

HOW TO WRITE A SOUND PITCH

Social workers are not public relations experts. But, we are viewers/readers/listeners of media that influence us in our daily lives. As media consumers, we know what kind of stories we like to hear. Frequently, we are saying to ourselves, “I would love to see a story on...I wonder how I might get that story out to the public.”

Journalists need story ideas pitched to them. With 24-hour news operations and the advent of Web sites that complement every media outlet, there is plenty of opportunity to have your story heard by reporters and conveyed to the public.

There are some general pitching tips that apply whether you are a social worker suggesting a story to a journalist, or trained public relations professional:

- **Convey a well thought out story.** Provide the journalist with not only the idea, but also the key players in the story. Provide experts who convey both sides of the story, including an expert or two who conveys your messages. Give real life examples of how this story affects people and allow the journalists to speak with those people.
- **Research the appropriate contact to send the pitch.** You can research a reporter’s beat, or topical areas of coverage, by reviewing the Web site for their publication or program. Reporters appreciate when you understand their interest areas and pitch a story idea that is relevant to their work.
- **Determine the best way to reach out to a journalist.** Most journalists prefer to be contacted initially by email. The days of faxing and snail mail are slowly drifting away. A phone call can be effective follow up, but only when you have something new to add to your pitch. Don’t send attachments of press releases or photos unless they have been solicited by the journalist.
- **Make the pitch compelling.** Use an interesting subject line, keep the copy of the pitch short and keep them reading with a couple of compelling paragraphs (at most) about your story idea. Keep in mind that reporters receive hundreds of emails a day and they need to be selective about the ones that catch their attention.
- **Connect your pitch to a timely news event.** If you can connect your story idea to a larger story or to a community event, then the pitch is more likely to be considered.
- **Provide contact information** It might seem basic, but providing your email and daytime and nighttime phone numbers to a reporter will only help your cause of getting them to cover your story.

PITCHING – THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY EXAMPLE OF A GOOD MEDIA PITCH:

Good morning. Prof. Frederic G. Reamer, PhD of the Rhode Island College of Social Work is an expert on missing persons cases where the parent is the suspect. He has been a member of the Rhode Island Parole Board for more than 25 years, has experience dealing with these cases and can help your readers understand the situations. [Include a brief quote from the expert.]

Prof. Reamer is the author of: [Include names of publications]

I am pasting below Prof. Reamer’s bio which includes his contact information. Good luck on your story. [Include brief bio for reporter’s reference]

Theresa Spinner
202-408-8600 x468
media@naswdc.org

What is right about this pitch?

- The pitch gets right to addressing the needs of the reporter by identifying the expert and explaining his credentials.
- A quote, names of related publications and a brief bio are included to give the reporter more information about the expert.
- The reporter understands why it will be helpful for his/her readers to hear from this expert.
- Theresa provides the contact information for the expert as well as her own contact information.

EXAMPLE OF A BAD AND UGLY MEDIA PITCH:

Hey Bert:

What’s shakin? I wanted to tell you about this great product we have. It’s going to blow your mind. The Orbitron 5000 is the latest in hair care products. We’re even having a contest on our web site for someone to win the full line of Orbitron products. I attached a picture of the Orbitron 5000. Check it out!

Let me know if you’re interested in doing a story.

Cheers – Ernie

What is wrong with this pitch?

- The pitch is too conversational. Unless you know the reporter, “Hi” or “Hello” is more appropriate.
- The pitch does not describe what the Orbitron 5000 is and what it does.
- The pitch is entirely self serving. In a good pitch, you would describe how the product or service will benefit readers or viewers, rather than just peddling your product.
- Ernie didn’t include his contact information for Bert to contact him if this pitch made him interested in the product.
- Ernie attached an unsolicited picture to the email.

Depending on what your responsibility is as a social worker, you may or may not have direct contact with the media. Here are some suggestions, broken down by function in your organization:

NASW Chapters

- Look at stories that are affecting the community and see how to interject social workers as examples of good work or experts to add perspective.
- Promote events that might be of interest to the public like Legislative Days and guest speakers.
- Create a list of experts in different topic areas so that when a reporter calls you are ready with a social worker.
- Some of the most interesting work to the larger community is work that is done in the State Capitol. Promote your legislative activity and position yourselves as experts on the topic as it comes before the legislature.

Private Practice

- Make sure that your private practice has a Web site that promotes your expertise.
- Send your information to journalists who cover the areas of practice in which you specialize.
- Make yourself available to journalists when a timely news story hits your community.

Social Workers in Organizations/Agencies

- Make yourself and the important work you're doing known to the PR/Marketing staff at your organization.
- Include the PR/Marketing staff on the planning of important events in the Social Work Department.
- If possible, share success stories with the PR/Marketing staff that they can then present to the media as examples of the stellar work being done by social workers.