



Why was THAT Lawyer Quoted?

Tips to Secure Positive Press Coverage

By Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC

With social media activities, blog posts and other interactive marketing strategies in full force for many lawyers, public and media relations sits idly on the back burner. While lawyers are focused on building and maintaining a stunning presence online, let's not forget about what lawyers used to do in the pre-social media days. It's not about rekindling an "old" strategy – securing positive press coverage for you and your firm – and turning it into a "new" strategy for today. Rather, it's viewing proac-

tive public and media relations efforts as a continued important part of your marketing mix. Many new lawyers today are just not that well-versed on public relations best practices. Seasoned lawyers are caught up in today's social media frenzy, trying to blog and post their way to success!

I'll bet when you're reading your local daily paper you often wonder: "How did that lawyer score this type of exposure?" The likely answer is that they have a proactive strategy in place to keep the firm's name recognition high with local, regional

and national business and legal reporters, editors and producers. The result? Getting interviewed for the 6 p.m. news or being quoted in a big story in the daily paper.

This article is designed to demystify what it really takes to develop a PR plan, create your PR tools, and generate positive press coverage. If you are really serious about media coverage, you will consider hiring a PR professional or a PR firm. But for those DIYers out there, here are steps you can take to double down on securing the elusive animal called positive press coverage.

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A Few PR Planning Tips

It's important before you jump in and start contacting the media, to develop a basic PR plan that will identify:

PR Objectives – Are you looking to become a regular TV legal contributor, secure a radio interview, get quoted in relevant stories, or provide bylined articles for publication?

Audiences – Members of the media who report upon your practice area and topics of interest to your clients. Remember the media is a conduit through which you will reach your “real” audiences.

Messages – Why should members of the media want to talk with you? What expertise do you have that is a cut-above the rest? Remember that your messages and pitches need to be newsworthy – topics that affect a large group of people very significantly.

Measurement – PR can be a hard sell to lawyers and law firms. Why? Because a lot of arduous work may result in a feature story on the cover of a business publication, or it may result in nothing. PR is a game where you must continue the “right” strategies over time – consistently. If you do find yourself gracing the cover of a publication, being the star of a feature story, or being interviewed on television, even though the actual coverage is editorial (not advertising), such coverage will significantly increase your name recognition, and will position you for more. Media begets media. If you keep being featured and interviewed, more opportunities will come your way.

Getting Down to Brass Tacks

Following are many activities you should consider if you want to generate your own press coverage:

Be a Consumer of the News – Make sure you are staying current on your reading with media outlets covering topics related to your practice. You don't want to pitch an idea that was just covered last week or even last month.

Media List – If you could wave your magic wand and know you would be successful in your PR efforts, on which radio shows, TV news programs, publications or blogs would you like to be featured?

PR Materials – Reporters are busy and deadline-driven. Do your best to synthesize information for them. Many firms have a “media room” on their websites that include a one-page firm summary, bulleted versions of select attorney biographies, links to past news coverage, and other tools to make the reporters' job easier.

News Releases – A news release is a tool to communicate information the media should know about. News releases are broadly sent to many media outlets, many times as a “let's throw it out there and see if anyone calls.” If you are serious about sending timely, relevant news releases consider a subscription to www.PRNewswire.com, a first-rate media distribution outlet.

Story Pitches – Story pitches are used to present a specific story idea to (generally) one reporter. This is where the media doesn't want you pitching stories to just anyone. If they like what you are pitching, they will want an exclusive.

Media Source – Keep track of reporters who cover stories affecting your clients. Engage with them online – comment on their stories. Point out something they may have missed by offering a different angle on their story. Maybe they will

call you for an interview or you will become a great source for them to call when they have questions about a particular case or matter.

Help a Reporter Out (HARO) – True DIY lawyers must know about this service. HARO identifies upcoming stories from all major news publications, so you can offer yourself up as a source of timely and relevant information. Here is their website: www.helpareporter.com

Identify the Local Angle on a National Story – Keep an eye out for big, national stories. If you can identify a local angle and pitch it to a local reporter, you might just find yourself being extensively quoted in a story.

Don't Overlook Attorney at Law Magazine – Being featured in Attorney at Law Magazine is a fabulous way to generate positive press coverage. The publication is very selective about lawyers and law firms they feature so you need to use the same strategies above when developing your story pitch. What is unique about this magazine is that they negotiate reprint rights upfront. Most publications charge thousands of dollars if you want to reprint the article or create a perpetual link on their website.

Public relations is alive and well. In fact, it's better than ever. There are many lawyers focused on digital media in lieu of traditional media sources (TV, Radio, Print), yet demand remains high for timely, relevant and newsworthy story ideas. Don't have a PR firm? It's OK – with the tips above you can really do it yourself. In fact, most reporters prefer hearing directly from you rather than a PR agency pitching a story on your behalf.



Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC, is the founder and president of Professional Services Marketing LLC. Terrie and her team have helped lawyers and law firms promote interesting aspects of their work, resulting in favorable press coverage. Terrie also serves as vice chair of the Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board, and earned her master's degree from the University of St. Thomas with a focus in public relations. You can reach Terrie at Terrie@psm-marketing.com or (320) 358-1000.