

# Perfecting Your Pitch: Planning for Effective Media Outreach



# Perfecting Your Pitch

Press coverage shouldn't be a one-time event, and it's not just for launch day. Building an engine that will effectively ensure that you get continual press is the best way to keep your company in the spotlight.

In this book we'll look at how you can get your pitch just right for different outlets, and confirm interest with other promotional sources.

The principles that we will cover can be used each time you have news to share! So let's take a look at how you can create an absolutely amazing pitch that's right for the outlet that you're pitching to, increasing your chances of press coverage.

To success!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'H' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'er'.

Onboardly, co-founded by Renee Warren and Heather Carson, works with venture-backed startups who build products that their customers love. Our focus is on Demand Marketing, a methodology created by the team in the Onboardly Labs, to help startups like yours drive customer acquisition.

Having increased our clients' traffic by over 5000%, lowered acquisition costs by 60%, and increased engagement and sales by 110%, we've helped hundreds of startups get more customers. And now we're ready to show you how. Are you ready?

*onboardly*

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# Lesson 1: Getting Ready to Pitch

Your hard work is about to pay off. Your startup story is written, and you have a few different versions of it for different publications. Your press kit is finalized, complete with your press release or passionate video pitch, and is ready to send off to the press as soon as it's needed.

You have just about everything that you need to start pitching to journalists. Your pitch has been drafted, and now...we're going to look at how you can perfect the heck out of it, and tailor it to ensure that it's timely and relevant to the journalists that you send it to.

In this book we'll also see how those relationships that you've been building with the press are about to pay off. All of your hard work to date is about to come full circle. You're ready for this, we're certain of it!

## Lesson 2: Confirming Your Launch Date

Whether you're launching your startup, introducing a new product, or sharing big news with the press; it's important to confirm that the date you've chosen isn't expected to coincide with any other breaking news. This is your chance to confirm that there's no scheduled news expected to break at the same time as yours.

Again, before sending out your press release, a pitch, or anything that has a date on it, do one final check to make sure that there's no big news expected to break that day. The last thing that you would want would be for another story to eclipse your news.

**Now, it's time to work on your pitch!**

# Lesson 3: Perfecting Your Pitch

In your assignment, you drafted the first version of your pitch, now it's time to perfect that pitch and make sure it's ready to face the press!

This stage is really all about honing in on individual outlets, and making sure your pitch is tailored for individual publications. This helps to ensure that the pitch you create is one that the journalist or outlet would be interested in.

**Why go through the trouble?** What's wrong with a one-size-fits-all approach?

Well, for starters -we all know that one-size-fits-all is somewhat of a misnomer, and rarely works in the real world! When it comes to press coverage, it's certainly no exception. With your pitches you want to think perfectly tailored. This ensures a better response rate than you would have by mass emailing a standard pitch. It allows you to make sure your pitch is the right fit for the journalist that you send it to.

## **The Tailored Approach**

The most effective pitches are ones that are tailored for each outlet. Instead of sending out a one-size-fits-all pitch, it's important to think about the publication that you're pitching to, and ask yourself 'why is this news important to them?'

While developing a unique approach for each outlet may sound daunting, we promise that in the end, it will save time. Instead of wasting time sending out pitches that journalists may not be interested in, you're applying a more strategic and targeted approach -one that will ensure a better response rate.

*Ready to get started? Start tailoring your pitches to perfection!*

## **Know Your Outlet, Know Your Hook**

So what approach should you take? How can you craft a pitch that will get a journalist's attention –and make him want to know more?

Firstly, it's important to identify the outlet or journalist that you plan to pitch to. Familiarize yourself with the type of articles that the outlet features, to get an idea of which news stories they cover. Check out the journalist's previous articles, to learn more about her style.

Then, grab your story angles (that you created in weeks 3-4) and choose an angle that would interest the publication that you're pitching to. This will help you to develop a hook that's absolutely perfect for the outlet –customized to perfection.

### **Tip: Know You Why (Your Hook)**

Ask yourself why would THIS journalist or THIS publication be interested in the news? Then craft your pitch around this approach.



You may also want to have the first draft of your pitch handy. This will help to guide you as you craft your pitch.

## **Strong Introductory Statements**

Again, it's important to ask: 'what's in it for them?' What type of introduction would interest the journalist or outlet?

Know your WHY, know your hook, and include it in your introduction. If you've got that down, you've got it made. Everything else is minor details that the journalist can ask for later.

Read news headlines for inspiration, or browse through other articles that the journalist has written. This is a great way to find inspiration on the type of titles that the press use, and will give you a good idea on the type of language that you will want to include in your introductions.

### **Ensure Relevancy**

If it's relevant, your chance of getting coverage is much, much greater.

We touched on this in weeks 1-2, while you were crafting your first pitch. The same principles apply when adjusting your pitch to ensure that it's perfect for various outlets.

When perfecting your pitch consider:

- Relevancy (Make sure it's the type of story that the journalist covers.)
- Timing (Timing is important. One idea is to find recent articles that a journalist has published, and design your pitch around a related topic that follows on from one of those stories.)
- Opportunities to Newsjack (Think major holidays, trending events, and new studies.)

Remember: journalists are busy. They are constantly facing deadlines, and trying to finish to-do lists. They have pitches coming in from every angle, and are cautious of companies trying to sell advertisements that are thinly disguised as news. They can spot an ulterior motive a mile away –it's their job! This is why it's important to ensure relevancy, and to make sure your pitch is something that would genuinely interest them.

### **Ensure Newsworthiness**

And as we discussed in weeks 1-2, your pitch must be newsworthy. Check it's newsworthiness by asking if it does any of the following:

- Shock
- Surprise
- Spark feelings of interest
- Prove or disprove a well-known theory
- Create heart-warming moments
- Grab emotions

If it does any of these, you've got a winner!

### **Keep It Human**

Remember, journalists are people too. Fight the temptation to be sales-y; just be human. Include human interest details, and give them something that they'd like to cover, something relevant to their niche, and something that their readers would like to read. Always be polite and pitch respectfully. Remember to keep it short and easy to read. Brevity is key, and less is more. Six sentences or less is usually ideal for a pitch.

### **Clicky Subject Lines**

The best subject lines are often the simplest. Use casual subject lines. A simple "Hey Joe - Have a moment for a quick pitch?" or straight-forward sentence outlining the news works most of the time, and is much better than one that's filled with buzzwords. Don't waste time with flashy subject lines to make your pitch look fancy –chances are that this approach will only result in your pitch looking like all of the others in the inbox!

*Ok, now you have a pretty good idea on how to tailor your pitch for different outlets. Apply these concepts each time you pitch a new story, breaking news, or updates on your company. Remember, publicity isn't just for launch day, it's something that you should be striving for 365 days a year –it's important for keeping your company in the public eye!*



## Lesson 4: Setting Up Alerts

*\*Go ahead and skip this section if you're already very already familiar with Google Alerts.\**

Set up Google Alerts (if you haven't already) so you'll be the first to know when media coverage appears online.

Google Alerts are notifications that you receive via email, telling you when someone uses your company's name or other key term. This is a great way to find out first, when someone's covering your company!

Google Alerts are free, and fast and simple to set up, allowing you to easily stay updated on press coverage that your company is receiving.

To set up the alerts, put in keywords that you want receive notifications for –like your company's name or your product name. This allows you to keep track of who's writing what about your company.

As you receive alerts, you'll be able to respond right away to new articles that appear mentioning your company. A great way to keep in the know!

## Lesson 5: Drafting an Announcement Blog Post

Now it's time to draft a blog post for your company blog -and your personal blog if you have one. This post should be the announcement for your big news –whether it's launch day, a product launch, or other news story.

Have it written up, and ready to publish when the big day arrives.

Plan to update the post in real time as the media covers your news. Create a cool **\*\*Updated: Thanks to Forbes for the amazing coverage this morning.\*\*** section at the top of your post. If a media mention is one of the first things that a visitor sees, it'll lend credibility. Keep updating this post as additional outlets publish your news.

## Lesson 6: Start Pitching!

It's almost time for your big launch! Now it's time to get in touch with the journalists that you've been connecting with and let them know about your product or company launch, and pitch it to them. Keep the pitches short: remember, six sentences or less is usually ideal, and make sure your pitch is on point and relevant.

### Tip: Be Friendly, But Not Too Friendly

Remember that while you want to appear accommodating and friendly when interacting with journalists - if you act 'too chummy' you could freak them out. (i.e.: Don't lie and pretend you've met before, or discuss things you've observed from their personal lives.



Get a system in place. Start pitching three to five business days before launch day. Make a plan to start with outlets that you desire most, or those with the longest lead times, and work your way out to other outlets from there. Work from your media list to ensure that you don't pitch to the same outlet twice!

You may also want to offer exclusives to the most desirable outlets. This will help to increase your chance of getting coverage from your main outlets. Tell them your unique story, and give them a unique angle to work with, invite them to a preview of your product, or offer an exclusive interview. Make sure you tell them that it's exclusive!

Finally, remember to ask the media outlets to observe your launch date -usually they will be happy to oblige you. Place the embargo date on your pitches before you send them out.

Now it's time to cross your fingers and wait for responses! The hard work you've been doing building relationships with journalists is about to pay off.

## Lesson 7: Treat No's Like a Future Yes

With all of the work that you've put into your media strategy, getting a no is always going to be tough. But it's important to remember that a no, doesn't necessarily mean that your pitch was bad; it could mean that it wasn't a good fit for the journalist, or that the timing was off.

This is why it's important to treat every no as an opportunity for a future yes.

If the answer's no, ask the journalist for feedback on the pitch –and look for permission to contact him again in the future.

Let's look at a few different responses that you may receive, and find out how you can turn each one into an opportunity...

### **The 'Yes, But...'**

'Yes, But...' is the next best thing to a yes. This usually means that you've nailed the pitch, but the timing is off, or that your pitch needs refined but the idea is solid. In this case, you will want to work on adjusting your approach -either by scheduling a better time to discuss the idea or repositioning the pitch to get it right the second time around. If you move quickly enough, you'll still be fresh in the journalist's mind, and can turn it into a win!

### **The 'Not Interested'**

The 'Not Interested' can be used as a way to get to know the journalist a bit better. He said no, but the fact that he took the time to reply most likely means that he respects the time you took to reach out, but it's just not for him. Use this as an opportunity to reply, and look for feedback on the pitch and for permission to contact him in the future.

### **The 'Ignore'**

The 'Ignore' usually means it's a bad time, or a bad pitch. Bad timing can be avoided -to an extent- by actively monitoring for journalists looking for stories, or by watching Twitter or get to know a journalist's publication schedule. To avoid bad pitches, make sure you're targeting the right person for your story.

### **The 'Unsubscribe'**

The 'Unsubscribe' is a classic response to a pitch gone wrong. Most likely he or she is the wrong person to cover your topic.

### **Tip: Don't Stress Out About The Word 'No'**

Use rejection as a reminder that even the best PR people can learn ways to improve their approach. Take 'no' in stride and keep at it.



Rejection doesn't feel great, but it's important to remember that it happens to everyone. Even the best PR pros get their pitches rejected! The important thing is to accept the fact that rejection is part of the business, and move on.

If the answer is no, don't burn a bridge. Thank the writer for his time. You'll never know when you may want to pitch to him again. It's all about making friends, rather than just contacts. With each journalist that you connect with, you're setting the stage for a relationship that will most likely be reciprocated eventually.

On the other hand, if you do receive a positive response from a writer, your odds of scoring media coverage will have just skyrocketed. In this case, make sure you're ready to offer the writer whatever she needs to get the job done!

Remember that even just one amazing media opportunity is often more valuable than a dozen mediocre ones. Finding the right journalist who is passionate about your subject matter is more likely to lead to coverage than a dozen pitches sent out at random. Chances are, if you work on building that relationship, you'll have a friend for life.

If you don't receive a response initially, wait a couple of days and follow up again. After that, move on. Who knows, those journalists may contact you later once they start seeing your name in other publications!

## Lesson 8: You're Building for the Future

The great thing about these principles is that you can apply them to ANY big news that your company has in the future.

It's important not to treat press coverage like a one time thing; coverage must be continual in order to be effective. Making PR part of your company's DNA is an excellent way to gain continual publicity for your company –an extremely valuable way to stand out in today's world.



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