

# The value of journalist relationships:

How to get journalists to care



## The value of journalist relationships: how to get journalists to care

Appealing to the media in Australia can be a challenging task, especially for organisations in the business-to-business (B2B) sector, where getting cut through depends on a variety of factors. It primarily hinges on the newsworthiness of the information offered, the market and audience appetite, the publication being engaged, and, importantly, the organisation making the announcement or offering the information.

In Australia, media coverage is less easily achievable than in other regions of the world like the United States or the United Kingdom. The publication landscape in Australia is, unfortunately, continuing to shrink, with the downward turn starting many years ago and accelerating during the pandemic as publications went on permanent hiatus, print magazines ceased, online publications stopped publishing, and media outlets increasingly moved towards pay-for-play models that prioritise paid-for advertorial content.

A report on the Australian media showed a 15 per cent decrease in the total number of Australian newsrooms between 2008 and 2018. According to the report, 106 local and regional newspaper titles closed, and at least 5,200 journalism jobs were cut between 2012 and 2020. Additionally, there has been a significant reduction in the number of articles covering local government issues, public health, and science over the past 15 years, alongside a decrease in local and regional news.

This has ramped up the competitiveness of publications and stifled opportunities an organisation once had to get its name in lights. Editors and journalists, even those who freelance and work with multiple media titles, have an agenda: to find stories that appeal to their audiences and encourage engagement. The media game is about the audience because they are, after all, the ones that keep the publication's lights on and journalists in their jobs.

For organisations trying to achieve coverage, knowing the current and evolving media landscape is one of the first and most important lessons to learn. Failing to understand how to play the media game right leads to many missed opportunities and can damage relationships with important industry media. Researching the publication and specific journalists before engaging with them and sharing content—be it in a press release, bylined article, interview, or even just commentary—can save a lot of wasted time and rejection.

Newsworthiness is also critical when approaching the media with a story or opportunity. It's important to take the time to drill down and consider what the organisation is offering and ascertain that it's timely, interesting, and relevant to the publication and its audience. It also needs to be relevant to the local market, particularly if it's a company, product announcement, or press release. And, if it is to offer further commentary on a hot topic or news story, organisations must provide a unique or different perspective other than what's already in the news.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/abc-media-campaigns/share-the-media-diversity-report/who-controls-our-media-the-new-report-commissioned-by-getup>



Beyond these two factors, there is much more at play, including the brand, its reputation, and its recognition in the market; spokespeople, their positions and their industry experience; and the amount of information that can be provided, including further interviews with spokespeople or customer use cases.

Addressing these factors and providing journalists with a solid offer they will find interesting and relevant is key to establishing a relationship between the organisation and journalists as well as building a successful presence in the Australian media.

This whitepaper explores why it's important for organisations to make an effort to build a relationship with media and the resulting benefits, the important considerations to know, how to get cut through with stories and announcements, and the benefits of a PR agency when it comes to building a strong, lasting relationship with media.

## **The importance of building a relationship with media**

If your organisation is new to the Australian market, whether it's recently launched or a multinational business looking to expand into the region, or if it has not previously leveraged media successfully, building a relationship with key media is important to greater business growth, reputation, and market recognition.

The media offers organisations an opportunity to showcase new products and solutions; partner, channel, or industry initiatives; regional performance and growth; and research findings from surveys and studies. It also can be a valuable tool to bolster the profile of local spokespeople and establish your business as an industry leader in terms of solutions, knowledge, and expertise.

Securing coverage in key industry publications gets your brand's name out into the public domain and makes you more recognisable to prospects. It also demonstrates the depth, knowledge, and innovation your organisation has to offer and the type of challenges you can help customers to overcome.

However, before you start building your media profile, your organisation needs to understand the Australian media environment to navigate it and build relationships with key journalists.

# The ins and out of the Australian media landscape

The Australian media landscape is as unique as the country itself, and local media aren't like other regions. Australian editors and journalists won't take, accept, or even look at just anything that comes into their inboxes.

There are seven news values that factor into a journalist's decision to cover a story:

## 1. Timeliness:

how long ago did the story break, or is it too soon? For B2B organisations, this is relevant for media releases and announcements. If the announcement is being made globally, it must also be released in a timely manner locally; otherwise, the news will already be public before Australian media get a chance to publish it themselves, and they'll likely lose interest. Conversely, offering media news under embargo weeks before they can actually publish will have the same effect.

## 2. Human interest or uniqueness:

is the story unusual? B2B media are interested in new survey findings or different opinions from high-level executives about matters affecting the industry.

## 3. High impact:

how many people, businesses, regions, and countries has this affected?

## 4. Proximity:

has this happened locally, or is it relevant to regions with close ties? The Australian media industry heavily centres around news and updates specific to Australia. However, it may occasionally report news in neighbouring regions, including New Zealand and the Asia Pacific as well as the United States and Europe, depending on the news itself. Within Australia, local media are also more interested in news and announcements that will directly affect them.

## 5. Celebrity:

does it have something to do with a well-known person? High-profile people, including CEOs, other C-suite executives, and spokespeople well-known to the organisation or with a wealth of experience in the industry, are more likely to garner media interest.

## 6. Conflict:

does it involve a dispute? This type of news covering the B2B industry is usually not a story that has been pitched or offered to a journalist, which means it is likely to occur as breaking news.

## 7. Negativity:

is the news bad or good? Journalists tend to report on more negative stories than positive ones. For B2B organisations, this type of coverage can occur following media interviews with spokespeople that are not media trained, especially if the wrong comment was made or the conversation was steered in an unfavourable situation.



In addition to aligning with one of these values, the content, pitch, or information also needs to meet the requirements of the publication and the individual journalist. This means understanding the content each publication covers to know what type of news announcement or commentary they will be interested in.

National media mastheads include The Australian and The Australian Financial Review, while state-based metropolitan publications include the likes of The Sydney Morning Herald, Brisbane Times, and The Age. These outlets run on a daily news cycle and are interested in general news, as well as important political, business, and financial updates. Stories must be of significant national or local importance to achieve coverage in these publications.

More often than not, B2B organisations will have great success engaging with specific industry media. Depending on the industry in which you operate—for example, information technology (IT), cybersecurity, education, manufacturing, telecommunication, finance, retail, and many others—the number of key media titles you can engage with will differ.

It's essential to understand the media title you want to engage with to ensure your story or commentary is relevant to their audience. If not, you risk damaging your relationships with media houses by pitching stories that won't interest readers. This can paint your business in a negative light and ruin your reputation as an industry leader if you consistently provide stories that don't hit the mark.

## Building a connection with journalists

Beyond knowing what content the media publication covers to ensure your story fits the bill, it's also critical to connect with key journalists to position your business as an industry leader. There are two primary reasons for this. Having a good relationship with a journalist means that not only will the journalist be likely to write about your business and cover your stories, but they'll also be more likely to write positively about your business.

Additionally, if you have a good relationship with a journalist and are known for giving them impactful, engaging stories that their audience wants to read, they'll be likely to approach you for future content.

Building a relationship with a journalist isn't as seamless as simply sharing news with them when you have it. It needs to be the right news, and it needs to be given in a way that helps them write the story. Ensuring your information is newsworthy is one thing; however, you can also help strengthen a journalist's story by giving them the facts and figures they need upfront. And helping them out by ensuring your spokespeople and customers are available for comment when needed is critical.

It's also important to know how and when to contact a journalist. This means knowing when a journalist might be on deadline and looking for stories or knowing whether they prefer to be contacted via email or phone to ensure you work with them as best you can.

## How to get your story out into the world

Once you've done your due diligence to know that you're engaging with the right journalists and publications, the next step is positioning your news to get the most attention and cut through with the media. This is where pitching stories effectively is key.

There are two things to keep in mind when pitching your news to the media:

### 1. Make it a good story

As we've already covered, knowing what a publication or journalist is interested in covering is essential. To achieve cut through with your content and news, you need to understand what makes a good story for those key journalists. While a new product announcement or industry recognition is important to your business, it may not hold the same level of interest to the media. It's important to understand how to show a journalist why your news is important to their readers.

For example, ask what your industry recognition means for your customers and what it signals to the wider industry about your business. Or include information in your product announcement about what direct impact this will have on customers to solve their specific business challenges.

### 2. Audience is everything

Finding the right hook and showing the direct impact to the people journalists care about—their readers—will help you secure more opportunities for coverage with journalists and media. Keep the end audience in mind when you're pitching stories to journalists. Your stories need to be interesting to the journalist reading your email pitch; however, it's equally important to show why it's interesting to the people that pay for their content.

Each publication has a different audience, so it's essential that you keep this in mind when pitching stories to ensure that your message is correct for the audience. For example, your industry recognition or an interview with a visiting executive of sales may not be of interest to publications like *The Australian* or *The Australian Financial Review*, which cover general news for the entire population of Australia. However, they would be more attractive to journalists that work at trade publications that cover news in your specific industry.



## How a PR agency can support your media efforts

Navigating the Australian media landscape and building relationships with key journalists can be challenging, especially for organisations that aren't familiar with the region and the key players. Working with a dedicated public relations (PR) agency can help you achieve greater cut-through and reduce the potential to damage relationships with media by pitching stories that aren't relevant or securing media interviews for visiting executives without a story to tell about the local business.

Great PR agencies spend all day every day engaging with local media on stories of industry, national, and global importance. They also regularly engage with journalists at key publications. This means that a PR agency can do the heavy lifting for you: they already know what stories work for the Australian media as well as how to contact journalists about the stories that matter.

Engaging with media can be especially difficult when you sell complex, high-value products and services. Not every PR agency has the same level of industry experience or

the expertise you need to communicate complex B2B IT concepts to journalists and industry media; a generalist PR agency can only do so much. It's essential to partner with an experienced PR agency that understands the ins and outs of your business, and the industry at large, to ensure your business is seen where it needs to be seen and is engaging with the right journalists at the right time to get the best results for your business.

Recognition PR—part of The Recognition Group, Australia's leading group of PR and marketing specialists—has more than 35 years of experience helping B2B professional services, IT, and financial services companies across Australia and New Zealand reach their audiences and tell their stories. Recognition PR builds and executes tailored PR and communication programs to achieve brand recognition and business growth for clients. Its team of experienced PR consultants, content writers, marketing specialists, designers, and developers provide expert communications support for clients.

For more information on how Recognition PR can help your business grow its relationships with Australian journalists and media to tell stories that matter to grow your industry reputation,

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