

Don't Give a Sales Pitch to a Journalist – Tell Them Your Story. Here's Why.

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As entrepreneurs, it's in our blood to always be selling. But when it comes to public relations, pump the brakes on the sales pitch when speaking with reporters.

Over the years, I've watched entrepreneurs, CEOs and business owners jump right into their sales pitches with reporters. I suspect they see this media interview as another opportunity to sell their products to a larger audience.

That's not how it works with journalists. Reporters tell stories for a living. They don't want to hear subjective information on why your product or service is better than others, even if it comes from a client testimonial – they want to hear the story.

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Don't talk about 'how the sausage is made'

A popular mistake I see even the smartest entrepreneurs make: They want to tell how the sausage is made. Unless you're speaking with a trade reporter writing for an industry-specific audience, stay away from the backstory.

Let me give you an example: A few years ago, I worked with a

physician who continued to start each interview with how his surgical procedure worked. I took science and biology classes in college – like most journalists – but I don't think any of us remember the medical jargon. Journalists don't want to hear a long lecture on anatomy.

With most articles, writers have only 1,200-1,500 words to tell the entire story, and if you're lucky, they will give you 20 minutes to talk at most. In TV, it's even shorter, with 120 seconds for most on-air segments – so don't waste the first 10 minutes going in-depth on how the sausage is made. Instead, focus this valuable time on explaining how your procedure is more advanced or different from previous approaches. Start your conversation with the end result; not the beginning.

This approach applies to any industry – tech, health care, politics, etc. If you're selling a new mobile app, don't go into the coding or cloud experience. Keep the conversation focused on the client benefit and value-add from your product, and stay away from any industry lingo. It only confuses the reporter.

PR sells the story – not the product

This might sound counterintuitive on the surface, but if you're hiring a publicist or PR agency, you want to see results that grow your business. That's understandable, and it will happen. Our expectations are aligned.

But an interview with a reporter is not the time to ask for the sale. These interviews should be focused on the client or customer. You can highlight this message by focusing on the five Ws of journalism: who, what, when, where and why.

- Who is your product or service helping?
- What is different about your product or service?

- Why should we care?
- Where is this being used?

This is just a blueprint and in no way the only approach to your story messaging. At the very least, if you ask these questions before your interview, it will keep you focused on the story versus the sale.

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PR won't save your business

I get worried when I hear potential clients tell me they are hoping PR can save their business. It's even more distressing when you hear fear in their tone.

PR is not going to save your business. If your business is hemorrhaging money before you hire a PR agency, it's likely a larger issue than publicity alone. Any publicist who says PR can save your business is probably engaging in the same entrepreneurial approach rooted in our blood.

So what value does PR bring if it can't save your business?

PR will bring your product or service more exposure. If news outlets are talking about your storyline, it will always be more credible than any advertisement. And unlike ad campaigns where the promotion ends when the budget ends, media stories continue to reach eyeballs long after the PR campaign is over. In many ways, the cost decreases over time.

Google doesn't reveal much about its search algorithm, but they do publicly admit to putting a priority on quality content and news exposure. If *Entrepreneur* or the *New York Times* is writing about your business, search algorithms will rightly prioritize your business with search. It gives your

brand the added exposure needed for the search lift.

Just remember, the effects of PR don't always happen overnight. A targeted media campaign will drive traffic to your website or store, but your end product still needs to be interesting. And that's probably the most important point to remember: Brag about what is interesting, not what you're selling.

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