



Ask A Journalist



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Introduction

Like any relationship, media relations is about understanding a journalist's needs. We created this e-book for the benefit of those wanting to understand more about this area of PR.

There is also need for an ongoing dialogue between PR and the media so that both can work together for everyone's benefit. Journalists have even less time to write as they are fewer in number and the need for ever more online content adds to their work load. As a result there is even less room for 'lazy PR' tactics such as poor news releases and poor pitching.

The similarity of each journalist's opinions on how they would like to be approached offers a unique insight that will benefit students and experienced PR professionals alike. We will be continuing the series on our site and invite you to subscribe to our blog and Twitter feeds for more interviews and insights from some of the people you need to deal with to help with the visibility of your client or organisation.

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Managing Director

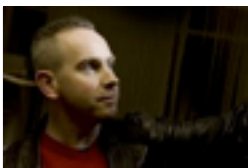
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Chapter 1 - Print Journalists

John Kennedy - Silicon Republic.com and The Irish Independent

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In our inaugural post we asked John Kennedy how he prefers to be approached, his opinions on news releases and how he decides which news goes in print and which goes online.



John is the editor of Ireland's leading technology news website siliconrepublic.com as well as the weekly e-Thursday pages in the business section of the country's biggest selling daily, the Irish Independent and the Digital Ireland monthly supplement.

John also features occasionally on Dublin's Newstalk 106 FM, where he discusses technology issues. His broadcasting experience also extends to discussing technology-related issues on the BBC World Service, RTE Drive Time and Today FM's Sunday Business Show. In 2005 he was named Technology Journalist of the Year at the Irish Internet Association's Net Visionary Awards.

Do you prefer to be pitched to by email or phone?

Start with an email and follow up by phone. Because there are fewer journalists around these days, journalists have less resources and yet there are infinitely more stories to be written. Time is a critical issue and therefore I and other editors need to make snap decisions.

Don't rely on email all the time, conversations clinch deals. And the old adage, real selling only begins with 'no'. Often the real potential of a story or pitch is unmasked half way through a conversation – the penny drops – and even the person making the pitch can be made aware of an angle or idea they hadn't even thought of.

The other problem, few PR professionals even bother to pick up the phone anymore except to ask: "Did you get the press release?" An instant turn off. The best route is a well presented email, with background on the person or company.

Follow this up with a call and be convincing. In most newsrooms journalists have to pitch stories to editors – often nabbing it in the first 12 words. If the journalist isn't even convinced, it will never fly. And in today's environment with fewer journalists and stressed out editors pressed for time, you need to drive home why the story merits coverage.

Another thing that is really missing these days is not only people pitching editors, but ringing up to shoot the breeze, share knowledge and actually having a working relationship with a journalist. We won't hesitate to put the phone down on the 'did you get the press release' brigade, but if you're a good contact who shares knowledge and insights, you'll be given generous time.

How do you prefer this email to be presented?

Facts and figures first, then the pitch. Be clear, don't oversell, keep it real. Really research the story angle and basically interview the client yourself first to ensure that all the bases are covered. There might be an excellent anecdote in there, there may be links to great technology companies like Apple or Intel, also make sure there's no skeletons in the closet. Does your client have a media history – good or bad – you should know it.

Also, make sure you might have some clippings or links you can attach to the pitch that may back up your argument and why the subject / person is worth covering. You need to build up the journalist's enthusiasm for the story, they'll pitch it better or the editor – who is always scrambling for ideas – might decide to make it a cover story. It's all down to the premise ... and the promise.

What are your pet peeves when it comes to being pitched to?

There are so many. I'll just list some points:

- When someone pitches a story to you that's already been pitched elsewhere – this really gets on editors' nerves. You want your product to be special, your product is better than anybody else's – how dare anyone come on the phone to you pitching a story that's either been rejected elsewhere, has already been covered or is being worked on elsewhere. Exclusivity is KING. Don't waste people's time
- This is very closely related to the first point – don't come to an editor about a topic that's already been covered in a newspaper, even if you've come up with an alternative angle. You are trying to keep momentum, but we can always sense desperation. Don't waste our time. Make it exclusive or bugger off.
- If it is a subject that basically everyone is going to cover – like financial results, a jobs announcement, the latest gadget – we're realistic enough to know everybody deserves the same access – but don't be overly generous in terms of interviews and executive time unless you're prepared to do it for all. Simply put, treat everybody the same.
- Related to previous point. Don't pitch some lowly executive as an 'exclusive' interview if you've given the CEO or a VIP to a rival product. You are entitled to choose your avenue, but as I said, every editor views their product as their priority, second best is not an option. If you're going to go exclusive, be exclusive.

What are your pet peeves when it comes to news releases?

Really, press release that are low on facts. Some journalists get a bee in their bonnet if the release is badly written. I think that's absurd because it's the journalist/editor who is responsible for their own ultimate product and its standard of writing. As long as the facts are there, there's contact information, just leave the rest up to the journalist. Also, try and ensure that you've anticipated every possible question we might ask. Time is pressing, deadlines are unforgiving. Always get to know the journalist, their working habits and their deadlines. The amount of time people have pitched stories to me while I'm driving home, the paper has gone to press or as I'm reading the same story on a rival site or paper is frightening.

For me I hate receiving releases that are thinly disguised ads. If you want to sell a product, take an ad. Otherwise, make sure you have something to announce that is newsworthy.

When calling to follow up on press releases, how do you recommend the caller grabs your attention? What normally piques your interest?

If someone calls me up asking me if I got the press release, I feel like putting the phone down. Or I want to ask – 'why? Did you get a bounce back?' Ultimately it's up to the editor what gets published. Don't issue a release feeling entitled to it being covered. That's our choice not yours. That's where the pitch comes in.

We want something newsy and special that readers would appreciate. Call well in advance, warning that something is about to happen. Otherwise, unless it's a major development, it gets bundled in with everything else that may be dealt with if there's time.

People also call me with unrealistic expectations. They haven't gotten to know my deadlines and have often rung when the deadline has passed.

Lately I've been getting calls where someone is about to hit send on something. That's fine if it is a big story. But if it becomes a regular tactic, it becomes annoying.

For building a relationship with you, is there anything companies can do aside from sending news releases and pitching features?

Shoot the breeze. Get to know me, my working methods, my deadlines and ultimately what the audience requires. The reality of online news as opposed to newspapers, although I do see this changing, is that the reader has joined the editorial board. We focus on analytics and know what stories are being read and what stories aren't, for example.

Sending news releases and pitching features isn't an original tactic, just an increasingly redundant part of an overarching strategy. The reason most people join the media is because they are interested in people and get a buzz from being around people. It is people at the end of the day that companies and their PR people are trying to reach. We're watching all the time what people are reading and people are becoming more and more direct in their interaction with us. Journalists buzz off people,

we learn from people. People make a good story. Add elements like Twitter into the mix and you've got to remember conversation is everything.

If you want to be part of this conversation, talk to me. Engaging with a journalist should not begin with 'did you get the press release'.

How do you decide if news is suitable for both print and online coverage?

Online news sites can put out between five and 20 stories a day typically. Not everything is going to make it to print. That's because there's no room for everything. More often than not, however, the best interviews appear in print first because the idea was strong, it was exclusive and original enough for us to hold our fire.

Good interviews will always deserve a place in print. So if the story is backed up by direct contact, it will make it to print.

How do you get a journalist to attend a briefing, launch or an event?

Invent a time machine. There are fewer journalists doing vaster amounts of writing. If we're going to leave the office for a few hours on end, it has to be worth our while. The same goes for press trips. If it's not going to be educational or productive or justifies time out of the office, it's not worth attending. So it really goes back to the pitch. If it's a major announcement like a manufacturer investing in hundreds of jobs or if the CEO of a major global company is in town, these have merit without doubt.

But, particularly in the technology business, too many companies make the mistake of treating all journalists the same, mostly as a trade channel magazines. But we have different agendas and different outputs. My *raison d'être* online is that tech savvy people as well as newbies can engage with the content, for a family newspaper it's got to be accessible and at the same time relevant for the paper. Ultimately people have to learn something.

Getting a journalist to attend an event is essentially all about the story they'll walk away with. This goes back to the pitch and ensuring we are anticipating a good result.

What would be your advice to a company being interviewed by you for the first time?

Just tell the truth and relax. If you truly believe in the tale you are about to tell, then it will show. If you aren't enthusiastic or frank and it's all just spin, it won't enthuse the interviewer. Also, don't diss your competition, it's not big or clever and we're not going to run the gauntlet of libel laws just to satisfy you.

The main thing is to be yourself, anticipate the questions we will ask, know your business inside out and the subject being discussed.

Be composed if you're thrown a curve ball. Take your time. In most interviews, it's not live, you can talk off the record and that will be respected. But don't bullshit your way around a topic, or waste time waffling. We don't have much time, but we're here to listen to you, so make it count.

What's the most memorable thing, funny, interesting or plain ridiculous that has happened to you in your career as a journalist?

Too many stories to tell and you'll have to come with a bottle of Bourbon. My career has moments that verge from the sublime to the ridiculous. One minute you could be shaking hands with Bono, interviewing Vint Cerf or checking your hands for frost bite after falling down a mountain in Utah.

Adrian Weckler – Technology Editor ,Sunday Business Post

Originally Published on 16 July 2009

A frequent debate in online PR and social media circles is whether the essential PR tool, the press release, is under threat of extinction. We think there is life in the press release for a long time to come as it serves an essential function in distilling information to its core facts. Its shape and format may change over as online media evolves but a good press release (or news release as we like to call it here) is the essential first point for journalists.

We asked Adrian Weckler of the Sunday Business Post to offer his views on the topic and also to give his guidelines on the press release that will most likely get his attention.



Adrian Weckler is a journalist for The Sunday Business Post, a national Irish broadsheet newspaper. He edits a consumer technology section in the newspaper and also a monthly business technology magazine, Computers In Business. Adrian also maintains a blog featuring consumer technology reviews, news and opinions as well as pointers and commentary for those in the media industry. You can find Adrian's blog at www.yourtechstuff.com

To start the post off we asked Adrian: “Are (well written) news releases still relevant and important to you as an editor?”

Yes. A well-written press release gets across the key facts (and context) of a product, a service or a news development.

You'll hear views from a few eager beavers that press releases have no relevance anymore. Ignore them. The media takes press releases seriously. Realistically, that's all you need to care about. A press release is just a piece of communication, like an email, a text, a tweet or a blog post. It seeks to inform about something.

The difference between a press release and a tweet, an email or a text is:

- (a) It is intended, specifically, to be referred to as a public position, policy or announcement
- (b) It represents the reputation of the issuer
- (c) It is not casual or throwaway, like a tweet, a blog post or an email
- (d) It is held to a higher degree of critical scrutiny

A press release should be crafted with many things in mind (for a longer explanation and some examples of this, see the specific (and lengthy) advice I've written on this topic on my blog).

Here are a few relevant points:

- Write clearly and to-the-point
- Include pricing, availability and direct contact details of as many people as is suitably possible
- Front-load the key facts at the top of the release, ideally in bullet-points

- Give industry or financial context: what are the big movements/events recently in your business? Why does your announcement stand out? Be specific about this
- Don't ever, ever issue a press release announcing that you have won the 'partner of the year' award (awarded by some other company)
- Do NOT attach headshot photos
- Try to write a short personalised note at the beginning of the press release

John Collins - Assistant Business Editor, The Irish Times

Originally Published on 3rd September 2009



John Collins is Assistant Business Editor in The Irish Times and in 2006 was awarded the Net Visionary Journalist of the year. The Irish Times is a top priority for many PR campaigns and John is well placed to give insights into what it is journalists from the paper expect and need from pitches. We also ask John for his insights into how the media business is changing in Ireland and what his thoughts are on the influence of the rise of the internet and the recession on news reporting.

PR agencies and their clients consistently put a very high value on coverage in The Irish Times. Why do you think this is so?

Besides the quality of what we produce? I think it's a hangover from our days as the "paper of record" – if your story is carried in the paper it has got there on merit. We also have the highest readership amongst business executives so there is a lot of competition to get coverage on our finance pages.

The Irish Times website is one of the most popular in the country. Do you think we will see the paper move fully online in our lifetime?

That's something we've been debating internally recently. My gut instinct is no. Too many people still want a physical product in their hand. Notwithstanding the improvements in mobile technology and electronic readers like Amazon's Kindle, I have yet to see a technology that will replace the written word on paper. It's also interesting that Politico, the Washington politics site that has been held up as offering a new business model for journalism, is now profitable largely due to the paper it publishes three times a week. The nature of the paper product may change in my working life but I think there will always be a physical product that people will be able to hold in their hand.

The workload on journalists has increased given both the economic downturn and the demand for regular online content. Do you think that this is a risk to the ability of journalists to be truly investigative as they are put under increasing pressure to produce more volume of copy?

Absolutely and it's the real worry about the cuts that papers are having to make in the face of this recession. Not only are we faced with increased competition from online (where frankly the rates for advertising will never replace what newspapers could command as recently as 18 months ago), but we are seeing a sharp downturn in advertising. Our organisation, along with all other Irish media, has had redundancies and those left are faced with doing more with less.

Do you rate Twitter as an emerging breaking news service? Do you feel that Twitter is a threat or an opportunity to traditional media in relaying news?

Twitter has been first with stories like the Mumbai terrorist attacks and it really is fascinating watching stories like that develop in real time. Despite this I don't see it as a threat but more a complementary service. While you might hear about an incident on Twitter you are still going to turn to a newspaper to find out what it means. We've been experimenting with Twitter over the last year with our @IrishTimesBiz account. We've done live Tweets of the Budget and also the publication of the two reports into Anglo Irish Bank as well as sending out links to the stories we publish online. People have to remember however, that Twitter is still very much the domain of an educated elite and most people aren't even aware of it, as recent research has shown.

How much value do you put on blogs for research purposes?

I find that they have actually decreased in relevance in the last two years or so. Most of the most popular blogs now come from traditional media outlets. There are some that still generate ideas – I love what The Irish Economy has contributed to the debate over the last year – but in terms of ideas and trends Twitter has become more useful.

Is the press release dead or dying?

I noticed a high profile PR guy said at a debate earlier this year that financial journalism was largely press release driven, which I wouldn't agree with. I've just finished putting the two finance pages to bed for tomorrow's paper. Of the 14 stories we are carrying tomorrow, four came from press releases from Irish PRs, but a significant amount of phone calls would be made to try and tease out new angles on those stories. A lot of people suggest "press release journalism" will become more common due to media cutbacks but I think good journalists who know the sector they are writing about will always get scoops and exclusives. At the end of the day that's what newspapers like The Irish Times are good at and it's what will differentiate us from the pages and pages of free comment and opinion available online.

What is the format, tone and layout of the ideal press release for you?

Short, to the point, jargon free and with the mobile number of the client (not the PR agent) at the bottom. Put the headline as the subject line and don't use attachments. Subject line "press release" with attachment called "press release" drives us mad but people are still doing that.

What are the elements of an ideal PR pitch to you?

Make it short – if you can't say it in less than a minute it's too complex. Make sure it's relevant. Just because I've covered technology for years doesn't mean I am interested in your clients new

enterprise storage hardware. You really wonder sometimes if the person pitching has read your paper – it's essential you are familiar with what someone covers before you ring them up and ask them to listen to your pitch. It also helps to have some appreciation of the person's working day. I like to think of myself as a reasonable person but if you ring me on deadline and launch into a pitch for the following week, I may be quite unreasonable!

What makes you consider someone as a go-to expert when researching a story?

Someone who is willing to give you the background information you need without trying to push their own product or service. You are more likely to use a quote from someone who shares their expertise and points you in the right direction than someone who merely talks about how their service could have prevented something happening in the first place.

Have you any tips for budding journalists on how they can land a dream job as a staff writer in The Irish Times?

Get a real job! But seriously don't be afraid to knock on the door, don't wait to see something advertised. Journalists in the paper are a good source of where openings may exist or what sections are more likely to be looking for freelance contributions.

They should also remember that journalism requires putting in long hours for pay that is relatively low compared to what you'd get paid for doing a similar job in another sector. That said it's hugely rewarding.

Any interesting anecdotes from your time as a journalist?

Many, but I'd like to stay working at The Irish Times!

Chapter 2 - Radio Journalists

Today FM's The Last Word Team

Originally Published on 23rd July 2009



In this post we asked the team from Today FM's The Last Word for their insights into how they decide what to cover on the show and ways to deal with the white knuckle terror of your first radio interview. We also asked the team about their opinions on press releases, Matt Cooper's favourite and least favourite topics for discussion and how to get in touch if you want to contribute to a discussion that concerns you or your organisation.

How do you decide on what topics to cover on The Last Word?

The provisional running order of items is decided at our editorial meeting in the mid-morning. This is obviously subject to change should there be any breaking news or a reason to replace one item with another later in the day. The topics are usually drawn from the news of the day, papers and topics that we will have been working on ourselves. Our focus is always on picking topical stories that are relevant to our audience, their lives, their interests and, often, their pockets.

How far in advance are these planned?

It depends – some of the items are put together on the day, especially news items. While some other discussion pieces or features can be days or weeks in the planning.

How do you source interviewees for your programme?

Most of our guests come from our own contacts book, people we have used before on the show and the relevant newsmakers. However others come from pr pitches or events that might be taking place in the area. Some of our guests are also listeners who have emailed us with an interesting opinion or story to tell.

What makes you consider someone as a go-to expert?

I think talking to them on the phone beforehand and gaining a sense of their depth of knowledge and ability to put across a point in an easy & accessible manner is crucial. A well-written succinct press release will attract your attention but the best way to gauge whether or not an expert will work well on radio is to talk directly to them.

Ideally an ‘expert’ will be chatty, informative, have a bit of personality and make the subject accessible and interesting for the average Joe Soap.

What would you advise someone appearing on radio for the first time?

Come into studio. Relax. Trust your brain to do the work.

Being in studio makes it much easier to participate- you forget about being on radio, you are a person in a room with a presenter telling your story.

You have to relax otherwise the tension will stunt your contribution and make you unintelligible. Amazing amounts of people are fluid and cogent on the phone before hand but freeze on air. Trusting your brain means you won’t freeze, you will back yourself and the knowledge you have and get your point across.

Also – don’t answer in a yes/no fashion. Keep talking and elucidating.

What makes a radio interviewee memorable?

It is so indeterminate I think. It can be anything from clarity of vision, strength of personality, turn of phrase to the depth of knowledge and passion of belief. A guest is best when they force the listener to take a position, agree or disagree but do it with a bit of wit and charm. Beyond those vagaries the most memorable guests are truly one-offs, making it very hard to give a typology. Often they resonate with our listeners on an emotional rather than an intellectual level, making you feel as much as think about the topic.

If you hear something on radio that concerns your company or organisation, what’s the best way to approach the show for inclusion?

It depends on how that piece has made you feel, I suppose. The worst way is to call immediately after and shout down the line. I suppose a phone call is best – emails can be patchy especially if you are sending it during pressure points in our day. It is easy to miss. If it is a friendly call to note that you might be relevant to such a discussion then you might not get on straight away but you might get on next time. Treat the call as a pre-interview and pitch yourself well for inclusion.

If sending in a news release is there a format you prefer?

Try to keep attachments to a minimum – most releases are read for the headline and first line with attachments opened less regularly. As long as they are readable they should do ok – be succinct and to the point though.

Would your preference be for a phone interview or a studio interview and why?

For radio, studio is everything, the connection that gets made between guest and presenter is the first step to a really successful item. The guest is more able to engage in a conversation than over the phone and it sounds better. Most of our guests who make the effort to come in once, come in all the time – it is an enormous difference to doing a phone interview.

From our perspective phone interviews have to be done from time to time – but they don't sound as good so might get less time.

What are Matt Cooper's favourite/ least favourite topics to talk about?

Matt treats stories on their merits. Our listeners have diverse interests and we try to reflect that by doing unusual and new stuff. Matt is happy to go with his own feelings on certain stories but if a number of the team feel something is worth doing it makes the cut – we operate very much as a team in that regard trying to get as broad a base of stories as possible.

Tim Desmond- Producer of RTE Radio 1's "The Business"

Originally Published on 8th October 2009



In this interview we spoke with Tim Desmond about different aspects of radio production. Tim is a producer with the RTE 1 Radio Show "The Business" broadcast on Sunday mornings from 10am. He has also worked on the Mooney show, the Late Debate and The Marian Finucane. Tim got involved in radio reading news in the pirate station ERI. After that he spent some time as an entrepreneur in the construction industry. Tim really kicked off his media career when he decided to return to college to study Journalism and Social Science in UCC at the age of 38. Tim is a living proof that it's never too late to become radio producer.

What type of stories interest you for The Business?

We've concentrated quite a bit on smaller businesses and start-ups and have become well known for our mentoring series, where start-ups are taken on by successful businesses and we 'eavesdrop' on how it all goes. We've had big names on as well (Niall Fitzgerald, Edward De Bono, George Soros), they bring a broader view of business which complements the start-up stories. We love locations, the live feel of being out and about is important.

Describe the process when planning the show?

We work ahead with a diary that everyone contributes to. Ideas are bounced around, but only acted on when we've given them consideration. We're not afraid to change our minds about ideas, items and stories. We are flexible enough to change gear at the last minute, the world of business can produce headline news on a Saturday, so we are ready to react for Sunday morning. There are no egos on the business, every story is judged on its merits so consensus happens remarkably quickly.

Are there any stories which can get better exposure on the radio than on TV or in the newspapers?

It's a bit of a cliché, but radio can bring intimacy to a story. If it's a story about personal difficulties or challenges in business, voice alone can be extremely powerful. Many stories simply work differently on radio than in print, for instance someone's personality can come across much more readily on radio than in print, but some ideas and products are so much easier to communicate through the visual medium of television. I think the mentoring item worked particularly well on radio.

How do you decide if a story is a good radio piece?

First of all, it has to be a good story. Second, we ask can do it in a way that ‘works’ for us on radio? That’s a bit vague, but we usually try things out, Richie (Beirne) recently took a spin on the new Airbike service to Dublin Airport, while the programme was on air. He started live at the Radio Centre with a chat at the start of the programme, he called in on route, and the managing director of the company was interviewed when they arrived at the airport at the end of the programme. It gave the whole thing a sense of something happening, rather than simply a straight interview.

How do you decide if someone is suitable for a radio interview?

Is it a good story? Can the person talk? Are they a bit of craic? Can we make it sound good, paint a picture for the listener, can we have a go at whatever it is (within reason!)

How many people have input into the programme research and ideas?

There is a core team of four, including John Murray, but we don’t all work full time on the programme. Colleagues within RTE , Radio and Television will come to us with ideas and stories, usually saying that something is suitable for ‘The Business’, in other words something we can do in our unique way.

What is your role as a producer? Can you specify the areas you have final say and the ones for which you only advise?

The programme has the final say, in other words if something doesn’t work , for any number of reasons, it won’t be broadcast. My role is to find stories, make them happen on radio in an interesting way that makes people listen. I only have final say in how much sugar goes in my coffee.

Do you like to provide questions in advance of an interview?

Bullet points and headings are much better. If someone knows their subject, they can give a straight answer. Listeners are not fools, they know if someone is trotting out some rehearsed party lines, our presenters are well briefed and if the interviewees are, they shouldn’t need to be provided with questions in advance. On the other hand, if it’s Bill Gates you’re offering us

How would you describe John Murray’s interviewing style?

He’s very personable, he’s known for his disdain for jargon and listeners really like that. He is not afraid to ask tough questions though his Morning Ireland training gives him the edge there. But most of all he doesn’t take himself too seriously and likes to keep it all real and down to earth.

Any major No Nos when it comes to PR pitches?

Any hint of deception is poison, if you're waiting to hear from another programme, tell us, if an interview is in print the day before we broadcast it, we all look a bit foolish.

What makes a good PR person?

An avoidance of the above. It also helps to be open to producers wanting to be a bit creative with something that might make an item memorable and create more impact (the Airbike example being a case in point). Understanding that things change in the radio world very suddenly helps as well and that if it isn't going to be good radio, we're not interested.

What makes a radio producer?

Someone who can think like a listener and can facilitate the telling of a story or the holding of a discussion in a way that can engage the listener and trick them into not turning off the radio.

How valuable are press releases?

It depends on what they are saying. They are usually just a starting point and of use to check facts, but they need always be accompanied by a pinch of salt.

What do find enjoyable about your job?

Every day is different and the people I work with are great, it is a privilege to serve the listeners the best radio we can cook up. If I was rich, I'd do it for nothing!

If you were to give one piece of advice to PR pros what would that be?

Don't pretend your client is more important than they are. Niall Fitzgerald (CEO of Thomson Reuters) is a real heavyweight in the business world, but his PR people were a pleasure to deal with, no making out that it was a big deal for him to talk to us. He was real gent as well, by the way.

Any interesting anecdotes from your life as a producer?

How much time have we? The most interesting radio moment for me recently was trying to talk John Murray and Richie Beirne out of pucking a sliothar from the roof of the Cork studios, live on air. I didn't manage to talk them out of it, but thankfully the sliothar landed in the river Lee.

Other Comments from Tim:

“The most satisfying part of my job is reporting on the great efforts being made by people putting their money where their mouths are when it comes to setting up and developing businesses.”

“The Business was extended to an hour and I had recently been upgraded to producer, so was ideally placed to join the programme, working from the Cork Studios. There is a really strong team working on The Business, John Murray has a great touch when it comes to putting it all together and the show is going from strength to strength”.

His own experience in Business has Given Tim a strong appetite for the kind of stories he covers.

“I admire anyone who takes a risk with their own time and money to get out there and innovate in business; the programme works hard at highlighting and supporting these ideas”.

“We try to keep the focus on entrepreneurship and innovation based start-ups, as a result the programme seems to have a really broad appeal and not just to people in business. The programme team works hard at keeping a sense of humour in these difficult times, while also telling stories which can inspire people with their own ideas to give it a go.”

Tim has also recently been working on the ‘Documentary on One’ series, producing a documentary on the Muslim Community in Cork and a programme about music education in Cork Prison. Tim lives in Turner’s Cross with his wife Tanya and two daughters.

Chapter 3 - TV Journalists

Joe Walsh - Producer of TV3 News

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In PR, television can either be a poisoned chalice or a holy grail for a client. An understanding of the role of the news editor is of critical importance, whether you are managing a crisis or looking to publicise your client nationally. In this week's post we ask TV3 senior news editor, Joe Walsh, how he decides the agenda for the station's news programmes and how PR practitioners can best represent their client's interests to him.

Joe has many years experience working in the media. He held the position of senior producer on TV3's Ireland AM, before moving to Sky News Ireland as a news editor for three years. He has also worked as producer of 'The Last Word' with Matt Cooper at Today FM and as editor of the David McWilliams's show at Newstalk 106.

How do you decide on what to cover?

The big question! Some stories are obvious – they have national importance and impact. Others play into themes that we are concentrating on – healthcare in Ireland / the recession etc. On a daily basis the news editor is first in and puts together the options (what stories are of interest – who would cover them etc). The early morning meeting with the 5.30 news producer then cements the day's agenda leaving all important leeway for breaking news.

How far in advance are these planned? When does the production meeting take place?

Daily production meeting is at 9.30 am – planning meeting is at 2pm to look ahead to the next day and major items on the agenda for the next week. Big stories which are flagged in advance (budgets. elections etc) take weeks of planning. Most stories are planned the day before when the legwork is done.

To whom should pitches/ press releases be sent? Is it best to send it to an individual's email as opposed to the general news email address?

Sending everything to the news desk email is best – specialist reporters should also be emailed. Programmes like Ireland AM, Midday etc should be contacted separately.

How do you source interviewees for segments?

From a news point of view our interviewees fall into different categories – the politician making the point, the economist saying he/she is wrong, the expert highlighting the problem and importantly the person who is hardest hit by the decision.

What makes you consider someone as a “go-to expert”?

A depth of knowledge and an understanding of the needs of television. Credibility is key – we need people who can make their argument with authority and in a manner that can be understood by non experts.

What would you advise someone appearing on TV for the first time? How should they prepare?

For magazine programmes knowing the style of the programme is helps. Is it relaxed and informal with a discursive style or more news orientated where the time to get your point across is limited? Find out if there are other guests – who will be doing the interview and what the production team want from the interview. Ask what to wear – this is becoming more important in the era of virtual sets.

What makes a TV interviewee memorable?

A strong personality, a heartfelt story, a new disclosure, an original opinion, a complex situation explained – many things can make an interview stand out from the crowd but it really is the ‘good story well told’ factor that will hold viewers attention.

What’s the best way to pitch a story i.e. offer the angle, interviewee(s) and ideas for footage?

Pick up the phone and call. If the news desk is not interested (and we are most of the time) then we can put you on to a show that might be. If footage can be offered then it’s a major selling point particularly for programmes. And if you can offer those pics exclusively then all the better!

If located outside Dublin is it still advisable to contact the main news desk or do you prefer contact to be made with regional reporters?

Both is best. The regional reporter will then make the contacts and ‘sell’ the story to the news desk.

If sending in a news release is there a format you prefer?

The news desk is nearly always a very busy spot – any releases that take time to open up tend to be a little annoying.

Mark Little - Presenter of RTE's Primetime



Mark Little has been working in RTE since 1991 where he started as a television reporter working on stories such as the Ben Dunne scandal before being assigned to the USA as RTE's Washington reporter.

He worked as RTE's Foreign Affairs Correspondent since 2001 covering the September 11th attacks and spent seven weeks in Iraq reporting on the war there. He received a Television Journalist of the Year award for his coverage of the Afghanistan conflict.

Mark is currently a presenter of RTE's flagship current affairs programme, Prime Time and has written two books, Turn Left at Greenland and Zulu Time.

How does the Prime Time team decide on what to cover?

The process begins with an editorial meeting on Monday morning, where we do our post-mortem on previous week and review the big events likely to dictate our programming. But anything between 25 and 50 per cent of our output comes from reporters/presenters pitching specific ideas.

What kind of stories are you more likely to report on?

The story we feel we would be ashamed to have missed.

What influence do daily newspapers and news programmes have on your reports?

More limited than it was when I first joined Prime Time but we still keep a very close eye on who is talking on TV and radio and scour the papers for the emergence of a new voice. Lately, I've been doing my own scouring of social media for ideas and people.

When seeking opinions on issues covered by the show, what makes you consider someone as an authority?

A huge variety of factors but a general confidence in their credibility as an advocate of a particular position and their ability to articulate that position is paramount.

Do you think a report on Prime Time has any influence on how the issues are subsequently dealt with?

Public debate is a river with different currents and we are one of those currents.

How can PR people bring value to the Prime Time production team?

Solve a problem. Be honest. Think of the long-game. And if you don't have absolute personal confidence in what you are offering then don't make that call or send the e-mail. A show like ours has a long memory for people with integrity but we never forget the chancers.

What value do you place on press releases or press statements?

None. The only exception is a release in relation to a breaking story on programme day

Are you open to being pitched stories? Any advice you'd offer here?

Hate being 'pitched' but absolutely open to ideas from all quarters. We'd be failing if we weren't seeking out as many views as possible. But again, this is a long game. Don't make a short-term pitch that will damage your long term credibility.

What advice would you give someone invited in for a studio interview? What makes a good interviewee?

Belief in yourself and what are you saying (something no media training course can help you with) And remember, you're not in that studio to impress your bosses or boardmembers or cabinet colleagues, You are there to communicate with good people with busy lives in living rooms across the country.

How would you describe your interviewing style?

I wouldn't even try.

What are your most memorable Prime Time reports?

Leas Cross. US elections.

Do you ever reference blogs when researching?

I check out all kinds of media.

As a recent Twitter convert, how do you find the service for keeping you up-to-date on current affairs?

It is my first and last port of call now. It has become my own personal newswire thanks to the links it provides to unlimited sources. It is also easy to filter and cross-check. I operate on the assumption that it is not what you say on twitter that matters but who you follow

What other benefits are you deriving from Twitter?

The interaction has been so refreshing. I don't think I have been more plugged in to a community than I am now.

How do you feel to being pitched to on Twitter?

Let's leave the pitching aside, but I'm fascinated by innovative people and new ideas and change.

You are also a regular Boards.ie user. Does using boards.ie ever inform your research?

I primarily use it for interaction. But many of the reporters I work with use it for sourcing interviews and ideas.

How to you find Boards and Twitter as barometers of public perception on current affairs?

They are invaluable for discussion and interaction and accountability but I don't think they have a broad enough reach into Irish society to be a barometer of public opinion.

Was it always your ambition to be a current affairs programme presenter?

That or centre-forward for Liverpool.

What TV presenter do you most admire?

I don't have any heroes.

What TV programmes do you like to watch?

I find myself watching a lot of TV news in the same way I eat broccoli. It's good for me but I would probably rather be doing something else (like watching Jools Holland, The Wire, Sarah Silverman, John Stewart).

What newspapers and magazines do you regularly read?

What you got? I read them all. But less and less in actual newsprint and more online although I still feel a little thrill when the wife's Vanity Fair drops through the letterbox with a thud.

Do you have an opinion on the new versus traditional and the future of TV?

It's like having an opinion on the tide. New will completely transform old. TV will survive but it will become just another platform for content.

As a former Malahide Sea Scout did you ever notice shaky foundations in coastal transportation infrastructure?

No. I was too busy chasing Girl Guides.



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