. She called a famous columnist and told him in one sentence what she did: teach executives how to have charisma. The columnist took her number and called her back a week later for an interview.

The day his article appeared, she received calls from Time and Newsweek as well as from several executives who turned into clients. Time ran its own story on her, which led to writeups in Barron's, Financial Weekly, The New York Times, "CBS This Morning" and "Good Morning America." Much of her business -- and her ability to charge thousands of dollars a day for her services -- indirectly stems from that phone call to that columnist.

What can you learn from this?

First, she used a concise, intriguing characterization of herself. This takes most people much more than one minute to formulate. Unless you have an unusual job title, such as Florida State Official Handwriting Analyst, your job title won't perform this function. Instead you need to delve below "stockbroker," "specialty shoe wholesaler" or "sports trainer" to put into words the results that you produce for some group of people. The shoe wholesaler might say, "I help men spend a whole day on their feet in comfort."

You'll know you've done it right when people lean forward after you reel off your sentence and ask you, "How do you do that?"

Second, Benton did the research necessary to reach someone who would probably respond well to her pitch. Although her research consisted simply of taking note of the personality and interests of the columnist, whom she regularly read

anyway, you may need a few trips to the library or the Internet to find the right media person to call. Consider the audience you hope to reach and what publications they read or what programs they watch or listen to. Or consult an up-to-date media directory in the reference department of almost any public library.

Third, when you call, respect the other person's time. Because media people face unforgiving, absolute deadlines, PR pros usually start off something like this: "Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_. Are you on deadline or do you have a moment now?" Tell them only as much as is necessary to pique their interest. Don't take it personally if they appear brusque, and never argue with someone who's given you a "no." Simply go on to another person on your list.

Fourth, practice what you'll say when they want a full-length interview. Decide on three major points you want to get across and get a friend who's a Barbara Walters wannabee to feed you relevant and off-the-wall questions. Debra Benton got terrific results from the columnist partly because she anticipated what he might ask and prepared compelling examples and convincing replies.

Phone pitches shouldn't replace targeted distribution of news releases, only supplement them in those rare cases where you sense a perfect match between a media outlet and your own specialization.

Marcia Yudkin [marcia@yudkin.com](mailto:marcia@yudkin.com) is the author of the classic guide to comprehensive PR, "6 Steps to Free Publicity," now for sale in an updated edition at Amazon.com and in bookstores everywhere. She also spills the secrets on advanced tactics for today's publicity seekers in "Powerful, Painless Online Publicity," available from [www.yudkin.com/powerpr.htm](http://www.yudkin.com/powerpr.htm) .

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