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## Top Tips for Engaging With Media Editors

As discussed at Government Marketing University's Market Chat Live!  
Program guests:

- **Lisa Wolfe**, Editor-in-Chief, Federal News Radio
- **Jill Aitoro**, Executive Editor, Business-to-Government Group, Sightline Media Group
- **Anne Armstrong**, Co-President & Chief Content Officer, 1105 Public Sector Media Group
- **Camille Tuutti**, Executive Editor, NextGov (currently Editor-in-Chief, GovernmentCIO Magazine)
- **Dan Verton**, Executive Editor, MeriTalk (currently Publisher and Executive Editor, Homeland Security Magazine)
- **Billy Mitchell**, Managing Editor, FedScoop

### 1 Educate yourself on your targeted media brand before reaching out with a pitch.

Learn the media brand's approach to news, find out who reads it, and inquire about the editors' and reporters' preferred methods of engagement. Some editors and reporters prefer to be emailed or approached face-to-face at events, while others prefer phone calls. But all editors and reporters strongly agree on the fact that PR folks and marketers need to do their homework and know their publications, their audiences, and the types of stories they follow before reaching out to them.

Those that do, says Federal News Radio's Lisa Wolfe, will usually find success: "There was one example of a company that sent [a pitch to] my DoD reporter. He did a couple of things that were really nice. The first one is he understood the reporter's beat and that he had a show called 'On DOD.' The subject line of the email was 'Looking for guests for your show? I can provide insights on these three things.' That's really helpful because our reporter has a weekly deadline. So that's very helpful that the research was done. Then he listed in the email various companies that he worked with and the type of expertise that they could provide. So that, again, was helpful."

"But the most helpful part about that exchange," Wolfe continued, "was our reporter's positive reaction to it. He took the opportunity to email this person back and say, 'Gosh,

thank you for your offer to help and here's how you can be helpful.' I don't think there's any secret sauce. I think we're all going to say the same thing here that paying attention to news and making your pitch peg to some sort of news development is always very key. Also, being able to provide a government customer to go along with it. I know that the next time we get an email from this company, our reporter will respond to it, we'll have another conversation, and hopefully we'll be able to book the person that this company is pitching because they have this shared understanding and they've built this relationship of trust."

### 2 Position yourself as a resource for editors and reporters.

Articulating your value proposition to media representatives goes a long way toward establishing a constructive relationship. Jill Aitoro of Sightline Media explained how one example of such an engagement turned out to be mutually beneficial: "We were doing a project on unmanned systems at the Defense Department. I got pitched by a company that really focuses on training for unmanned systems and simulation and so forth and it was interesting but it wasn't the road we were intending to go down. [I mentioned to this person that getting footage from the Air Force base that trains UAV pilots was a challenge.] He then sends me all sorts of footage of UAV pilots in training and in simulators, which was fantastic."

"Then it made me start to think about it. I was like, 'This would actually be a really interesting addition to this big project that we're doing on unmanned.' It spurred me to go to that Air Force base and say, 'I have this footage. Do you have additional footage?' They offered up an interview. We ended up with a big section on training in this unmanned project, which without question was his ultimate goal. But for me it wasn't even something I was considering, it but it gave me the material. His approach was not 'Hey, here is what my company does and why you should talk to us.' But instead, 'Here's how it fits within a project you're doing. I know you care a lot about government. Here's what government is doing with it.' And he handed me over the resources I needed to get the job halfway done. So it was just a good example of him understanding what it was we were looking for and leading us down a road to really kind of make it more possible."

### 3 Connect your pitches to current news whenever possible.

Media organizations cover news, so help them do that. If you have access to subject matter experts who can discuss the latest big cyber attack or federal cloud policy update, offer them up. As Dan Verton said, journalists will always be interested to hear from PR and marketing reps if they have a good story to tell and can hook it to the news cycle: "I don't think there's any secret sauce for the industry folks in how to get your people in front of us or into our content. [Send me an email.] Don't get cute in the pitch. 'Hey Dan, I've got a guy or a gal who's an expert in this who can really talk about the OPM breach from a different perspective.' Great. We're working on the OPM breach. We need people like that. ... I think sticking to the current news and knowing who you have access to and actively pitching those people in a timely fashion will probably get you coverage."

Camille Tuutti said stories about emerging technologies and case studies tend to be popular. "The stories that do really, really well for our audience are the ones that describe a problem and how agency A, B and C overcame that challenge or how they implemented a new technology. Now, it's not about the platforms or solutions or the technologies used. It's about let's say, okay, Windows 10 deployment for example. It sounds really boring, but people want to read about those stories. They want to know how this agency was successful in migrating to a new technology."

But at the top of the list for any media brand is breaking news. "I think all marketers need to be aware that if you bring a story that nobody else has and you give exclusives to a journalist, I mean that matters a lot to us, and we will remember you for it," said Aitoro.

### 4 Build a relationship.

Or, as Anne Armstrong of 1105 Media puts it: "I tend to respond to ideas and pitches from people I know and trust."

Billy Mitchell of FedScoop says relationships are critical to success for both journalists and marketers. His advice to marketers: "Don't be too transactional in your interactions with people, don't sit down with someone and say, 'Hey, I need to get X, Y, Z story out of this encounter or else this is a bust.' I think, as a journalist, or as a marketer pitching journalists, you've got to think about the bigger win, and that means you might not necessarily score from that first email or that first encounter from someone. It might take a couple of conversations off the record before you really kind of develop that trust."

Armstrong agrees. "Sometimes you get a better relationship by what you don't publish. If they can trust you with information, if you're not out with 'gotcha' journalism, then you're more likely to get the bigger story and the deeper story later."

### 5 Contributed bylined articles (Op-Eds) should educate, not sell.

Even the suggestion of a sales pitch can be enough to have your offering rejected, so avoid the temptation to sneak in something self-promotional in your bylined article.

Also research what kinds of contributed articles your targeted media brand publishes before you pitch them. If an editor thinks you don't know their brand, they probably won't take the time to look at your offering. "When it comes to contributed content, I work with a pretty limited list of PR people that I trust that will get me content that I want," said Tuutti. "Yesterday actually I got this terrible pitch from somebody. It was a column on how to modernize your file transfers. Nobody wants to read that, I can guarantee you. Sometimes it's too techy or just not what our audience wants to read." Dan Burton said he has noticed that contributed byline articles by subject matter experts who challenge the way agencies approach or think about certain challenges also tend to perform well.