

# Marcomments

*Tips on marketing communications*

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## In PR, *What* You Know Counts for More Than *Whom* You Know

PR people often get these questions from clients and prospects: whom do you know at *The Daily Bugle*? How often do you talk with them? How many articles have you placed with them?

The assumption is that PR is all about contacts—as if journalists ignore news from unfamiliar sources and give priority to those they work with frequently.

Not exactly.

### Why Do People Put So Much Faith in Contacts?

Many organizations have tried media relations in the past and were unhappy with the results.

PR failure, real or perceived, includes outcomes such as the media returning calls or

e-mails only sporadically, not using information accurately or simply not using anything.

People craving coverage begin to think, “Why can’t I get through to the media? I need an insider—someone with contacts!”

So, they hire an individual or organization they perceive as having the necessary connections.

Suddenly, doors are opened, phone calls returned and news is generated. Right?

Well, keep in mind that PR is a process, not a mystic, influential society involving winking, nudging and secret handshakes.

Be sure you understand that process, because it is much

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MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, COPYWRITING AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

ALLEN-JOSEPH, LLC  
37 OTTER COURT  
COVINGTON, KENTUCKY 41017-9391



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more important than contacts.

## How Do You Reach Journalists?

To be in the news, think like a journalist.

Journalists need an audience. To get that audience, they bait their “hook” with the juiciest, meatiest news possible.

Otherwise, people won’t pick up the paper, or even worse, they read a competitor’s publication.

Each news organization, and each journalist, has slightly different criteria for what they consider to be newsworthy.

Suffice it to say that news needs to provide audiences information they didn’t already know—something that helps them do their jobs better, make a pile of money, cheat the signs of aging, decide whom to vote for, attract a mate...you get the idea.

Let’s say the news you’re pitching is that your organization’s vice president is now executive vice president.

That’s not front-page, busi-

ness-section news.

If you don’t have real news to offer, you can’t be in the news.

Assuming you do have news, you need to package it according to how journalists expect to see it.

Usually, that’s in the form of a news release or pitch letter that presents the facts and offers the promise of more information—they contact you.

You’ll also need to send that news to the right person. A good media directory will help you do that. Bacons and MediaMap are good examples of national directories.

Note that sending news to “editor” is the same as sending it to “dear occupant.”

And, yes, you can pitch to far-away journalists just as easily as to the ones in your own town, as long as you’re offering them news that fits their needs. If they write about local events, make

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sure your news has an angle that fits their geographic area.

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If journalists indicate your news isn’t useful to them, and you thought it met all of their requirements, don’t hesitate to ask them what would improve future pitches.

## Journalists Change Jobs

Some journalists stay at a single news organization for much of their careers...but most don’t.

They move up within their organization or leave to work in a larger market. Sometimes they simply change beats (the kind of news they cover) because of new directives at their organization or to take the place of someone else who left.

That’s why knowing how to pitch news is more important than knowing individual journalists. Your knowledge won’t change, but your contacts will.

Note that some prominent journalists, particularly television

newscasters, rely on a staff to prepare the news they present on-air. People such as an assignment editor, camera operator, news writer and many others are behind the news you see at 6 p.m., and if you try pitching the anchorperson...good luck.

You’re much better off contacting the relatively unknown assignment editor, who will likely move on to a bigger station in another market in a few years.

In closing, remember that generating news coverage is, as with anything else in business, a process that can be broken down into steps 1, 2, 3 and so on.

Each step builds on the last and gets you closer to your goal.

Circumventing the process, knowingly or not, usually results in disappointing results. ❖

## Contact

Jeffrey M. Seal, APR  
**Allen-Joseph, LLC**  
 37 Otter Court  
 Covington, Kentucky 41017-9391  
 Phone: 859-363-8036  
 Fax: 859-363-8037  
 jseal@allenjoseph.net  
 www.allenjoseph.net