

# Best Public Relations Tips

Steven R. Van Hook, PhD

Practical advice from Those-Who-Do  
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# Storytelling & Public Relations

- **Have a point of view** or theme, as in classic storytelling: *Titanic, Ghost, Romeo & Juliet, West Side Story*
- **Use a strong beginning:** a normal life, a hero's journey, and a hero's return.
- **Domino's Pizza:**  
*A young orphan goes into the Marines, returns and buys a small pizza store in Ypsilanti, Michigan, thinking he can make more money delivering pizza than waiting for customers to come to him. He opens other stores and builds the company into a \$3.3 billion dollar global enterprise. He sells it for \$1.1 billion then says, "I want to give all my money away and die broke."*
- **Other examples:** Buick, Bertolli, Lipton
- **Win-win-win:** The Media, the Client, the Agency



Robbie Vorhaus,  
President, Vorhaus  
& Company  
[www.vorhaus.com](http://www.vorhaus.com)

**Best Tip:** *"Know your story, know your audience, & tell your story better than anyone else."*

[Article](#)

# The Road to Inspiration

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Break through market obstacles by rethinking preconceived notions; question the unquestionable; sleep on it

- **Attack sacred cows:** Wine screw caps
- **Take a trip:** Zipcars imported from Germany
- **Defy tradition:** Reality TV shows
- **Take a nap:** Carroll Shelby dreamed up the sports car name “Cobra”

**Ronald Burt:** *“The usual image of creativity is that it’s some sort of genetic gift, some heroic act. But creativity is an import-export game. It’s not a creation game.”*



Kyle Potvin is principal at  
*Splash Communications*  
[www.splashllc.com](http://www.splashllc.com)

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# The Truth About PR Disasters

Elements of PR disasters are clients' misdeeds, PR malpractice, and media hunger for 'bad' news. Such disasters include:

- **Acts of God:** Tsunamis, hurricanes, floods can be PR disasters for tourism & governments
- **Business Operations:** Both Coca-Cola & Pepsi defended against high toxins in India
- **Legalities:** McDonald's tortured fight in London against pamphleteers for libel
- **Rumors:** Procter & Gamble accused of Satanism
- **Staff Mistakes:** Starbucks in New York charged 9/11 rescue workers for bottled water
- **Scandal:** Kobe Bryant sex-assault tainting sponsors

**Best Advice:** *"If you are in a PR disaster always manage the situation ethically, with good grace, humility or humor."*



Gerry McCusker,  
author of *Talespin:  
Public Relations  
Disasters*

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# Pitching Your Product is Problematic

**Best advice:** “By putting a spin on something ordinary, or identifying some unusual aspect of something ordinary, you have a good chance of getting major media hits”

- **Create a controversy:** 90% use toothbrush too long
- **Give an award:** World's rattiest wallet
- **Show unexpected client:** Wallets for nudists
- **Useful tips:** 10 ways you should never use a toothbrush
- **Tie your product to economic trends:**  
What toothbrush sales reveal about recessions & economic booms
- **Celebrate a milestone:** Your 10-millionth toothbrush sold
- **Feature employees with stories:** An over-80 wallet designer; job-sharing vice presidents who are twins
- **Run an event for kids:** Traveling show to day-care centers to teach toddlers how to brush their teeth

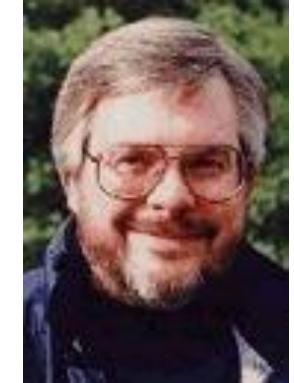


Marcia Yudkin  
Author of  
*6 Steps to Free  
Publicity*  
[pressreleasehelp.com](http://pressreleasehelp.com)

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# How to Write a Winning Op-Ed

“One of the best ways to gain credible visibility for a corporate client is for a chief executive to publish an opinion piece in a major newspaper.”



- **State your conclusion first:** Back it up with facts and reason throughout the rest of the piece
- **Be timely & controversial**, but not outrageous
- **Be humorous** (provided it lends itself to humor)
- **Have a clear editorial viewpoint:** Don't equivocate
- **Provide insight and understanding** (but don't preach)
- **Use powerful, simple language:** Appeal to average reader
- **Keep it to 750-or-less words.** Include bio & contact data

**Best Tip:** *“It's better to be published in another excellent paper than to be not published in The New York Times.”*

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# Write a World-Class Media Release

- **1. Write a feature lead:** “Imagine intense hours WITHOUT pain medication after a routine surgery – that’s what often happens to pets.” (**Pfizer Animal Health**)
- **2. Lead with the benefits:** “Employers now have a better way to measure, monitor and manage employee absences, thanks to UnumProvident Corporation.”
- **3. Try tipsheets:** “10 tips for worry-free packing” (**UPS**)
- **4. Give great bio:** “It all started when Carlton Calvin read about popular push scooters in Japan ...” (**Razor USA**)
- **5. Use human interest:** “In 1989, Elizabeth felt a lump in her breast ...” (**ContourMed**)



Ann Wylie  
*Wylie Communications*

**Best Tip:** “*Make your copy creative and compelling, not just one more cliché.*”

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# Press Releases are a Waste of Time

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**Write pitch letters – *damn good ones*:**

- **Say why you are writing:** Don't bury the reason
- **Explain your premise in no more than two sentences:** How would you describe it to a friend?
- **Timing can be everything:** "This is a hot topic and I have a great source!"
- **Watch your superlatives:** No 'first,' 'only,' 'greatest'
- **List topics your newsmaker can address:** 3 or 4 areas of expertise
- **Keep it all to 350 words:** Edit. Edit again. If done, edit again.



B.L. Ochman  
Author of  
*Reality PR  
Strategies*

**Best Tip:** *"Reporters hate to do research – have lots of good research materials available when they call."*

# Improve Your Media Relations Skills

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- **Know the reporter** and the publication before picking up the phone.
- **Know how and when** a reporter wants to be contacted.
- **Clarify your message** before delivering your pitch.
- **Ask what they are working on** and how you can help.
- **Never make promises** you cannot keep.



Peter Granat  
Senior Vice President  
*MediaMap*

**Best Tip:** “*Whenever possible, pitch by phone.*”

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# How to Make a Mark in the PR World

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The public relations career *x-factor* for those just starting out:

- **Exude confidence**, but not arrogance.
- **Identify a mentor**, ask for guidance.
- **Realize that mistakes will be made**, but do not make the same ones twice.
- **Burn the midnight oil**, and enthusiastically.
- **Commit to being a student of the industry**, never stop developing your craft.



Cori McKeever  
*Chandler Chicco Agency*

**Best Tip:** *“The humility of ‘being green’ and a show of extra effort to learn is the surest way to make your mark.”*

[Article](#)

# Trade Shows & Industry Conferences

Four steps to get the media interested:

- **1) Develop targeted media lists:**  
Industry journals, national media, local media
- **2) Identify 3 mainstream news angles:**  
New business, technology advances,  
consumer benefits, celebrities, etc.
- **3) Manage onsite press room:**  
Media kits, interview sources, phone lines,  
internet connections, coffee & donuts.
- **4) Prepare post-show media package:**  
3 major news stories from event.



Ian Smith, APR  
*Southeast Building Conference*

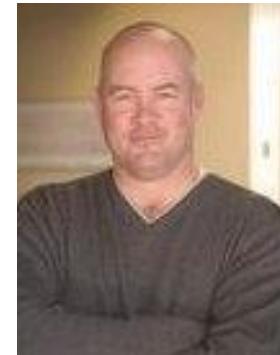
**Best Tip:** *“The key to success begins with precise targeting and early notice.”*

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# Effective Online PR

The six tools of an effective online communications strategy:

- **A Corporate Web Site:** 1<sup>st</sup> point of contact for all audiences
- **A Media Room:** Contact data and releases
- **A Blog:** A web log serving clients & customers
- **A Crisis Site:** Keep it dark until you need it
- **A Corporate Intranet:** Internal communications for shared vision and message
- **A Client Extranet:** Secure password protected area for customers and clients



Dee Rambeau  
DVCO Technology

**Best Tip:** *“Only by developing an understanding of these tools can PR pros truly call themselves web-enabled.”*

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# Put Your Networking to Work

- **You can network anywhere:**  
Kid's schools, doctor's office, repair shop, parties.
- **Go where you feel comfortable:**  
Meetings, lectures, lunches, soccer games, wherever your best nature comes naturally
- **Don't over-market:** Don't be a bore and remember to listen as well
- **Elevator speeches sound canned:**  
Know your talking points but never sell a fake you with a scripted speech
- **Try to follow up:** Handwritten notes work well



Pari Noskin Taichert  
*Bad Girls Press*

**Best Tip:** *“Stay in touch: Newsletters, emails, phone calls, lunches, walks – keep yourself top-of-mind with others.”*

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**Steven R. Van Hook, Publisher**

***About Public Relations***

Email: [srvanhook@aboutpublicrelations.net](mailto:srvanhook@aboutpublicrelations.net)

Email: [steve@wwmr.org](mailto:steve@wwmr.org)

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# Public Relations Across Cultures

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*Kwintessential*

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# Create an Online Newsroom

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Publisher of  
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# A Plan for Small Business PR Success

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# Effective Steps to Counter a Crisis

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# A Perfect Media Package

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*Margie Fisher Public Relations*

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