



How To Nurture Media Relationships



How PR teams can strengthen media relationships in challenging times

The pandemic. What hasn't it affected? From maintaining relationships with reporters to finding the story angles that will break through, media relations and PR professionals have faced some stiff challenges during this time. Business Wire recently teamed up with Muck Rack to host a [panel discussion](#) with PR and journalism experts about how PR teams can continue to strengthen media relationships even in such a changeable environment. Our panelists were:

Gillian Kushner – SVP of Day One Agency, focused on consumer clients.

Terry Lynam – Consultant and former Head of Communications for Northwell Health.

Andrew Dunn – Healthcare reporter at Insider (fka Business Insider).

Moderator **Greg Galant**, co-founder and CEO of Muck Rack, led the discussion as the panel shared their perspectives and insights across some key areas of opportunity.

Our PR Experts:



GILLIAN KUSHNER

SVP
Day One Agency



TERRY LYNAM

Consultant and former Head of Communications
Northwell Health



ANDREW DUNN

Healthcare Reporter
Insider (fka Business Insider)



GREG GALANT

Co-Founder & CEO
Muck Rack

Level up your media relations game

1 NAVIGATE A CHANGED MEDIA LANDSCAPE

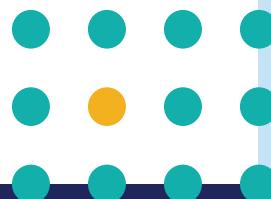
2 MAINTAIN AND DEEPEN RELATIONSHIPS WITH REPORTERS

3 CRAFT A MORE STRATEGIC MEDIA APPROACH

4 BREAK THROUGH THE NOISE

5 PERFECT YOUR EMAIL PITCH

6 BE VIGILANT ABOUT PREPARING SPOKESPEOPLE



1

Navigate a changed media landscape

The year 2020 had a major impact on the industry. Gillian Kushner noted that **by the end of the year, 33,000 members of the media had been "displaced."** With so many reporters no longer at their publications, PR teams need to rethink their media strategies, looking at smaller outlets, personal blogs, Substack, and other platforms to find and connect with reporters and experts.



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TERRY LYNAM
Consultant and former Head of Communications, Northwell Health

2 Maintain and deepen relationships with reporters

As with most industries, both PR and media have shifted toward a virtual environment, making in-person contact much less frequent. While this downplays traditional relationship-building activities between reporters and journalists, it has also created opportunities to focus on new ways to strengthen those relationships.

For Terry Lynam, working at Northwell Health in the epicenter of the pandemic, a partnership with a local public access TV station provided a professional studio for recording interviews and creating b-roll. "Years ago, media outlets would never take a video or a photo that was supplied by outside organizations," he says. "That's no longer the case. They're not only taking these assets, they're grateful for them." Overall, these relationships are becoming much more collaborative, with reporters welcoming the content that PR teams create, and that makes it easier to pull together a story when an onsite visit isn't possible.

For health reporter Andrew Dunn, the pandemic has forced a "ruthless prioritization." His focus is on getting close to companies and working only with PR people he knows he can trust. Building trust takes time and can mean PR professionals stepping outside of their comfort zone a little. **"I think a good part of building trust is being upfront and puncturing the hype around any announcement,"** says Dunn. "That indicates that I can trust you to some extent, and I don't have to triple check every fact in every statement and assertion."

The good news? While email and phone calls might be the most popular ways of connecting, gatherings are still happening, albeit virtually. Gillian Kushner has created virtual panel events with invited media and recommends focusing on how technology can help to bring people together. **"Make virtual work via briefings, kickoffs and launches,"** she says. **"That way, you can still have that face-to-face connection, you can answer questions and you can continue to reinforce those relationships."**

3

Craft a more strategic media approach

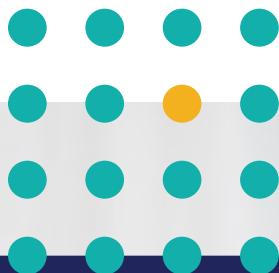
To grab the attention of reporters and, ultimately, audiences, PR professionals need to take a broad view. Gaining media attention and traction means understanding how the work the company is doing dovetails with broader cultural stories. "As PR people, we have to pay attention to where our consumers are paying attention," says Kushner. "What platforms are they on? What rising trends are in their feeds? What do they care about, and where are they?"

It's also important to decide who will help tell the company's story most compellingly. For example, not every outlet is ideal for every story. Some stories, podcasts or Substack newsletters from an individual journalist may be more effective than a national newspaper piece.

Choosing the right outlets for the story will create the best chance of reaching an audience that is ready to engage with the story. With an outlet or journalist in mind, it's also much easier to choose appropriate independent third-party voices that will lend credibility and interest to the story.

There is no one-size-fits-all template for media relations programs, and any approach needs to be flexible enough to respond quickly to changes in the news landscape.

With the foundation of a robust central idea, cultural insight, and the trust of the client or executives, the PR team can be agile and develop an approach that can earn attention from the right audience.



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GILLIAN KUSHNER
SVP, Day One Agency



PRO TIP:

Consider including a reference to current trends and predictions.



4

Break through the noise

The news landscape has changed, becoming both more fragmented and singularly focused on a couple of big stories, like the pandemic and civil strife. At the same time, reporters are receiving hundreds of email pitches every single day. In this environment, **finding a way to catch a reporter's eye means thinking about how the story can be viewed through the lens of topics that audiences are focused on.**

Taking a look at the larger conversation can inspire more creative ways to present a topic. For instance, the story might include a reference to trends and predictions that are being discussed, how the context for the issue has been changed by the pandemic or other big story, or a bundled approach where the client or company appears alongside others working in the same area. Ensuring that there is a compelling human-interest angle will also help. The goal is to connect to the culture and provide compelling insights so that, in Kushner's words, "It's going to stop people in their scroll, and it's going to be irresistible for the media to cover."

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Perfect your email pitch

Dunn gave a few specific tips to improve the chances of a reporter opening a pitch email: "Think about what the headline of that story would be. The pitch should zero in on that," he says. Ideally, the pitch should get straight to the point about why the story matters, including details about timing and any embargoes, as well as specific anecdotes or details that bring it to life.

Kushner recommends thinking about what a conversation about this story would sound like. That probably means **shorter, less jargon-filled subject lines** and a more human approach to communication. Emailing a quick message about an upcoming event or story and asking whether a reporter might be interested in learning more can also be more effective than just sending a pitch cold.

Pitches are also a learning opportunity. Not only can PR professionals track the kind of language that works, but also get valuable feedback from reporters, even if they're saying, "This isn't a fit for me." It's a chance to ask questions about what they would like to see in the future and for developing a deeper relationship with that reporter.

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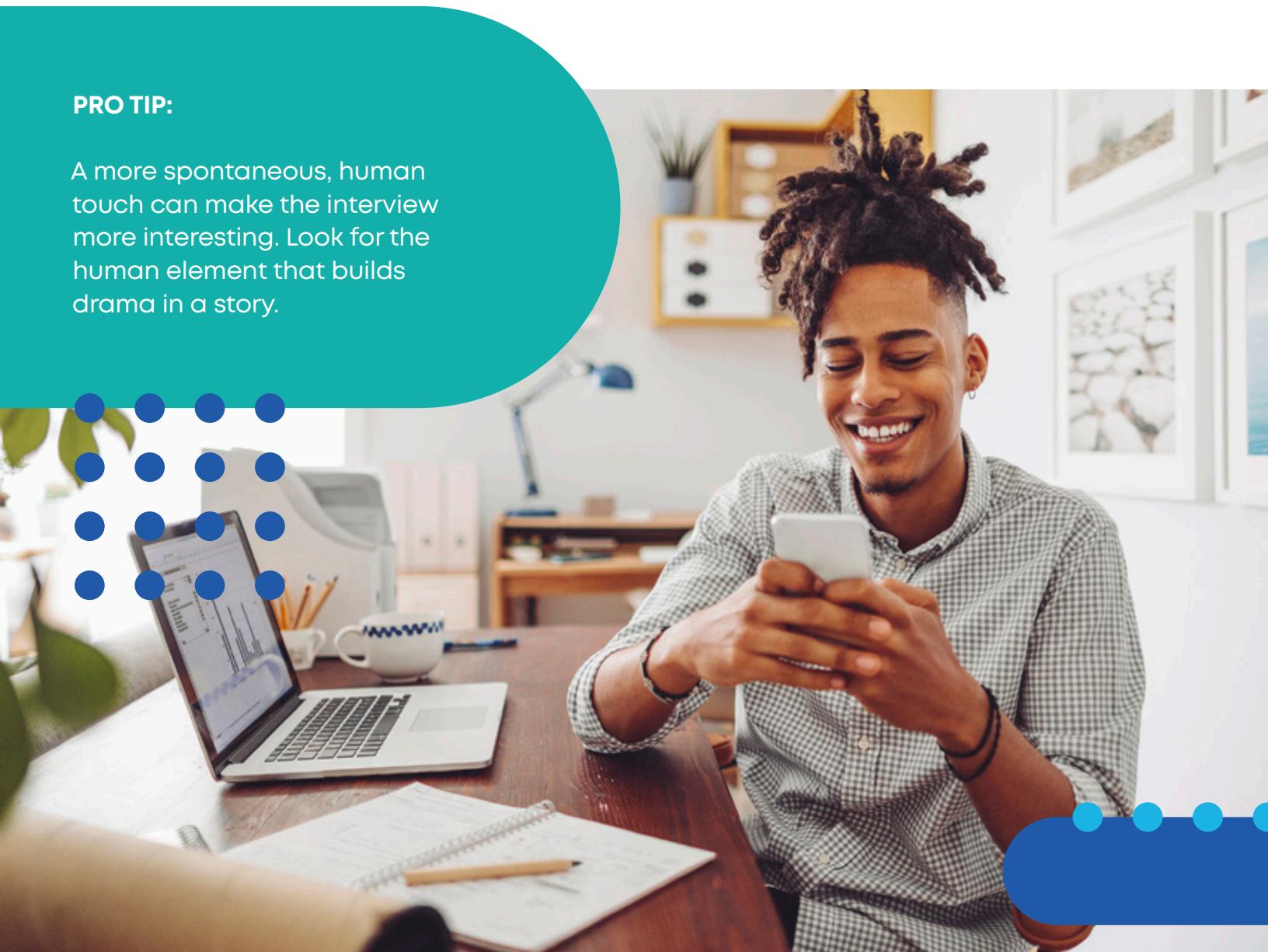
Be vigilant about preparing spokespeople

Kushner would likely advise a potential spokesperson, **"Don't feel like you have to answer every question. Don't feel uncomfortable sitting in the awkward silence.** You can get straight to the point. You can reiterate your key messages." At the same time, it's important to impress upon spokespeople they need to be comfortable talking about the story, how it connects with the culture and how it matters to audiences.

This doesn't mean a spokesperson has to be totally rehearsed. A more spontaneous, human touch can make the interview more interesting. As a reporter, Dunn finds a too polished approach unhelpful, and buzz words like "innovative" or "breakthrough" may make him tune out. Instead, he's looking for the human element that builds drama in a story. "If you can paint for me the scene of the boardroom, when we had to make that call and what it was like. Was it over a WebEx, and everyone was sitting around and then leaped up? Shaping those details into anecdotes can be much more helpful."

PRO TIP:

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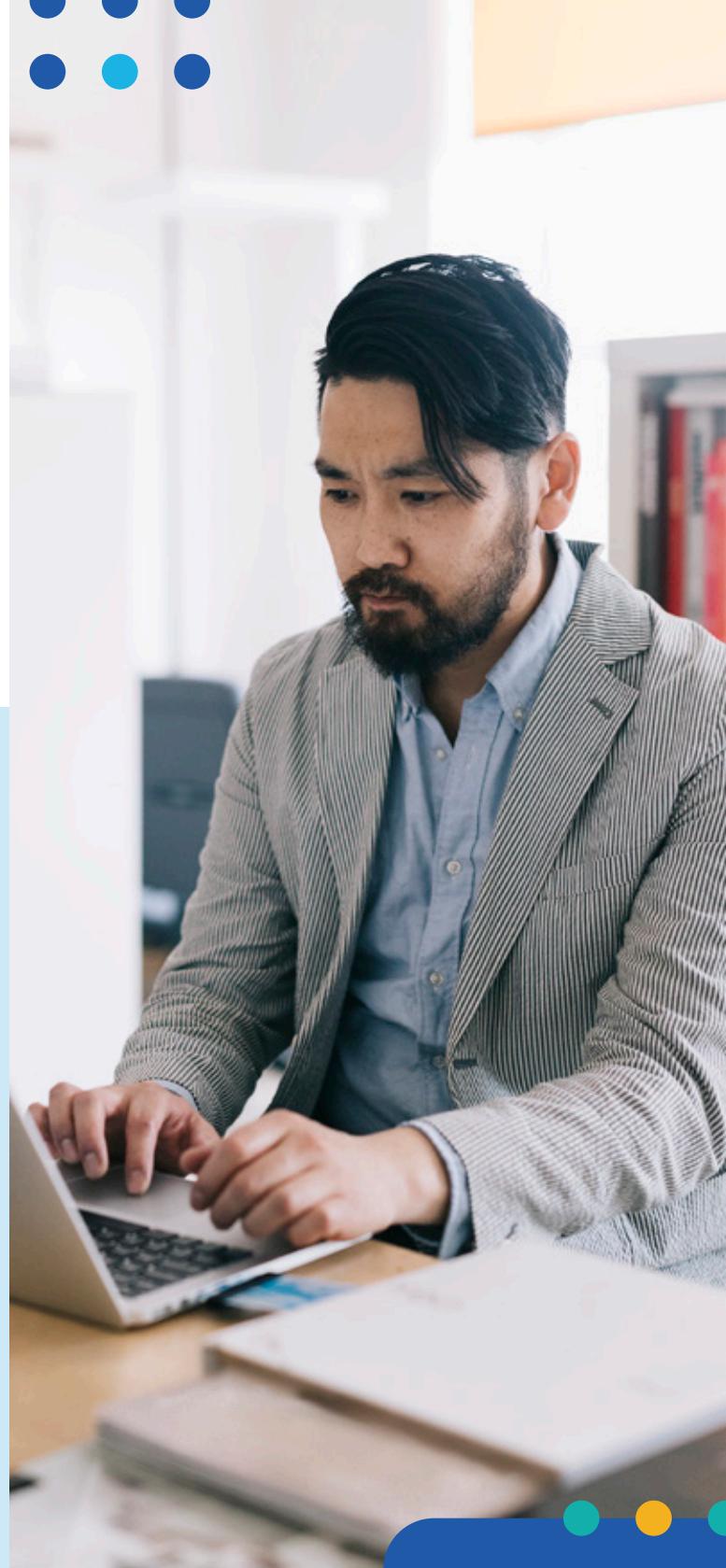
Observe, adapt and be real

Media is in a continual state of evolution. The kinds of stories that are shared are changing as channels and outlets change, and reporters are finding new ways of telling stories on podcasts or Substack. PR and media relations professionals must be agile to keep up with the evolving landscape. Still, changes are also creating new opportunities for PR teams to connect more creatively and authentically with their audiences.

About Business Wire

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