

TIP SHEET:

Pitching Your Story Idea to the Media



Step #1: Develop your media hook. Remember it's about them, not you.

Your pitch should be developed with the media's objectives in mind. To do that, you need a good media hook. Start by asking: Why should a reporter/producer/editor care about your story? How will their audience benefit? What will they learn? Why do they need to know? How is your story new, different, or unique from other related stories/events?

If you need some help, here are some tips for building your story to include a good media hook

- **Find a safe conflict.** Show how your story idea solves a problem or relevant controversy.
- **Tie it to a trend.** To journalists, three examples make it a trend. Find other examples that relate to your story idea and position it as a trend.
- **Focus on real people.** Connect your pitch to a profile or impact story involving a remarkable 4-Her, 4-H professional or volunteer.
- **Connect it to current news / pop culture.** Show how your pitch is related to recent news reports or something that's happened in popular culture.
- **Lead with strong data.** Show how your pitch is related to a new study or compelling statistics.
- **Relate it to a milestone / event.** Does your pitch connect to a holiday, national awareness day/week/month or major event?

Step #2: Find the right media contact.

Create an accurate list of local newspapers, online news outlets, and radio and television stations. Don't forget that other institutions like schools, local government and community organizations may have an interest in your news. You may also consult the websites of media outlets and social media platforms for contact information and where to send news information. Check out the Building a Great Media List Tip Sheet for more ideas.

Step #3: Send your email pitch.

Here are some tips for sending an email pitch that grabs your contact's attention.

The Subject Line

- Don't put the full story idea or idea in the subject line. Treat it as a teaser, to get journalist to open email.
- For teaser ideas, look at covers of women's magazines and look at how they write those headlines. Use numbers (e.g., 3 ways to do this...). Use the word "how" to connote something practical (e.g., how a start-up beat an industry veteran).
- Use abbreviations & punctuation to keep it short so journalists can see entire subject line in viewing pane
- Avoid using words that will trigger a spam filter (anything to do with finance industry, insurance or stocks, explanation points or dollar signs)

The Email

- Keep the email short and easy on the eyes. No more than one scroll down. Using bullets can help.
- Always address the person by their first name. The email has to be personal and not appear to be junk e-mail.
- Don't send in evening or first thing in morning (especially on Monday morning). That's when they have a lot of emails from overnight. Wait until about 10 a.m. when they've cleared email back-log.
- Never include attachments. Use the email to get their interest and you can follow up with additional information later.
- It's a good idea to reference (and compliment) a recent and relevant article or news story by the reporter in the first sentence. It shows you're personalizing the pitch just for them.

Step #4: Follow up via a phone call.

Once you have sent your email pitch, or your press release/media advisory by email, you should follow up one day later with a telephone call to the assignment desk or to the reporter or editor. Try not to leave voice messages if you can avoid it...keep trying until you get a live person. Here are some tips for what to say when you're on the phone:

- Introduce yourself and your organization.
- Give them a 7-second hook in and ask them if they have time to hear more.
- PRACTICE. You will only have a few seconds to make a good impression. Know exactly what you're going to say.
- Anticipate questions.
- Sound like you're passionate about your story.

Sample: "Hello, my name is **ZYZ, TITLE** from 4-H. I saw your story about **REFERENCE RECENT REPORTER ARTICLE**. I thought you'd be interested in a story about **YOUR MEDIA HOOK**.
Do you have two minutes to learn more?"

Tips for Television Newsrooms

- Call TV assignment desks one week before an event. The best times to call are usually between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. or 7 p.m. and 9 p.m., or on weekends before 4 p.m. Never call between 3:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. or anytime the news is on the air. When pitching TV, always remember the visual/video opportunities you have to offer. Be prepared to share with them what kind of video and interviews they will be able to get.

Tips for Newspapers

- Call reporters or editors before 3 p.m. Between 10 a.m. and Noon is usually the best time of the day.

Tips for Radio Stations

- Unlike television stations, radio stations generally have a very small staff. Newscasts/programs are generally at the top of the hour or half hour so avoid calling at these times. Approach the show you know the best. If there's a morning talk show you're familiar with, ask to speak with the show's producer or ask for the person who handles news or education assignments