9.17: Journalist Contributors

Public relations professionals interview journalists on a regular basis, but not usually as sources to be quoted in messages. Rather, the PR professional interviews the journalist about the types of stories the PR specialist might successfully "pitch" to the publication for which the journalist writes. Journalists and PR professionals can help each other as long as each recognizes that the other has a legitimate, but decidedly different, role to play in generating information for an audience.

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Journalists, for whom interviews are the mainstay of their work, are notoriously reluctant interviewees themselves. Unless they are promoting themselves for a book, have just won an award, or are one of the pundits found on television “talking heads” news programs, journalists would much rather be the interviewer rather than the interviewee.

If you are looking for personal commentary, insight, or advice from individual journalists, first you have to find them. You might locate the name of a reporter you’d like to talk with from a byline on a story. Some news organizations include email addresses on their reporters’ bylines. Most news organizations have on their Web sites a listing of names and contact information for people in their newsroom.

If you don’t have a specific name of someone and are just looking for a journalist who has experience or knowledge about a particular story, posting a question to a listserv or social networking site where journalists correspond might be a useful tactic. Tell them you are interested in someone who has covered, say, the rising cost of prescription drugs and ask them to email you offline. You might also try searching the Resource Center maintained by the Investigative
Reporters and Editors organization to find specific types of stories. If you find a story similar to the one you are working on, you can then contact the journalist who worked on that piece.