

How to Be A Story

**or, at least,
part of The Story.**

A Little Insider Stuff for You

from

[Carrie Ferguson Weir](#)

WeirTPR
all about you.

I Covered Everything from Fires to Fancy Flip Flop Fashion

As a news and features writer for nearly 20 years, I got pitched dozens of stories daily -- both nationally and locally focused.

How did they grab my attention?

They were good stories about interesting people, services and things. Sometimes, the pitch came from somebody's uncle. Sometimes the pitch came from an international PR firm.

Didn't matter who pitched though, as long as the story was good.

You too can be a story.

But, Before You Make Headlines...

You must answer a couple of questions:

- 1. Who are You?**
- 2. What is your Niche?**

Knowing the answers well will help you focus your pitch and speak confidently.

Who are you?

Can you answer that question in one -- maybe two -- sentences?

Me: Cuban-American former journalist, current publicist and entrepreneur living in the South, raising a bilingual/bicultural child.

Now, you try.

Defining yourself -- who you are to the public -- allows you to focus on reaching the reporter who will be so happy to hear from you. And you, specifically.

What is Your Niche?

Most of the time, your niche finds you.

It is your passion, your favorite thing, your favorite kinds of people.

Me: I like people, writing and information. My journalism and small [business experience](#) created my niche: [Latinos](#) living the American Dream and [small business owners](#) trying to find theirs.

What about you?

Who do you write for? Sell to? Create for?

Open Your Eyes

Once you know your focus, it is easy to spot stories all around you.

It is even easier if you consume a good variety of media -- print, TV, online, radio. Tune into what is happening elsewhere in your field or topic of expertise.

And remember, you don't always have to be the story -- you can be part of the story, or just the source.

Being a great source wins you something non-sources don't get: A call returned quickly.

That's gold.

Connecting with a Reporter

Guess, what?

Reporters want just one thing: A Good Story.

You got one? Call. And it won't cost you anything. Seriously.

How?

- Pick up the telephone.
- Send an e-mail.
- Send a press release.
- Tweet.
- Even, good old-fashioned letter via postal mail works.

They may not respond right away, or ever, but that's really all you need to do.

The Five Ws

All you need to offer when you contact a reporter via call, e-mail or press release is really:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why

If they want more, they'll ask for more.

You can find examples of press releases online. I like [PRNewsWire.](#)

Suggest Stories and Sources

"Hey, check out this cool person or business"

Have you met someone fascinating? Have you discovered the coolest new shop in town? Does your neighbor have the biggest holiday display in six states? Go ahead, tell.

Localize a national trend

What are you seeing among your friends or co-workers? Are they adopting new technology, your hip friend found the next Twitter? Are your stay-at-home friends returning to work in droves?

Did you contact the local business reporter to talk about the new FTC guidelines and the ruination of your giveaways blog?

Suggest Yourself

Find your beat reporter.

Are you a frugal blogger? Find the frugal, shopping or business reporter who needs to know you.

Are you a parenting blogger? Suggest an op-ed piece, connect with a feature's writer, get involved with the newspaper's parenting message board.

Are you an accountant? Call the business reporter and offer to be a source for a tax story, or for a story on new home finances management software, or whatever you know best.

You get the point, right?

Suggest Yourself, Part II

Localize a trend you are part of:

Example: "Hi, I'm So and So and I am writing to suggest a story on the growing number of local families who are greening their lives. We're throwing out plastics, raising our own chickens, baking our own bread and growing as much of our foods as possible.

This is a huge national trend and I know many local families you can talk to.

You can reach me at XXX-XXXX.

My blog is XXXXXX.com

Thank you for your time."

Always Include...

- Phone numbers
- E-mail
- Web page
- Blog URL
- Twitter URL
- Facebook, if applicable
- Links to relevant content about you, or the story you are pitching.
- Time, date, place if pitch is event focused.

Don't send photos as attachments.

And Please Don't

Start any sentence with :

- I am a Mom Blogger.
- I'm just a Blogger.
- I don't know if this is a story, but....
- I am the best, biggest, most unique....

Feel free to start the conversation with: "You are awesomeness and I read every single story you ever wrote...")

The Local Reporters Said No...

Well then, sniff around the blogosphere and in smaller local media outlets.

Try local radio stations, local Web-based radio stations, neighborhood weeklies, city magazines, neighborhood listservs, local public television programs...some of whom may love you.

Who is writing special interest columns for your local paper or for the local university? Is there a citizen blogger at the paper? A business professor who blogs for the local university?

Look beyond reporters.

Go National

You can pay a PR professional \$75 to upwards of \$250/hour to research media and contact reporters for you.

Or, you can spend a day in the periodicals section of your library and identify reporters and their beats.

Be sure to read at least a week's worth of the newspapers. Different features may not run everyday and some reporters don't write everyday.

Looking at newspapers from other cities will help you spot trends, and identify markets you never may have thought of.

Yes, you could do this online, but it takes a lot of time and paper Web sites kind of stink. Yes, I said that.

Create a Media List...Free and Easy

Subscribing to a media list can cost more than \$1,000 a year and it is well worth it if you have the money and need frequently updated and correct media contacts from all over the country.

Or, you can sign up for Peter Shankman's [Help A Reporter Out](#). As a member, you will receive daily queries from reporters and if you have something to say, you contact them and Boom! you may end up in a story.

There are strict, but smart, rules on HARO, so be sure to follow them. See a name and a beat that fits your stuff? Hold on to it for a pitch later but: **Be sure to be on target, or face being banned.**

Tweet a Reporter

Check out Muckrack.com to find journalists using Twitter.

You can search them by publication and you also will discover trending topics, and the most active Tweeters.

Attempt to find out first if they want you to pitch them via direct messages on Twitter. Some won't like it.

But, if they are on there, then they're open to conversation.

Try.

Careful using Social Media Pitches

I asked reporter friends in four states if they want pitches via Twitter and Facebook.

Most said they are not receiving much via Twitter. A couple said the Twitter DMs are so full of spam, they rarely check them.

On Twitter, they prefer conversation and then a pitch.

On Facebook, if their page is private, they prefer you try them via their work contact or Twitter.

Connect with Real People

Are you meeting regularly with local bloggers? Are you a member of a business mixer? Are you attending the local geek breakfast? Are you volunteering?

People who are involved, interested and connected get more opportunities.

Be one of those people.

It will help your business and boost the potential for media...and you'll be a lot happier too. (Free advice there...)

Be a Go-To Person

Every reporter keeps a list of people she can call when she needs "real" people to talk to.

Our go-to people are involved in the community, well-known in their fields, or folks who know how to collect people.

A Go-To Person connects with Real People...often.

That means you need to get out from behind your computer and get involved, purposely set out to meet people of varying backgrounds and with a variety of interests.

And sometimes, you will be the story...or a source or part of the story.

Why Media Matters

Traditional media -- whether it offers you a short brief in the paper, or a full-feature on TV -- validates you and your business in ways that a thousand links and blog reviews sometimes can not.

The best part: It is free.

And, it isn't really that hard.

Now, go get quoted.

-- more --

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[Tiki Tiki Blog](#)

You can see the variety of press my Spanish t-shirt line, [Los Pollitos Dicen](#) has received on our [media page](#).

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**This presentation is a version of the talk I gave at the
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