



THROW A WINNING PITCH: TIPS FOR BUILDING MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS AND PLACING A GREAT STORY

Media Landscape

- Editorial staffs are shrinking across most traditional media
 - Fewer staff, fewer news beats, fewer outlets = smaller local news hole
 - Journalists are wearing multiple hats and have less time
 - Need for more targeted and creative approaches that are easy for writers/editors to put into action
 - Relationships are gold
 - Don't get discouraged if you don't hear back
- Web traffic and advertising is driving editorial decisions – What is getting clicked?
 - Media are looking for visual and cross-platform stories
 - Social media and promotions create editorial/advertising gray areas
- No budgets
 - Events can be timely and visual news hooks, but if you're inviting media, don't ask them to pay
 - Most local journalists don't have the time or budget to travel, so look for ways to take your story to them
- It's still the NEWS
 - Timely, relevant and unique stories always win

Building Relationships + Targeted Pitching

- Stop blasting your entire media list
 - Review, sort and narrow contacts for every press release, calendar advisory or story idea
 - Make sure your content is relevant to each journalist you pitch (based on outlet, section, personal interests)
 - Consider their audience – What do they want to read? Where are they based? What do they care about?
 - It's okay to think outside the ag/ed media box, but make it relevant (e.g. environment, lifestyle, parenting)
- Make a connection – Media are human too
 - Read their work, research their recent articles, follow them on twitter
 - Check in occasionally to see what they are working on
 - Although connecting to personal interests in your email can help grab their attention, skip unnecessary formalities like “how are you” unless you already have an established relationship
- Be there when they need you
 - Make yourself available as a resource whenever you can; thinking beyond your organization will build trust
 - Respond quickly to their requests (within 24 hours)
- Send good story ideas
 - Don't pitch your farm/school/nonprofit organization; pitch a great story about a new trend or program



The Nitty Gritty: How to craft a great pitch

- Grab their attention
 - What's the lead? Skip unnecessary formalities and sell them on the main point of your story in the first sentence
 - Make your subject line short and interesting – If they don't open your email, they won't get the message
- Keep it short
 - Long, bulky paragraphs have visual weight and can be daunting to read; consider bullet points to break it up
 - Include just enough detail and context to spark interest; you can tell them more if they're interested
 - Focusing on one story idea makes it easier for media to say yes; save additional ideas for a follow-up pitch
- Make it timely
 - Why should they run the story now? If you don't give them a reason, they'll just file it for later
 - Tie your program/organization/story to trends, new reports or statistics, events, or national news (e.g. back to school, Farm to School Month, new legislation proposed or passed, community member goes to D.C. to lobby)
 - If you're promoting an event, put the date in the subject line to show urgency
- Put it in context
 - Put yourself in their shoes – What does their audience care about? Not what do you want them to know
 - Localize the story around a trend, report or national news by connecting it to your work, your community
 - What is different about your program than others? What makes this story new? Who else is doing similar work?
 - Make the connection obvious between what your organization offers and what the media is looking for; don't expect them to see it on their own
- Make it easy for them
 - Develop a story; don't just pitch your organization or business
 - Get the facts straight to build trust; don't exaggerate and don't leave out important contextual details
 - Highlight visuals, especially for TV and online media
 - Offer sources and interview connections; editors are looking for regular people with an interesting point of view
 - Be clear about what you want and your role; they know this is a business transaction so be up front
 - Offer bylined articles to content-hungry online media
- Follow up, be brief and don't hound them
 - Most media prefer to be contacted by email, but a phone follow-up can sometimes help break through the clutter

Looking for more advice on pitching your story?

National Farm to School Network Communications staff are happy to help! Visit www.farmtoschool.org/staff to find contact information.