

## How to pitch a story to the press



### From finding the right person to avoiding being annoying, publicist Tingy A. Simoes offers an insider's guide.

You've hopefully pinpointed something newsworthy to say, and a particular group of people who should know about it. So, how to approach a journalist? It's rather unlikely that you as clinicians will find yourselves making the first call to pitch a story directly to a reporter. This will be the job of your PR (if you have one), or perhaps your marketing person or even your practice manager. Taking note of the tips below will give you invaluable tools and an understanding of the process.

**How to find contact details for the media:** look on the web, browse the newsstands. There are plenty of free websites where you can look up media contact details, and many newspapers and outlets will actually list their editorial teams. In magazines, you can always flick through the pages to the masthead, which will list the editorial staff.

**How to ascertain the best person to speak with:** feel free to contact the general switchboard and ask, "Who covers health?" or "Who would be the best person to talk to about a local clinic's charity fundraising?" etc. The issue is that, sometimes, there is often more than one contact who can be appropriate. Just because 'Health' doesn't want to cover it, 'Features' or 'News' might, so it can be a bit of a guessing game and certainly involves a lot of trial and error. This is why experienced publicists, particularly publicists who are known for one particular sector, such as cosmetic surgery, are invaluable. They will know that sometimes the 'Business', 'Home Affairs' or 'Culture & Society' reporter will be covering news from this arena.

**Do your research:** in PR, as in life, flattery will almost always help. If you have time before an interview or before approaching a journalist for the first time, look up what else they have covered in the past. You will seem much more clued up if you say, "I enjoyed the piece you did last month on teeth whitening/swine flu/bunions." They will be pleasantly surprised.

**Put yourself in the journalist's shoes...**what would they want to know? Offer interviews and photos. A tip: do NOT send big attachments unsolicited. They will only clog up their inbox and annoy them. Leading us to...

**Don't annoy the journalist:** once you have ascertained your publication, your contact, and your story has been pitched, sit back for a couple of days. Feel free to chase up, but leave a day or two after pitching. And don't whine about rival experts; this is a sure-fire way of ensuring they don't use you again!

**Stay focused** – don't give up: if they don't hear from you after a while, they will not beat a path to your door. Having said that, journalists are busy people and newsrooms can get quite frantic. Respect their schedules.

**Exclusives:** you needn't be a brain surgeon to figure this one out. It basically means you offer it to one person first. Offering journalists a story can be a complex balance game, and most journalists will turn their nose up at a press release that's been carpet-bombed to 900 contacts. To individually contact each prospect, and wait until they run it past their editors, then get back to you with feedback (which could well be a 'maybe') can be extremely time-consuming. However, it invariably yields the best results. A newspaper or TV programme that has a head start over anyone else, will be perceived as 'clued-up' and therefore earn your gratitude. Never pit two journalists against each other for the same story. This will enrage them and is a sure-fire way of ensuring they will never, ever write up any of your stories!

Getting a 'hit', i.e. securing coverage, can be quite a serendipitous process. You may ring an editor today and they can categorically say that there is absolutely no interest in covering cosmetic surgery or aesthetic treatments at all. Next week this may change, and they probably won't backtrack and call you, but simply use whoever is contacting them at the time. Also, outlets that historically haven't proven friendly to cosmetic surgery may undergo a change in direction and decide that, after all, it is something that they're interested in. This happens a lot when there's a new editor or producer in charge. It's a fluid environment and things are constantly changing: space for a story can suddenly open up last minute, which is why good publicists are always on the move. It is rarely a nine to five job!

Adapted from 'How to Cut it in the Media: A PR Manual for Plastic Surgeons and Professionals in Cosmetic Medicine' by Tingy A. Simoes, available in e-book and print format via Amazon and reputable e-tailers.



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