

Take Advantage of Slow Summer Months to Boost your Media Relations

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Historically, the summer months are a slow time for the news, especially August. During this time, the news media, particularly local outlets, are in need of stories and sources. Just like attorneys, educators and others, many journalists take vacations during this time. However, the downturn in activity presents an opportunity to generate some additional media coverage for your firm, as well as build relationships with key journalists.

Here are several action items that will help you take advantage of the traditionally slow summer news cycle.

Contact the right person: A simple step that will go a long way toward increasing the chance a story will be covered is doing some light research into which reporter or editor at a media outlet is most likely to cover the law or a specific industry. You can call the media outlet's main number, and they can usually tell you the name of the reporter covering a particular beat. Also, many business journals and trade magazines have editorial calendars that list subjects that will be covered in upcoming issues. These are usually available on their website. Review the calendar, and see if there are any upcoming issues that will focus on a topic or industry that is relevant to one of your firm's practice areas. Then let the journalist know that you have a source who is willing to comment or submit a bylined article on the topic.

Pick up the phone: Make it a point to call two or three journalists and find out what stories they are working on or planning. Contacting media outlets is typically not as intimidating as many people think. Reporters, especially those at smaller outlets with limited staff, are often interested in hearing new story ideas. This is a good time to let them know what your firm may have lined up for the near future – expansion, new hires, new practice area, etc. You will also be top of mind if there is a breaking news story and the media is looking for a legal source in one of your firm's key practice areas. Also, if your firm has a newsletter, ask the journalist if he or she would like to be added to your distribution list.

Make a lunch date: Invite a local legal or business reporter to lunch or coffee. This is an excellent way to build a relationship. If permissible, share any big cases or deals the firm is working on. Don't worry if you don't have a topic or story idea in mind. It may work to your advantage if the reporter doesn't feel pressured to feel as if he or she is being pitched. Also, take this opportunity to ask

questions. How do they like to be contacted? How many stories do they work on a day? What is the best time to contact them? Also, don't forget to reach out to the local news bureau for any of the news wire services located might have offices in your city, such as Reuters, Bloomberg or the Associated Press.

Pitch soft news stories: Like the holidays, late summer is a good time to pitch soft news stories that will promote the firm and its attorneys. Many large cities have publications that target specific audiences other than businesses, such as families, women professionals, pet lovers, and food and wine enthusiasts. I once worked with a firm where a female associate was a member of the local roller derby team. I was able to get her profiled in the daily newspaper. In another instance, I secured a nice profile on a partner who also happened to be a sommelier. Perhaps your firm is doing some charitable outreach that would make a good photo opportunity. Or, if you have nothing scheduled, plan something that showcases your firm's culture and personality. One firm hosted a "Dog Days" of summer luncheon for its employees and clients and invited them to bring their pets. This generated local print and broadcast coverage for the firm and boosted employee morale at the same time.

Public relations is not just a seasonal activity; it's a year round effort. The relationship does not cease after your meeting or when you have had your firm's news covered. A brief email that thanks the journalist is polite, as is sharing the post with your social media networks.

The summer will be over before you know it, and the crush of the holidays will quickly be upon us. So use the season to your advantage.

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