

## Ten tips for getting famous in the media

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Compared with other sub-disciplines of public relations (PR)—such as dealing with regulators or employee communications—media relations is glamorous and fun. The other moniker for media relations is “publicity.”

Media relations is making companies famous via television, radio, web, and print. The allure of media relations is simple: it generates buzz about your organization. It’s Andy Warhol’s “15 seconds of fame.”

At the Canadian Institute’s 2-day intensive media relations conference held last month, about 80 business people honed their skills. Here are some useful tips for Mississauga business people:

1. **Spend a lot of time thinking about your “hook.”** First, become familiar with the publication or program: who is the audience and what types of stories have run recently?

This will give you clues as to what angles have NOT been covered. What has been overlooked? Does your company offer added insight into current news and business issues? How will this story affect the publication’s audience? On the other hand, offer an editor a story angle that ran last month—and you’ve just disqualified yourself!

Few organizations can generate news, but many can ride on the coattails of other news stories. Good media relations people can think of the “hook” that no one else has.

2. **Act on your “hook” right away.** Although we live in the biggest media market in Canada, the “news hole” is getting smaller and smaller. In talking with editors, you’ll be surprised by how many other organizations are in line, ahead of you, frequently with the same story idea.
3. **Media prefer to cover events rather than “talking heads.”** TV thrives on action rather than in-studio interviews. If your story is abstract, find ways to make it concrete for reporters and audiences.
4. **Establish good relationships with editors and reporters.** Regularly send out news releases so that editors know that you are willing to offer commentary and interviews. Be patient. It may take 12 to 18 months to get noticed.
5. **Use “leading” in the first paragraph of your news release and it will end up in the trash. Guaranteed.** Few organizations can actually substantiate this claim. Reporters are skeptical. Leave out “leading.”
6. **Today, reporters live and die by the Blackberry.** They all work on the fly. Some also file stories on their Blackberries. If you’re distributing news releases to reporters, keep this in mind: shorter is better.
7. **Reporters and editors think in terms of “stories and anecdotes.”** Reporters want stories that make a publication interesting while executives have been ultra media trained to deliver “Key Messages.” This makes for very disjointed interviews. Save “Key Messages” for crisis situations only. It’s O.K. for executives to relate stories.

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8. **Results in media relations are NOT guaranteed.** When businesses retain media relations professionals, they are paying for representation (like retaining a lawyer). Media relations people pitch a story, but editors and producers decide whether that story will run. Professional ethics prevent media relations people from being compensated “only if the story runs.”
9. **Ask yourself which business story you’d pull from a newspaper to run yours.** If you can make a legitimate case that your business story is more important than other recent stories, it MAY be worthwhile to meet with the editor or producer. Be aware, however, that this is a tough sell and comes across as “whining.”
10. **Get excited when the article is published, or when the program airs.** Media relations professionals don’t control what gets printed or aired. Stories that are 100% positive are rare indeed.