

Business

Working with the media can pay dividends for businesses

Appearing in the media can be very good for business. A news story can help bring recognition and credibility to an enterprise and provide useful information to readers.

Achieving coverage is a combination of hard work and luck. Tri-City Herald assistant city editor Mike Nemeth said, "Breaking news gets preferential treatment, whether it's a new industry locating to the Tri-Cities or a robbery."

But what if your news is not that urgent or you don't have professional assistance? Here are some tips from leading news people on working with the media.

Do's

Offer real news. KNDU-TV executive producer Joan Lucas sees news as "anything that impacts your community, what people are talking about or what makes you say, 'Really?' or 'Wow!'"

Short items are well read and relatively easy to get published. Simply submit the information.

Staff changes, awards and honors, speaking engagements and educational events lend themselves to news announcements.

Longer stories need a wow factor. "It's not just about being factually correct. It's about being entertaining," said Seattle Post-Intelligencer science writer Tom Paulson.

A difficult technology story can become more approachable when integrated with a personality profile.

A challenge or work in progress is usually more intriguing than a completed project.

A company event or milestone can be a good springboard, as can establishing a connection between your company and a current event or issue. For example, a Herald story last fall on military technologies featured several Mid-Columbia companies.

Know your target media. Different media have different styles, audiences and requirements. For example, TV stories must be visual. "Press conferences with

people standing behind a podium are not visual," Lucas said. "Show me what your business does, what makes you unique."

The single-passenger Tango electric car attracted nearly all Mid-Columbia media when it visited the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory last fall. Marketing research is less visual, yet the unusual process and products of Pamela

Henderson's NewEdge, Inc., recently achieved feature coverage in the Herald and the Harvard Business Review.

Most publications post editorial calendars on the Web. Puget Sound Business Journal Publisher Mike Flynn advised targeting opportunities that match

your customers' interests and the publication's plans. Be sure to make your proposal early.

Be responsive. Reporters are busy, and deadlines don't wait. Freelance science writer Karyn Hede of Richland said one of the best ways to build a good relationship is to be available.

"There is never enough time to do as much research as we would like," Portland-based Science Magazine writer Robert Service said, noting that the Web and blogs put even more pressure on getting the story fast.

Know what you want to say. Write your key points beforehand and use notes when soliciting coverage and when interviewing.

"Don't save your punch line for the end," Hede said. "I know it's counterintuitive for scientists and engineers, but tell me your main message up front so I can follow your discussion."

Be clear. You are talking with the media to build advocacy for your company. "Explain what you do and how you do it in a way that your mother could understand," Hede said.

Fact sheets and backgrounders

promote understanding — and accuracy.

Give feedback. "We don't try to make mistakes or distort things, but that happens. Feedback is important," Paulson said.

Don'ts

Ask to see the story before publication. While this is standard practice in professional journals, news writers generally view prior approval as an attempt to exert control over the media. You may offer to verify quotes or facts, but don't demand.

Threaten. Saying that you know the publisher or are an advertiser will only make a reporter mad. In fact, know the difference between news and an ad. "We're also a business, so don't consider our business briefs section a place to put free advertisements," Nemeth said.

Say "no comment." You may look bad. "A good reporter doesn't have an agenda; he or she simply wants answers," Nemeth said. You can decline information, such as the cost of a transaction, "but remember, the

reporter will try to get that information elsewhere. Giving a reporter access to information often means a pretty good story," he said.

Tell the truth and don't be pressured. "I don't know. I'll get back to you," is fine. Just be sure you do so promptly.

Go off the record. Don't expect a reporter to keep straight what is and isn't on the record. Don't say anything you don't want to see in print.

Assume the media know what's going on.

"Businesses don't get covered if we don't know about them," Lucas said. "Even if you have a relationship with someone in our sales department, call the news department directly if you have a news story you'd like us to cover. We want to hear from you."

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Tri-City
Economic
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