

PITCHING YOUR STORIES

When pitching your story to the media, remember you only get one opportunity to make a first impression. Be ready to pitch your story in 30 seconds or less. Identify why your story is significant to the media source and how readers may benefit from your story.

Here are some tips to make this task easier:

1. Research.

Make sure to find media publications that are interested in the arts (for a recital or musical program) or education (for Pedals, Pipes, and Pizza, or POEs), for example. Look for chemistry by selecting publications that would naturally focus on your concert or activity. This is the single most important step to receive the most free publicity exposure. You may have a great release or story, but if it's pitched to the *wrong* media outlet, you can be sure it will almost never get picked up.

2. Call at the right time.

If possible, call a week before your story will break to give reporters time to prepare for it and inform their editors. Call when the reporter is not likely to be "on deadline," usually early in the day the first few hours of their workday. Even then, always ask journalists if they have time to hear about your story. Don't ask if they received your release; even if they did they may have forgotten or misplaced it. Assume they know nothing about your story and say something like this:

"Hello I'm [Name] from the [Name] Chapter of the American Guild of Organists, and I have a good story for you about our organization offering a free concert. Is this a good time to talk?"

3. Be Prepared.

Don't make anonymous calls to the media and try to explain your story to receptionists and desk clerks. Call directly or ask by name for the reporter or editor who should have your story. Then, be able to present it in 30 seconds. Tell the story the way the media might tell it to their audience. If necessary, write a script that quickly gets into the heart of the story. Emphasize the newsworthy elements--the importance of the event, the unprecedented angle ("It's the first..."), the significance of the story to the writer's readers and its connection to other issues in the arts community.

4. Make Your Calls Near a Fax Machine.

Even if you already mailed or faxed media alerts or press releases to reporters and editors, be prepared to fax additional copies after your pitch call. Journalists often lose or misplace your releases in the newsroom clutter, and it's easier to send a fresh copy when the story is on their minds.

5. Be Ready With Specifics.

Have detailed information to back up your pitch, and be prepared to give telephone numbers or email addresses of people who can be interviewed to tell these stories. Know your information well, so that you can answer most questions then and there.

6. Be Persistent But Don't Be A Pest.

Most journalists cannot promise to do your story at the time of your call. When they say they will "look into it and do what they can," that's about all the commitment you can get. If you push further, you risk alienating the journalists and driving them away from you and your stories.

7. Offer To Do More To Make Their Job Easier.

Journalists often have too much to do in too little time; they are more likely to do stories that are easy for them to research and report; offer to do whatever you can to make this job easier.

8. Be Pleasant And Upbeat.

Your story may have ramifications and be emotionally stirring, but don't let that infect your pitch. Journalists like enthusiasm, but they do not like sermons with their story ideas.

Media publications run on news and supplying news is what will get you free publicity. Mastering how to strategize to receive the best media publicity involves knowing how to match your story pitch to the right publications. Keep researching, keep pitching!

Tips on Email Pitching:

1. Focus Your Subject.

Compose a clear and concise email subject and include your name and/or your chapter's name, etc.

2. Directly Address Your Point - FAST.

Use the first two-three sentences in your email to tell me who you are pitching and why. What is the key point you are trying to make? What is the "hook" or angle of your pitch? Reporters don't have time to read an entire email to try to figure it out.

3. Provide a VERY Short Bio.

Zero in on highlights, the ones most relevant to your pitch - don't just copy and paste a lengthy boilerplate bio. A short bio is one paragraph with 5-6 sentences.

4. Avoid Clichés.

Don't use age-old clichés to try to sell your event such as "This concert will be the best concert in this area in years," or "The artist overcame enormous odds to find success." The story should speak for itself without the clichés or hyperbole. Try to distill what makes it interesting or different or newsworthy into one concise statement.

5. Save the Press Release for Last.

Pasting a recent or relevant release at the end of the pitch can be helpful, and a reporter will glance at it if the pitch has grabbed their attention.

6. Make Follow-ups Clear.

If the reporter has responded to you and you are now following up, include the previous email exchanges you've had with them to refresh their memory. The worst follow-up emails are the ones that come all too often with nothing more than "Just wanted to know if you were interested in interviewing so-and-so for your article."

7. Do Not Attach Files for Reporters.

Unless you have been given specific instructions to send a reporter attached files, make it a rule to never attach files to reporters. If you can, use links to online resources. If you must send an attachment, never do it with your pitch but instead offer to send other documents and specify the file type and size or at least ask permission. If the core of your pitch is in an attached file, realize that nine times out of 10, your strongest selling points are going into a trash bin.

The most important thing to remember when pitching by email is that each reporter is different, and each has his or her own preference. It never hurts to email them first and ask what they'd prefer to receive.