



# 3 Tactics to Consider for Your Next PR Strategy

Setting Appropriate  
Media Expectations for  
Continued Success

**SmartBug.**

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Media Defined .....	4
Tactic 1: Pitching for Interviews.....	5
Tactic 2: Pitching for Contributed Content.....	13
Tactic 3: Pitching Nontraditional Media .....	21
Conclusion.....	25
About SmartBug.....	27



# Introduction

You have decided to design a PR strategy that will focus on media relations. Whether you're starting small with a narrow focus or hitting the ground running with a robust, comprehensive plan, it is important to understand not only your own goals, but also the media's expectations. This guide will go through various media relations tactics so you can not only get the win, but also build quality media relationships along the way.

# Media Defined

---

Who falls into the category of being media? We often think of reporters and editors, but in today's digital landscape, there are many other individuals that should not be ignored when it comes to your PR strategy. These include bloggers, freelance writers, podcast hosts, and analysts. The media is anyone that has the ability to spread your information outside of your own network. Get creative. Don't get stuck only looking at traditional formats. Work to build relationships that can garner repeat business.



# Tactic 1: Pitching for Interviews



When you think of media relations, one of the first things that may come to mind is talking to a member of the media with the goal of securing a quote, mention, or feature in a third-party article. This is one of the most popular components of a PR strategy; however, it is often one of the most difficult things to do well.

Why? Because your goals may not align with the writer's goals and because delivering a message, even when you know the message well, is harder than you think. Don't jump into the deep end until you have some basic elements in line. After all, the interview only comes once the media has bought into your idea. Here are some necessary steps to take prior to securing the conversation:



**When you think of media relations, one of the first things that may come to mind is talking to a member of the media with the goal of securing a quote, mention, or feature in a third-party article.**



## Understand Your Audience

Before starting any PR initiative, you need to determine your target outlets and the relevant contacts at each outlet. This is easy, right? Wrong. In a 24/7 news cycle, the areas of coverage for any given reporter can change overnight. There is too much content that needs to be written; therefore, reporters are less specialized and should be considered generalists. They may know a lot of different areas, but they will rely on you for the nuts and bolts.



Make sure that before you reach out to a media contact, you research their recent articles. Do they still write about the topic that you are going to pitch? If they write about the computer industry, do they only write about Microsoft? Know this before you make contact. A reporter will know if you don't read their work. Once you have confirmed that the reporter is relevant, confirm that the outlet is relevant. This seems like a no-brainer, but it must be said because it can be tempting to only focus on the shiny object—the outlets with high readership. However, just because the readership is high doesn't mean that all of those people will read your article once it is published. And even if they did, are they potential customers? Will they move the needle forward for your organization? Or is it simply bragging rights? Know who you want to target—your buyer persona—and then find an outlet that reaches your target audience. You may find that a trade outlet with 12,000 unique visitors per month (UVPM) is more relevant to your goals than an outlet with three million that couldn't care less.

## Get Media Training

Consider this component mandatory. You may read that heading and wonder, why? You are on the leadership team and give company presentations on a regular basis. You know everything about your company and you are an expert in your field. This all may be true, but a presentation is a one-way conversation. An interview with the media is not. Being interviewed requires skills that must be learned, and the more you practice, the better your media-facing team will get.

It is not about the media asking you a question and you regurgitating all of the information you know, as if you are reading from a sales sheet. In your response, less is more. You need to deliver what the reporter needs to know, what the audience wants to learn, and what you want to say—all in a concise manner and in a quotable way. If you lose the reporter, you will increase your chance of being paraphrased while they go to your competitor for a more succinct answer.





## Make the Pitch

PR is about relationships. Think of the media as your friend. After all, you don't only want to talk to them once. You want to have an ongoing relationship with them. The best relationships are two-way streets: You offer them something and they offer you something. If it's not mutually beneficial, you won't be friends for long. Working with the media is, and should be, the same way. Don't just talk about what they can do for you. Don't just ask for what you need. And don't be generic or use a program that cuts and pastes your email. They are onto this tactic, and it is the fastest way to hear crickets or burn a bridge before you even get to walk over it.

Start small. Be personal. Do your research. Before you jump into your pitch, read their recent articles. Send them a note that references a recent topic and says you found it interesting. Nothing else. Only a few sentences. You may wonder, "How does that help me?" The answer: It builds trust and starts the relationship off on the right foot. When they respond—and they likely will because it was a no-pressure email—that is an appropriate time to give them a few sentences (your pitch) on what you think would be an awesome follow-up article or something in the same vein that they could write about.



If you must decline because you have other commitments, understand that you may have just pointed them in the direction of your competitor while harming the relationship.

Tell them who on your team could give expert commentary and that you would be happy to schedule an interview if they're interested. It's as simple as that. You have done your homework, you've shown that you read their work, you have been personal, and you have shown them how you could have a mutually beneficial relationship. #WinWin

You have laid the groundwork. The media has agreed to an interview. Here are some basic realities to keep in mind:

## **#1: You are on the media's timeline, not yours.**

They are likely under deadline. You pitched the idea; therefore, it falls on you to accommodate their schedule. If you must decline because you have other commitments, understand that you may have just pointed them in the direction of your competitor while harming the relationship that you worked so hard to develop.

## **#2: You must talk in soundbites.**

When being interviewed, use notes. This doesn't make you less of an expert. Keep your responses short—never more than two minutes. Think about quotes in articles that you have read. What made that specific statement quotable? Mimic it. The reality is that the media can research facts without you. What they really need is an opinion. Give them one.

## **#3: Your interview is not a guarantee of use.**

You have taken time to do a phone interview or give comments via email. Then the air goes dead, or the article is published without anything about you. This happens. Their conversation with you is not a contractual obligation to use your insight. The reality is that they are likely talking with many experts, and once they get their article together, they will put in the comments that fit best, offer the best insights, and give the most color. You may not always make the cut. That's okay. Again, it's about the relationship. Now they know who you are, and you may be on the short list the next time they have a need.



## **#4: You don't have control over the content of the article.**

You will likely not get questions in advance of the interview. You will likely not get to review the article prior to publication—though some outlets allow this. Don't expect it or ask for it. If the article goes live online and there is an error, you may be able to have it fixed. This will include things like a misspelled name, incorrect fact, or a link that goes to the wrong company. If the article is in print, this may be more difficult. Bring the error to the editor's attention and they may be able to print a correction in the next issue. However, it is considered poor taste to ask for content changes. You don't have any control over the direction of the article and there is not even a guarantee that they will link to your company. That's okay. Remember the relationship. Become a consistent source for the writer. The more you do for them, the more likely they will be to quote you, feature you, and link to your company. It may take time—anything with your brand does—but continuing the process is one of the best ways to increase visibility, boost credibility, and promote your thought leadership.

# Tactic 2: Pitching for Contributed Content

---

Pitching to secure contributed content is the sister of pitching for interviews. They often go hand in hand. Contributed content is when someone at your company authors an article for publication in a trade or mainstream outlet. Though there is more work involved to get the article developed, this pitch is easier to land than that of the interview. After all, the 24/7 news cycle has created the need for content, and staff writers can't do it all. They need you.

How can you gain an editor's interest in your article? What are the best practices for contributing content? There is more to think about than just sending a completed article to your contact. Here are some necessary steps to take prior to writing the article:



**Contributed content is when someone at your company authors an article for publication in a trade or mainstream outlet.**

## Read the Outlet

Before you reach out to the editor, before you write the article, and before you dig too far into the nitty-gritty aspects of what you will write, take the time to read the outlet that you will be pitching. Because you will likely have an idea of the topic that you want to cover, see what else has been written on the subject. Has the topic been overwritten? If so, you may want to go in a different direction. You want a fresh angle. Reading articles on the same topic will give you an idea of what you could pitch, how your idea is fresh, and why their audience should care.



## Compile Expert Information

Don't hurry the process. Have all your ducks in a row before starting outreach. This includes gathering high-resolution photos of your experts—no, a grainy photo of them on vacation is not okay. If they don't have a high-resolution professional portrait, they should get one prior to starting outreach.

Additionally, review or create your thought leaders' bios. These should be brief and talk about what they currently do at your company, not what they did in years past. Make sure that if they are a director of data security, the bio talks specifically about that role. This will show why the editor should accept an article from them. Keep in mind that the bio you send to the media will probably be more condensed and targeted than what may be on your company's website. That's okay. It should be. Lastly, you should always link to your company website in the author's bio. Though the editor is not required to include a link in your article, you are improving the chances they will by giving them that information from the start.

## Create an Abstract

You should never send a completed article that is unsolicited. You need approval to submit. In order to get approval, you need to first send an abstract to the editor. This should be a few paragraphs in which you discuss the proposed title, the idea for the article, and the components that will be covered. You should also let the editor know the author's name, their title, and that they are an authority in this area. Remember to address the outlet's audience and why this article will be important for them. All of this shows the editor that you have done your homework.







## Know the Writer's Guidelines

Once an abstract has been approved and you have the green light to write the article, you must find out what has the best chance of being accepted. Yes, accepted. After all, approval to write is not approval for publication. The editor will still have to review the completed article and give you a thumbs-up. Ask if they have a one-sheet of the writer's guidelines. This may also be on the outlet's website—look before you ask. If it's not there or if they don't have a written set of guidelines, be sure to find out the expected word count, the deadline for the article, and whether it will run online or in print. Always keep the audience in mind and find out if they are novices in the subject or if they are at a higher level. After all, you don't want to talk down to them. Lastly, remember to look over the format of published articles. Do they often give tips and use bullets and headings? If so, follow suit.

You are now ready to begin writing. Here are some basics to keep in mind:

## **#1: Your article should never be self-promotional.**

You are excited to write your article. You have more control than you would in a staff-edited interview. But not so fast. The number one rule of a contributed article is that it must be neutral. Links in articles are good, but not to your own content—it gives the perception that you are promoting yourself, which is frowned upon in contributed content. Remember, it's about visibility; it's about your brand; it's about your industry know-how. If you promote your company, service, or products, your article will most likely not be published. What good is an article if you can't talk about your company? Your published article can (and should) be shared on your website, and remember, press begets press. Your published articles can be shared with clients and included in company newsletters via links. The more articles that are published, the more you are perceived to be at the top of your game, and whether you are looking for new customers, looking for funding, or looking to be acquired, press is a good thing.

## **#2: Don't violate intellectual property best practices.**

As the subscription to print issues has declined, the reality is that publication revenue still must come from somewhere. Though you can share links to your articles freely, full text versions may be protected under the outlet's copyright, so don't publish a full version of the article on your website or give photocopies to your sales team to hand out at trade shows. If you are interested in turning the article into marketing material, check with the publication's sales department to see what their fees are, if any, to use their branded material. Similarly, the outlet's logo is their intellectual property and can't be used on your website without securing written consent.

## **#3: Don't overcommunicate. You are excited for your article to publish, but don't be a nag.**

Yes, it is possible that they will forget to send you the link. Yes, it is possible that the article will not post on the day they said it would post. But anything more than a short message every few weeks will be seen as overbearing.

## #4: Good things come to those who wait.

Print outlets often work ahead many months. It is possible that a June issue article must be submitted by February, or even earlier. Also, some print publications have irregular cycles and only publish every quarter or twice a year. This can create a long wait before you see your published article. For online format articles, you would think that once you submit and they approve, it would publish immediately. Though that is possible, they still have internal schedules that they must adhere to. It is typical to see an online article publish two to four weeks after submitting, but this varies by outlet. Don't get frustrated. Just move on to your next effort and keep the ball rolling.



# Tactic 3: Pitching Nontraditional Media

---

Not everything in the world of PR centers around traditional staff writers. Make sure alternative or nontraditional media avenues are part of your strategy. Nontraditional avenues include bloggers, podcasters, and regular media contributors that are not staff writers. Each of these represent viable methods to boost your PR visibility; however, there are things that you must consider when going down this path so that there are not any surprises along the way:





**Bloggers can and should be part of your PR strategy—but like with everything else, you must take the time to do your homework so that you move the needle forward with no room for unexpected surprises.**

## **#1: Bloggers – Not all media is neutral.**

Bloggers have taken over the internet like syrup on pancakes. There is a blogger for every topic from dogs to data security, and many have audiences in the millions. However, there are a few things to understand before incorporating bloggers into your strategy. First, not all bloggers do interviews or accept guest posts. Do your homework and know their format before doing outreach. Second, unlike staff writers, bloggers are all about opinion—theirs. Know the topic that they write about. Know the tone that they use. You don't want to be caught off guard by the direction that they may go. Finally, if you ask for a product review, understand that they are under no obligation to write a good one. Build a rapport, develop trust, and read their content before engaging. Bloggers can and should be part of your PR strategy—but like with everything else, you must take the time to do your homework so that you move the needle forward with no room for unexpected surprises.

## #2: Podcasts – Prepare ahead of time.

Podcasts are the next big thing in the world of PR. This is no surprise because they take content to the next level, incorporating audio and sometimes visuals into the format. However, there are a few things that you should understand before reaching out to be a guest.

First, all podcasts use audio and some also use visual components. Therefore, unlike a reporter-generated article that is only in the written word, personality is imperative. Use inflection in your voice. Be conversational. Use humor. Be engaging. Second, it is expected that you have a quiet location with no noise for recording. Turn your cell phone off. Let everyone in your office know that a recording is underway. Put your desk phone on “do not disturb” and use a headset with a mic. This will cut back on any static or background noise that you may not even be aware of. Third, be sure that you are clear on the technology that will be used for the recording. If you are using Skype, be sure to load it and test it ahead of time for both ease of use and quality. You don't want to test on the day of the conversation. Finally, podcasts are popular in that everyone seems to have one or listen to one, but measurement data has yet to catch up. Know ahead of time that you may not get every statistic you track with your print, online, and broadcast efforts. That's okay. Know that people are listening and there is a great amount of value in this medium.



Being a contributor is an important part of a PR strategy. However, it is likely that your competitors are doing it, too.

### **#3: Contributors – Know your competitors.**

As we discussed earlier, being a contributor is an important part of a PR strategy. However, it is likely that your competitors are doing it, too. Take a look at *Forbes*, for example. Find an article that is like one that you would like to write. Now look at the author by clicking on their bio. It is very likely that this is not coverage by a staff writer, but rather a bylined article from a company thought leader just like yours.

Many contributors interview other experts, as if they are a staff writer. Reach out to contributors that could use your expertise, but don't be surprised if you are met with silence when you accidentally reach out to a writer that is from a company in your industry—especially a competitor. They won't have interest in giving you air time. No worries; there are plenty of contributors that will find your insight valuable. As always, do your homework.



# Conclusion

---

You want to build your brand. You want to boost your credibility. You want to promote your thought leadership. PR is the strategy for you. Learn and practice the best tactics for your organizational goals, from interviews to contributed content to nontraditional media. Know the necessary steps before you jump in, and fully understand not only what the media will expect from you, but what you can expect from each effort you put forth.

You may win some and you may lose some—that's okay. PR is a long-term commitment, and working with the media requires a skill. It takes time to build connections; it takes time to create relationships; it takes time to write content and publish. But the payout will touch all aspects of your company, from helping fuel the sales pipeline to developing content that can be used for marketing.

Take the next step. Build a plan and start making your company an industry leader.

# 10 Tips for Working with Media

---

- 1 You are on the media's timeline. Be flexible.
- 2 Talk in soundbites when doing an interview.
- 3 Effort does not guarantee use.
- 4 You do not have control over the content or direction of earned media.
- 5 Self-promotion is in poor taste.
- 6 Don't violate intellectual property rules.
- 7 Don't overcommunicate.
- 8 Not everything is neutral.
- 9 Prepare for interviews.
- 10 If using technology, test it ahead of time.

# About SmartBug

---

SmartBug Media is one of a handful of HubSpot Diamond partners in the world and is the highest-rated agency in the history of the HubSpot ecosystem. We also boast the highest ROI documented from any HubSpot partner—3,558% and 14,500% ROI on a six-month and three-year campaign, respectively. At Inbound 2015, SmartBug Media was the most recognized agency, having won or been named a finalist for nine awards.

SmartBug Media is one of the first HubSpot partners to implement growth-driven design and was an inaugural member of the HubSpot COS Advisory Board. For more than seven years, SmartBug Media has been helping businesses increase sales leads, close more customers, and enhance the reach of their brands. From building comprehensive online marketing programs to designing new websites, driving leads through social media or sales enablement, we're an extension of your marketing team that delivers.

**For a free inbound marketing or web design consultation, or to learn more, visit [www.smartbugmedia.com](http://www.smartbugmedia.com) or call [949-236-6448](tel:949-236-6448).**

## Curious how we can help grow your business?

Let's chat. Get the conversation started and let's talk about your organization, your goals, and how SmartBug can help you achieve them.

Let's Talk

**SmartBug.**

[www.smartbugmedia.com](http://www.smartbugmedia.com)

