

Media relations goes far beyond pressing send on a press release

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PR consultants often think media relations is just sending a press release and praying a journalist will be interested in publishing it. Unfortunately, it's really not this simple.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Media relations goes beyond simply sharing content and hoping the journalist will give you that much needed piece of coverage for your client. As PR pros, our relationships with media are essential.

With the ever-shrinking media pool in South Africa, it has now become imperative that PR professionals have trusted contacts in the media world. However, cultivating a positive, reciprocal relationship with media can be challenging because relationships don't happen overnight. It is process that takes time, dedication, effort, and most of all research to understand exactly what type of content they and their readers are interested in.

As a PR professional who has been in the industry for six years (and counting), here's some advice for those looking to build long-lasting relationships with our media:

- **Check-in regularly** – Media aren't just individuals who write stories or publish your press releases, they are people too. Believe it or not, they go through tough times just like any of us. They may not see your release or interview pitch because they might be off sick, on holiday or tending to a sick parent or child. The reality is that your release probably got lost among the hundreds of mails they get daily. If you have a relationship with them and are known to send relevant, newsworthy content, chances are they will see your email and read it.
- **Set up breakfast dates and get to know them** – Breakfast doesn't break the bank and hey – this is the most important meal of the day after all. Setting up a breakfast or coffee date is a great way to get to know a journalist, their beat and their interests. It isn't too much pressure and will allow for conversation to flow naturally in a casual setting.

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- **Don't spray and pray** – you've heard of the spray and pray approach to sending out a release. You've also been told you shouldn't do this. So why are you still doing this? I know that we are under pressure to secure earned coverage for our clients, but sending a release out to hundreds of media contacts in the hope you'll land five pieces of coverage has many drawbacks. You will irritate media who your content is irrelevant to, you will ruin chances of securing future content with them if you've annoyed them in the past, and you are at risk of ruining your client's reputation too. Understanding the media and the publications they write for means you only need to send them content you know they could publish.
- **Ask them how you can help them as opposed to how they can help you** - The main goal is for PR professionals to be useful to journalists. This means that you should be their go-to for help, reliable insights and assist them whenever and wherever. You need to develop a habit of building your client's brand by sometimes reaching out to the journalist and checking if there's anything they require. Don't expect the media professional to publish your release word for word, sometimes they require insights from a professional from a specific industry. Adopting the habit of sharing such information will help position you and your client as ongoing sources of reliable information.
- **Do your research** – Have you ever sent a press release and received a response from a journalist asking you to remove them from your media list? I have. Thanks to the world of social media, we are now able to gain insights about media through platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn. Also make use of platforms, such as MuckRuck, to uncover what the journalist's interests are and what they're currently covering, before you connect with them.

In the end, a commitment to building media relationships can secure great results for you and your clients. Regardless of the stage of your PR journey, the relationship you have with media should start early and always remain a top priority.

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