



**MACIAS PR**

## **White Paper**

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# ***How to get my Business on the News***

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## GETTING THE MEDIA'S ATTENTION

It's the one question every person wants to know. How do the news producers and newspaper editors decide what to print and publish? Most people ask this question like there is a magical formula that scientifically reveals whether a story should be pursued or scrapped. If it were this easy to identify news stories, you can bet the formula would have been hacked and posted on the Internet by now. The fact is news selection is an art and just like any other profession involving creativity, opinions and experiences, it is subjective to where you stand.

News is a public service, which means your story must provide a service to the public. It sounds simplistic, but many people don't grasp that concept as they pursue publicity. They assume the media is entitled to do feature stories on the public in the name of public service. No, the media is entitled to do stories that benefit and help the public with new information that is relevant today. And in today's saturated media market where ratings and unique viewers drive advertising rates, you will have more success with a media placement by finding an angle that has an inherent tease value. This is a story that draws readers in because they are intrigued, leading to more viewers and readers for the publication.

Finding a unique angle is not as difficult as it may sound. You just need to open your mind to timely events that impact and influence sales of your product or service. Look through the newspaper for news stories on similar topics. For example, if you own a fashion or jewelry store, think of high-profile events like the Academy Awards or the Grammy Awards – which the media will cover in-depth. One small jewelry store in New York City did this in 2008 after Daniel Day-Lewis wore two gold earrings to the Academy Awards ceremony. The owner pitched a trend story to a local newspaper that claimed straight men were now wearing earrings in both ears, just like Daniel Day-Lewis. The owner was profiled in the story as a jewelry designer and in the narrative of the story, he showcased his designer earrings that he claimed

men and women were buying from his story. The publicity was better than any full-page ad in the fashion trade magazines.

Many times, a current tie-in to your company can be found on the front pages of the newspaper. Below is an actual media release I received when I was a Senior Producer with CBS. The publicist sent this to me on the morning *American Airlines* announced it was canceling flights due to maintenance concerns.

Hi Mark,

American Airlines has canceled more than **2,400 flights** since Tuesday, **impacting tens of thousands of customers**.

Seasoned travel service experts and co-founders of JetCombo.com, **George Khairallah** and **Michael Thomas**, are available to comment on this airline fiasco.

Q- Who is at fault? American Airlines? The Federal Aviation Administration?

Q- Is this a sign of more woes to come for the commercial airline industry?

Q- What steps should American Airlines take for damage control?

Q- Where does this leave stranded travelers?

JetCombo.com is a first-of-its-kind online booking service that overlays existing commercial airline schedules with charter and private jet aircraft availability to create a new way to fly.

Please contact me for more information or to schedule an interview.

Best,  
(name of publicist)

This publicist had the right strategy with her tie-in to American Airlines, but her media pitch lacked credibility. After looking deeper into the story, I realized it was nothing more than another travel website. Her idea was in the right place, but she should have spent more time establishing her client as an expert and related it back to the *American Airlines* story.

## ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY WITH THE MEDIA

Credibility matters in life, but it especially matters for journalists. Whenever a business owner is pitched to the media, journalists will quietly and overtly measure his expertise, integrity and experience in the industry. Journalists will want to see proof on why this person is the best expert to add color to the industry.

This is why your business must establish credibility in the online world if you want to secure credible media placements. If a reporter doesn't see a solid online presence, credibility questions will be raised and this includes stories with the other news outlets. This doesn't mean you won't succeed with a media placement if you have never been in the paper, but it will be a much harder story sell to the media if you can't show why you are an expert. You can establish credibility by writing editorials on the market and submitting them to influential business news sites, like the Huffington Post, Business Insider, trade magazines, etc. Writing a book on your industry will also give you another avenue to position yourself as an expert. Here are a few questions to address and answer before you pursue media placements.

*Q) What makes you qualified to speak on this topic?*

*Q) How many years of experience have you spent in the industry and why does this make you more qualified than your competitors?*

*Q) How big is your business in comparison to others?*

*Q) What part of your daily routine is spent reinforcing your expertise?*

*Q) What do you know as an insider that others would want to know?*

*Q) Does your business have a direct impact on reshaping the future?*

*Q) Is your business positioned as a leader in any trends?*

*Q) Do trade organizations recognize your business as a leader or expert?*

Sometimes, you need to dig a little to find that timely, credible element. Suppose you own a small temporary employment agency, which helps people find new jobs. How

would you convince the media to do a positive story on your agency? Now, it's time to look outside for guidance.

## DISCOVERING YOUR GIMMICK

Everyone needs a gimmick, especially in New York City. If you want to stand out at a cocktail party or crowded lounge, you need something to push you above the crowd. Some people call that personality; others call it charisma. I like to call it a gimmick. It's no different with branding a product, business, or service. You need to discover what your gimmick is if you want to get noticed, regardless of what you are selling.

Now before the critics start mincing words and breaking down my statement with comments like, "That is shallow," or "Execution beats style," or "Hype loses to substance," or "Consumers are smarter than that," I get it. And I agree with you. But let's take off that analytical, argumentative cap for a sec and discuss this idea in the gray world we live in today.

In 2010, I consulted an HR company on their publicity and we needed a gimmick to get on the media's radar. As part of their media campaign, we created an internal survey that asked their clients whether they planned on doing more or less hiring in the next quarter. We packaged this survey with Rutgers University and positioned it as a private sector snapshot on where the economy was headed. The informal survey led to a front-page story with the Philadelphia Inquirer, a 10-minute segment on a CBS public affairs program, a radio segment on National Public Radio and a few other news placements. We positioned the CEO as a jobs expert, who put their employer survey into perspective, giving consumers and business owners a deeper understanding of where the economy was headed.

Perhaps your company doesn't have the resources for an internal survey. You can still use this strategy by using another opinion survey. AOL and Yahoo always have new polls that show how people feel about themselves. Find a survey that relates to

your industry, tie it back to your business and pitch a story with yourself as the expert.

A gimmick is especially important when you need to stand out from the crowd. This happened with the international non-profit organization, The Salvation Army, as we tried to determine how to get them more publicity outside of the holiday season. Their leadership committee told me it was difficult for the organization to get toy donations in spring, summer and fall when no one was thinking about Santa Claus. They wanted to find a way to remind the public of their toy drives throughout the year.

I recommended a publicity campaign involving Santa Claus taking a summer vacation to New York City. The idea was to put Santa Claus in Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt, and have him visit Coney Island for Memorial Day Weekend. He would ride a roller coaster at the park with the kids and be seen wearing summer clothes, which was not part of his traditional garb. The Salvation Army wrote up press releases alerting the media in advance that Santa Claus was taking a vacation from the North Pole and he wanted to remind parents that toys were needed year-round for kids. This media campaign was a success because it's unusual to see Santa Claus in the summer months. It was also a great photo opportunity for newspapers and TV stations that were looking for fun photos during slow holiday weekend. This strategy wouldn't have been as successful if the campaign were launched in December when Santa was overexposed.

In many ways the media runs in packs. Every news outlet wants to run enterprise and original stories, but the open secret is many editors, news managers and producers are afraid of failure. If the public doesn't buy, read or watch their stories, they know they will lose credibility in the newsroom for pitching it. The more you understand the definition and value of "newsworthy" the better chance you will have of getting media coverage for you or your business. And once you are

successfully pitching story ideas, you are better able to shape the message and spin the media into your favor.

## PREPARING FOR THE MEDIA INTERVIEW

At this point in your life you should know how to prepare for the job interview, but do you know how to prepare for the media interview? I recently interviewed a C-level executive with a very influential search engine company for a TV story. Minutes before the executive sat down in front of the camera, a woman from corporate communications tried to brief him for the interview. As the producer, I stayed quiet and listened as the corporate communicator prepped her boss with a briefing document that detailed answers to my anticipated questions. It was a long document filled with paragraphs. Luckily, the interview was taped because the executive flopped even though this was a friendly interview. The questions were softballs, yet this executive made the same mistakes that I continually saw throughout my TV career. He tried to memorize sentences rather than remembering themes.

The executive tried to read from a script, rather than speak from the heart and mind. If you ever do a TV interview, throw out the script. Don't try to memorize sentences, especially if long sentences because you are guaranteed to forget the words no matter how hard you study. And if you're preparing a briefing document for a client, don't write out long or even short sentences. In fact, don't write out any sentences. Instead, communicate your thoughts in bullet-points. These bullet-points will force you to learn the topic and understand the issues rather than memorizing words.

I made this mistake myself when I was interviewed on radio early in my career. Initially, I tried to memorize sentences rather than key points and I stumbled in front of the camera just like everyone else. It wasn't until I forced myself to communicate what I knew that my words flowed freely. If you're preparing for a media interview, study and prepare for the themes, rather than for the individual

questions. For example, if you are being interviewed as a portfolio manager on CNBC, rather than memorizing sentences, grasp the concepts that you want to communicate on TV. Remember the big picture on why you look a specific stock. Even if a question is rephrased, you will always know how to answer it because you will be speaking from a deeper understanding of the theme. Remember, you are the expert, so communicate what you know – not what you memorized.

In the case with this C-level executive, after watching him stumble for 15 minutes over sentences written by another person, I asked the photographer to stop rolling. I then asked the executive if we could toss his briefing document in the trash. I reminded him that he knew what he was telling me and he had to explain in his words – not the words from his staff – what the message was. As soon as the camera started rolling again, we had the best sound any producer or viewer would want to hear. You know why? Because he spoke from his heart and mind, rather than from sentences he memorized.

That is the key to doing an interview on TV. Prepare for themes, not sentences. All kinds of distractions will appear that you really can't prepare for – the studio lights, the siren outside on the street, the crowd watching. Your memory is the first to go, which is why you don't want to memorize lines. But if you know the topic intimately and speak from the heart, you won't mess up.



### ***Choosing the Right PR Firm***

Is there a quantitative way to measure value and success when it comes to public relations? As a former Executive Producer with WNBC and Senior Producer with WCBS, I worked with a lot of publicists throughout my journalism career. Some publicists took me out for after-work drinks, trying to sell me story ideas with alcohol. Other publicists met me on the location of



various video shoots, masquerading as my best friend. Of course, I met many publicists over the phone as I listened to their pitches for stories.

Now, as the owner of a PR firm, I see the other side of the PR business. In my weekly routine, I meet small business owners with tight marketing budgets and corporate executives with large budgets that require a spreadsheet. Regardless of industry, most business owners routinely ask the wrong questions when it comes to assessing the value of a public relations agency or publicist. Here are some pivotal questions to ask before hiring a PR firm to lead your media strategy.

**Can you give me a publicity strategy for my business?** This is a crucial question. You want to be able to see how the publicist thinks on his feet. I've asked this question to seasoned publicists for fun to get into their head. Most of them say, I need to research it. That is an excuse for, let me Google to see what others have done and I will copy their ideas. A great publicist will have his own ideas, but don't confuse strategy with an understanding of your specific field of expertise or knowledge. A great publicist will ask the right questions to determine what is a media strategy for your business. He will also come up with story ideas and specific tactics, so you can understand how he or she will lead your campaign.

**How do you see my industry?** This question reveals how well the publicist understands your business and industry. Make the publicist explain what he sees as the unique value in your service. But don't dismiss your publicist just because he doesn't understand everything at once. I've worked with high-tech platforms that took me time to grasp. TIP: Keep your question open-ended so the publicist can't repeat what you say.

**Tell me about your clients and media placements you have secured?** Media placements are everything in the world of PR. I have gotten my clients stories in the New York Times, New York Post, Good Morning America, CNN en Español, Fox News, Gigaom, Entrepreneur Magazine. You get the idea. A diverse portfolio suggests that this publicist knows how to identify a narrative, regardless of industry.

Sometimes, it is not valuable to work with a PR firm that only has expertise in one area because their ideas risk becoming stale. Once you see the media placements your PR firm has secured, ask how long it took them to secure those media placements. If it takes a PR firm six months to achieve one media placement, is that a time frame you are willing to wait for results?

**Will I be working directly with you?** Most larger PR firms in New York will send in the great sellers to get your business, but after they get your account, they will pawn off the work to a 22-year-old college grad. How do I know? Because I used to get emails and phone calls from publicists who were fresh out of college while their bosses took me out for after-work drinks. You have every right to meet the publicist who will be writing the pitches and selling your story to reporters. And whether you like it or not, reporters will associate the value of your business by how well your communications team interacts with them. Is your publicist organized and quick on his feet? Can he explain the specifics of how your industry? Make sure you meet the people speaking to the media on behalf of your company.

**What if we don't get along? What if I want out of the contract because you can't deliver results?** Every PR firm hates these questions, but it's a valid point to raise during your initial discussions. If you're working with a publicist and the chemistry is bad or he/she doesn't get along with you, you should be able to get a new person or get out of your account. Publicists are going to hate me for saying this, but I tell my clients, if it's not working for you, I'll let you out. I'd rather have a happy former client than a current unhappy client. (To date, no business has ever asked me if they could end an agreement early). I've clashed with some business owners because they wanted a media strategy executed their way, but after I explained my strategy and delivered media results, most of them deferred to my expertise when it came to the media.

**How long before we get to see results?** This answer can vary by the complexity of your campaign, but the PR firm should be able to give some guidance over a timeframe. The PR team might not want to give this hand away, but press them on it.

**What is your media experience?** Experience matters when it comes to anything in life and it matters even more with publicity. Does your PR team understand your industry, its competitors and what is your unique selling proposition? Force the PR firm or publicist to sell you on their experience, and make them explain how this relates to the media. This will also give you an idea of how well your PR team will sell your stories to the media.



### ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

The founder of MACIAS PR, Mark M. Macias, has worked inside the newsrooms of NBC, CBS, KTVK, the Arizona Republic and King World Productions. As the Executive Producer with WNBC in New York, Macias approved and vetted story ideas from publicists, reporters, producers and viewers. He was also Executive Producer for a national business show that was syndicated by NBC. This background in programming and editorial gives us an edge when finding the strong narrative needed for coverage.

### ***OUR SERVICES INCLUDE***

*Public Relations, Crisis Communications, Media Training, Messaging, Social Media Strategy, Original Content for Blogs/Newsletters and Website Design, Press Releases and Distribution, Introductions to Journalists, Event Publicity, and Video Production.*

If you are interested in scheduling a call with Mark Macias to discuss a media strategy for your company, you can reach him at: [Mark@MaciasPR.com](mailto:Mark@MaciasPR.com).

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