



## Healthcare Marketing

### Making 'The List' with the media

Of all the columns we have written, the one about how to become a media expert resource has been one of the most popular (at least in terms of responses from readers). Consequently, we've reached out to some key editors and reporters covering health care and insurance to ask them, firsthand, what makes a good expert, how they find expert resources and how to get on their "list" of expert resources. Here's what they said.

To the question "How do you find sources," the number one response was through personal contacts. Other resources included the Internet (but "there's no guarantee that they are reliable and knowledgeable,"), previous stories, e-mails, press releases and PR people. ProfNet, an online resource for journalists, was also mentioned, as was trade shows as a venue to find and meet new sources.

Some comments:

"I use the Internet to find sources for matter I'm not familiar with."

"We maintain an extensive contact list of experts in many different specialties. Editors will send e-mail sources, links, reports, articles that may be of use to the writer of a particular story. We also have a list of PR people at many of the consulting-type firms."

"I go to the contact on a press release. Surprisingly, some press releases and some websites have no media contacts, just a main number and name. It's difficult to get through the company voicemail maze to find someone in that case."

"We rely on members (of an association) and faculty as sources. We identify sources through word of mouth, previous articles books written, classes taught and areas of expertise identified by the members themselves."

"I use ProfNet quite a bit to find fresh voices. There's usually someone sitting in my e-mail that will apply to a story. Meeting people at trade shows is more personalized. They come to mind more often later."

"PR people offer sources, but they are not always right for my story. I look for PR people who won't send me just anyone. I can't use someone who will say 'that's not my expertise' to the first question."

"As I'm researching and reading other articles, I sometimes find sources that I will use also."

#### **Ideal source**

The second question we asked was, "What makes an ideal source and why would you

use them again?"

Knowledge of and insight into the subject matter of the story, quotable comments, reliability and responsiveness of the deadline needs of the journalist and the proper credentials and credibility are all important attributes of a good expert. Journalists appreciate an expert who speaks to the subject at hand. Journalists will react negatively to anyone who is pursuing an agenda to push a product.

"I want experience, excellent references and personal knowledge of the subject of the article. I'll use them again if they know my audience and can tailor their responses to queries directly to this audience."

"I like people who are responsive and call back, who are reliable and knowledgeable."

"I use people who will speak generally and not push their product. Someone who brings up an important question whether I ask it or not."

"It depends on the quality of information I get and their ability to talk about the subject at hand, not their own agenda. Someone who doesn't want approve the copy - this is a large insult to our publication and is against our policy."

"A source available at a moment's notice who speaks from a large knowledge base with some interesting side notes on it."

"We prefer sources who are able to provide practical strategies and examples on a given topic, not just "talk around it."

"They must have industry knowledge. If we speak to vendors, we must have referenceable clients".

"We need good, insightful commentary. Also ease of working with the person is important - they must be easy to get on the phone or by e-mail."

"They must know the subject, be an experienced healthcare exec, academic, lawyer, consultant, physician leader. They must be quotable, return phone calls or e-mails promptly, play fair, know how journalists work, such as what it means to go 'off the record.' "

### **Source list**

OK, so you have all these attributes. How do you become known as an expert resource? How do you get on the "source list" of a journalist who may not be writing about your subject right away, but probably will later?

The majority of journalists answered that they keep electronic files of contacts and subject for future references. A few use paper files and rolodexes.

"We keep an author database to keep tabs on who we've used and also an electronic file of potential sources for future issues."

"You must contact me by e-mail. I keep leads in e-mail folders. I have a folder and subfolder for each issue, folders for certain topics that are common in the magazine, and folders for certain sections of the magazine. , i.e. company profile or case study. Some editors printout out e-mails and file them. I like e-mail because I can access it

from the road."

"I ask for a list of PR person's clients and their expertise and keep it in a file on my desk. I don't keep releases on individual's promotions within the company. The best way to get my attention on a future story such as a feature that's on our editorial calendar is to contact me a week before the previous issue closes. I may still be on deadline but you will be the first one I call back when I start work on the next story."

"Don't use high pressure, or think you will catch my attention with press releases loaded with jargon. If I have to re-read it to understand what you're saying, you've lost me. Please no more 'strategic alliances' or 'revolutionary' or 'new paradigms.' Simple English please."

"I keep e-mails in an archive. Most releases come over e-mail; this is an excellent reference bank, but I have to vet each potential source."

"I try to file sources away, but it's best to have a story idea with that person and establish a relationship. Keep on my radar by sending me an occasional reminder e-mail."

"We may have our editor do a Q & A interview on strategy and schedule for publication, then everyone knows the person."

"I add names to my electronic rolodex when I have a chance . . .if I don't . . .that's journalism."

"I'm always thinking six months in advance; contacting me about future stories will get my attention and get you on the contact list to call for an interview."

### **Emerging trends**

Finally, in keeping with our philosophy of linking companies and people to current emerging trends for media coverage, we asked: "What are the new and emerging issues that you plan to cover this year?" In return we got a "laundry list" of possible topics to propose.

Fallout from Sept. 11 Workers' compensation Online delivery of services and information Insurance trends Raising quality levels in healthcare Leadership competencies New growth opportunities in the industry Technology ROI analysis Next generation customer contact centers Risk management and fraud detection The mobile professional Broadband

What does all this mean for the aspiring media expert? If you want to see your name in quotes, do the following:

1. Develop your knowledge base, not just of your product or company, but of the industry and the trends affecting it. Have a viewpoint and be able to express that viewpoint succinctly in memorable and quotable terms.
2. Don't overlook the Internet as a publication vehicle. Reporters use it. Get into online media expert files. Build your company's website as a source of industry information as well as company information and be sure to prominently feature the company's media contact.
3. When reporters call, be accessible and responsive right away. Talk about the subject of their story - don't use this as an opportunity to push your own

- agenda.
4. Increase your chances of showing up on reporters' radar by writing and publishing your own material. This establishes you as an authority and gets you into the source databases that reporters will research.
  5. Do research - or have your PR staff research - what features and topics publications are covering according to their editorial calendars, and contact reporters well in advance to suggest print and interview resources.
  6. Stay in touch. If a pitch doesn't get a response the first time, don't assume that you will be contacted later if the reporter covers that subject. Stay visible but do not be obnoxious.
  7. When an interview opportunity arises, know the publication and its audience so that you can provide information that is helpful and relevant to this audience.
  8. Look for opportunities to suggest commentary or subjects for features within a publication.
  9. Know your industry trends, identify the ones that your company or your work impacts and interpret how these trends will impact your industry and your customers.

---

Scott Public Relations, in Woodland Hills, CA, specializes in healthcare, benefits, insurance and technology public relations. The company can be reached at **818-610-0270**.