

Earned Media During COVID-19

The ongoing global pandemic has changed how news media of every type is responding to media pitches. Many newsroom employees are now working from home – something previously unheard of, especially in broadcast news. Editorial meetings are either moving into the virtual space or managers are making decisions without reporter input. Newsrooms are also in a continuous cycle of breaking news, focusing on the newest developments on COVID-19, leaving little room for any story not directly related to the outbreak. All of this creates a number of challenges when attempting to pitch stories. There are ways to be more strategic in your pitch to mitigate these challenges.

YOUR PITCH: IS IT AN A, B OR C STORY?

- A:** This is a breaking story, with great immediacy, that the media will jump on, whether your client wanted it pitched or not. It's rare that we will have the opportunity to pitch this type of story as it's based on normal news of the day.
- B:** This is not a breaking story, but one that is considered a "sidebar" or a secondary story on COVID-19. Is your story directly related to viral testing, an essential service or program that is helping people during the outbreak?
- C:** This will still likely be related to the outbreak, but perhaps it has a more unique angle of the feature variety – good news or a heartwarming story during these trying times. All other news not related to COVID-19 will fall into this category, which means coverage is much less likely.

YOUR APPROACH

Now more than ever, brevity and focus are key in any pitch.

- /// **Avoid the PR trap of mass email distribution:** Newsroom employees can tell if this is a general pitch going to every media outlet and the email will likely be deleted without ever being read.
- /// **Refine your Distribution:** Avoid just sending your pitch to general email addresses (i.e. tips@XYZnews.com). The newsroom tips boxes are being flooded with pitches related to COVID-19 and it's just becoming white noise for assignment editors. Take the time to identify two or three reporters/anchors/producers/columnists to send your pitch to directly. Go beyond the usual targets. For example, many newspapers have reassigned their sports writers to general news during the pandemic.



YOUR APPROACH (CON'T)

- /// **Keep it Short:** A short subject line, one to two compelling paragraphs for the pitch and maybe an attachment and be done. Anything more than that and many reporters will skip because they just don't have the time.
- /// **Find the Personal Story:** Any story you pitch must have stakeholders beyond a company or business. Who is the subject with a personal story to tell that can be the messenger for your client? A spokesperson or employee won't be enough. Have your messenger identified before you send the pitch.
- /// **Don't Forget the Technology:** Once that interview subject is identified, make sure they have multiple ways in which they can successfully interact with the reporter: Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, etc. Don't wait until the interview is scheduled to find out the subject doesn't have – or doesn't understand how to use this kind of technology. Let the reporter know how many ways they can conduct the virtual interview.
- /// **Patience is Key:** If it's a "B" or "C" story – don't expect an immediate response. The outbreak means we face months of stories related to COVID-19. Unless your pitch is time sensitive, the reporter will likely put it in their back pocket for a day when they need a pandemic related story and don't already have one assigned.

OWNED MEDIA ALTERNATIVE

Now is the time to focus on owned media: blog posts, internally written stories, etc. These can be done easily and ensure that you are controlling the message. The bonus to starting with owned media, is that you can then forward it as a media pitch. If a reporter can see how the story came together in what you wrote, it will make it easier for them to grasp how they might approach the story as well. Strategies 360 is specially poised to be a strong partner on owned media – our communications team can craft the content, and our digital and social media marketing tools can be leveraged to amplify blog posts and other owned media assets.

- /// **For more information** on how S360 can help you develop a media & communications plan, email our communications team at: communications@strategies360.com