

Writing Stories for the Media: Tips & Tactics



By Alex Bloom, Director, [O'Neill and Associates](#)

The ground shift in the print media industry – the precipitous decline in advertising dollars, the change to a readership accustomed to free content, the replacement of finite pages of copy by the infinite space of the worldwide web – has forced news publications to adopt the mantra echoed in “The Wire:” find ways to do more with less.

Just look at a few key numbers:

- Newspaper reporting jobs: -18,300 jobs since 2007
- Magazine jobs: -35,000 jobs since 2008
- Global PR industry jobs: +21,000 jobs since 2011

Even with the creation of 5,000 digital reporting jobs, it’s clear that news outlets have a vast amount of work to replace. Editors may not widely advertise the opportunity, but occasionally they will accept and publish submissions from PR firms.

It’s easy to see the benefits for your client: controlled content, directed to a specific audience, enhanced by the news outlet’s print and web presence. However, for any piece to run in a reputable, quality outlet you will need to show that you have facts to support your opinion – that your article is objectively valid and not just a Trojan Horse planted to push a biased, moneyed viewpoint. So there are a few things to remember:

Start with the editorial pages

Newspapers, magazines, and online publications welcome tight, well-written, thoughtful pieces for their opinion and editorial pages. Viewpoint pieces allow you to control the entirety of the content. Finding a national, statewide, or regional issue directly related to your client's industry and allowing your client to offer expert analysis is arguably the easiest opportunity to advance your client's reputation.

Find a news hook

Editors will see the news value of your submission if you can tie it to a recent study, a growing problem, or a current event. Balancing a profile you drafted of a hospital's new fitness program with a recent study on a rise in diabetes in your state will set your story apart in the eyes of the editor giving it consideration.

Push your message, but don't advertise

We have had news outlets return viewpoint pieces and other content with a request that our clients tone down the self-promotion. Be careful to find the right tone in your pieces so that your first priority is objectively explaining a news issue, while tying in your client's relevance to the issue.

Engage a third party

Oftentimes you can find a business official, a politician, or an academic researcher willing to lend a hand in developing a good piece on behalf of your client. Getting a third party validator to put his or her name into an article will help you bolster the objectivity of your submission to a news outlet.

Many of us in the PR world started in news and have a deep respect and appreciation for the work that reporters and editors do every day. While it's important not to abuse the work shortage in the print media industry, we can use our

understanding of news outlets as an advantage to develop strong content, while helping our clients.

***About the Author:** Alex Bloom is a Boston-based media relations professional for O'Neill and Associates. He is formerly a newspaper reporter and campaign spokesman.*