

MUCK RACK

The essential guide to

Media Relations

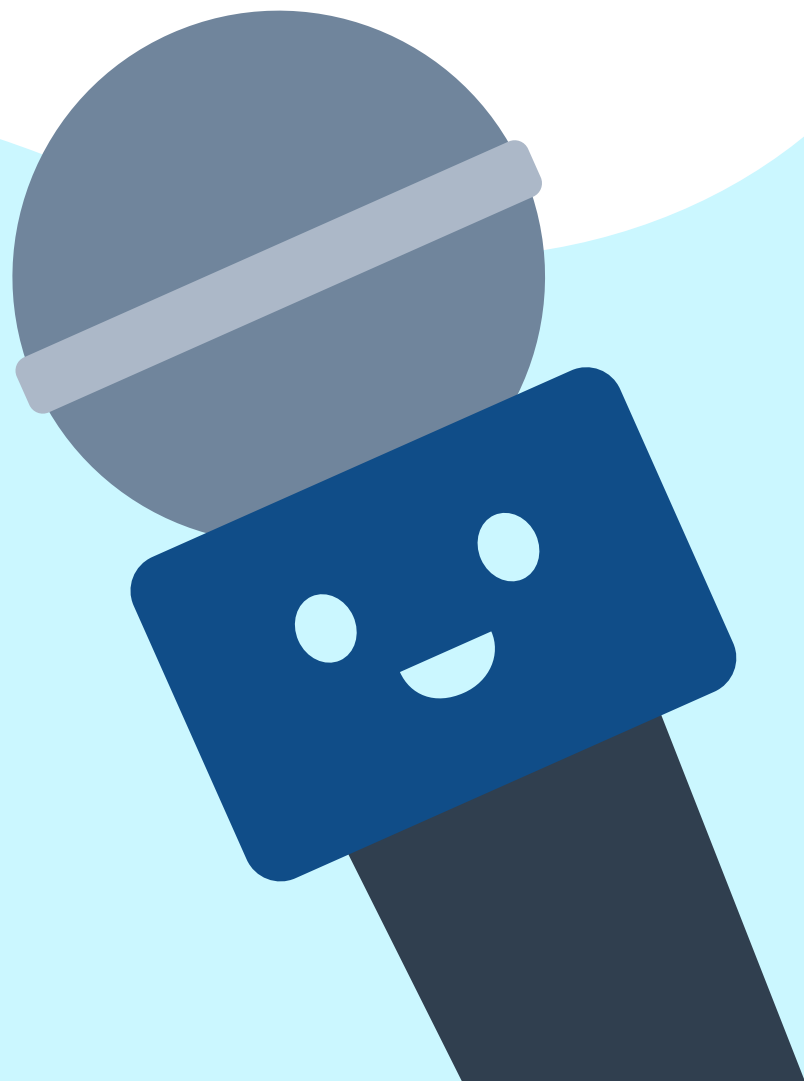


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Introduction to media relations

What are media relations?

Media relations help share a brand's message or story through third-party endorsement (earned media). It refers to the mutually beneficial relationship between journalists and PR pros. The goal of media relations, from a PR perspective, is to maximize positive coverage without paying for advertising.

For journalists, it can be a useful way to uncover unique and important stories.

How media relations and PR work together

Ultimately, media relations is commonly considered a strategy within a broader PR campaign.

After a PR team helps an organization determine what story they want to tell about themselves and to whom, they can utilize media relations strategies, which distribute the story to various media channels and journalists to spread the message to a target audience.

Here's an example: A nonprofit organization wants to promote a charity event it's hosting. It works with a PR team to write a press release or targeted email pitch. The PR team then utilizes media relations strategies by reaching out to relevant media outlets to pitch the story for potential coverage.

What's most important to remember is that media relations is just one component of PR and is used as a tactic to reach a larger audience and build relationships with journalists, bloggers and influencers in various industries.

Getting started with media relations

Identifying media relations goals and OKRs

What's the goal of your media relations efforts, and how can you ensure you're meeting those goals? In this section, we'll help you find those answers.

As a PR pro, you understand the importance of tracking, measuring and reporting the results of your media relations efforts. It proves your team's value to management, clients and other stakeholders. Keeping a list of your accomplishments is a great start, but you should also create OKRs.

OKRs stand for objectives and key results. This is a strategic goal-setting method used by companies, teams and individuals in many industries.

The goal of OKRs is to encourage collaboration and team alignment. OKRs allow you to set measurable and challenging (yet realistic!) goals, then track and measure the progress along the way.

According to the [2023 State of PR](#), measuring business results is a top challenge among PR pros. That's why, in the PR world, OKRs are especially impactful. On a team level, OKRs ensure everyone is aligned around clear objectives. By tracking the measurable results, teams can show off their value to the company.

How to create OKRs

An objective is simply what you aim to accomplish—your overarching goal. When brainstorming objectives, aim to create no more than five at a time. You want to keep your efforts focused.

Objectives should be:

- Concrete
- Action-oriented
- Aspirational

Under each objective, list three to five key results. These are benchmarks you'll need to meet in order to achieve the objective.

Key results should be:

- Specific
- Time-bound (think: month, quarter, year)
- Ambitious but realistic
- Measurable
- Verifiable

OKRs can be written as statements. For instance, "I will [objective] by [key results]." Or, you can write them in the following format.

Example

Objective: Position company as innovative, socially responsible newcomer (key brand messages) in the industry.

Key results:

- Produce 2 thought leadership pieces (placements) in 12 months (time period) in top-ranking industry publications (hint: you can easily find top-ranking publications in Muck Rack [here](#))
- Gain 30% message pull-through (growth metric) by March (time period).
- Reach 10 new journalists (contacts) in the space within 16 weeks (time period).

You'll notice the objective is concrete. The key results support the objective. Again, they're specific, time-bound, measurable and verifiable. When determining the specifics, remember to set challenging goals that are also achievable.

“Muck Rack is an exceptional tool for finding journalists based on location, outlet and topic of interest beyond their job title or beat.”



Tessa Byars
Brand + Internal Communications, Patagonia

Using a media database to achieve your media relations goals

Once you’ve worked out your media relations goals, it’s time to put your plan into motion. For PR pros, that means identifying the right reporters and pitching them effectively.

That’s where your media database comes in.

A [media database](#) is a digital directory or address book. The database contains contact information about journalists, editors, producers, podcasters, influencers and more.

PR pros use this information [to create media lists](#). They then use these media lists to help send targeted pitches, distribute press releases and send media alerts.

Some PR teams will use spreadsheets, instead of a media database, to store media lists. However, spreadsheets are static, which makes it difficult to collaborate and requires teams to manually update information in this ever-changing media landscape.

For example, when a journalist changes companies (this happens often), teams using spreadsheets will have to hunt down new contact information and update it manually. A robust media database, like Muck Rack, will automatically update with this information, saving you and your team time—and consequently money.

“Alerts help give us a leg up and take advantage of some of these conversations from top reporters while they’re still hot.”



Matt Prince

Senior Manager of PR and Brand Experience, Taco Bell

Building your media list

The best way to build your media list is organically through [media monitoring](#). Ideally, you’ll want to invest time each day into consuming content relevant to your topics. When you see a reporter or writer who consistently covers these issues, add them to your media list. Then, you can prove to them you understand what they do and how you can work together.

Instead of manually combing through coverage, you can use a public relations software like Muck Rack to set up [media monitoring alerts](#) for specific keywords, like your brand’s name, a competitor’s name or topics. With Muck Rack, you can opt in to daily or real-time alerts, so you can seamlessly review this coverage from your inbox. You can set up alerts for specific media lists or even specific journalists.

If you don’t have time to build your media list organically, you can use a [media database](#) to search journalists. Instead of searching by a beat and scrolling through thousands of journalists, you can get specific with keywords (think: “education technology” or “ed tech”), media outlets, and locations or markets. You can then save the most targeted journalists to a media list.

“Muck Rack has proven essential for helping my team find new opportunities.”



Emily Reardon
Assistant Director of Publicity, Penguin Random House

The essential features of a media database

There are plenty of media databases on the market—you’ve got options—but it’s important to consider the database’s core features before deciding if it’s right for you and your team.

Several essential features of a media database include:

- Comprehensive media contact profiles with information specific to the contact, not a general press email address or phone number.
- It’s important for journalists to be able to claim their own profiles and add things like contact preferences, portfolios, and even interview questions
- A powerful search function that lets you search for contacts by location, beat, media type, keywords and more.
- Automatic, dynamic updates to ensure the information is accurate and up-to-date.
- Team workflow integrations to optimize collaboration and prevent accidental pitching overlap.
- Seamless media list integrations that make adding contacts to media lists—and sorting through them—simple.
- Personalized pitching features to make it easy to send targeted pitches at scale.

Establishing relationships with reporters

Now that you have a list of targeted journalists and bloggers to pitch, one of the best ways to [**connect with them**](#) is to be a real, authentic person. It might sound simple, but this can go a long way.

For example, once you’ve fostered a relationship with a journalist, reach out unprompted without a pitch. Perhaps they live in New York and anticipate a gnarly weather event. Send an email wishing them well—just as you would with a coworker or acquaintance.

Another way to build connections is to consume content your target journalists produce. This will help you understand what topics they cover, how they cover them and the best way you can contribute.

You can even take this one step further: React to journalists' content in meaningful ways. This can include engaging with their social media posts. But it's not enough to do this right before you reach out with a pitch. It must be consistent. It's also important to react beyond a compliment. You can offer a third-party resource (think: breaking news from a smaller, more niche outlet or a white paper or research studies), share their work or ask a question.

To more strategically connect with journalists, you could set up Twitter/X lists or set Google Alerts. Or you can use Muck Rack to directly tap into outlets' feeds, so you don't have to wait hours or even days to react to articles.

You can also use Muck Rack to monitor Twitter/X, so you can see when a journalist is sourcing for or sharing a story that needs your attention. If you want to keep an eye on a specific journalist—or a list of journalists—you can set alerts for them, too.

Creating the perfect pitch

"Muck Rack is a great tool to help PR professionals be much more targeted in their outreach. Journalists get fewer irrelevant pitches from PR people...and it's helping PR professionals to get better results."



Michaela Kron
US Marketing Director Duolingo

Lack of personalization and poor timing are top reasons why a journalist will reject a pitch, according to the [State of Journalism report](#). So what makes a pitch stand out?

Here are a few pointers on how journalists prefer to be pitched (also from the [State of Journalism report](#)):

- **92%** of journalists preferred to be pitched via 1:1 email
- **55%** don't care which day of the week they're pitched—of those who do, most prefer to receive pitches early in the week
- **61%** want to receive pitches before noon
- **67%** prefer pitches under 200 words
- **69%** say pitches that connect to a trending story are the most shareable
- **76%** are more likely to cover a story if offered an exclusive

With these preferences in mind, let's look at five key areas of a PR pitch and how to optimize each one.

Subject line

- ☐ **Be clear and concise:** Keep the subject line concise, ideally under 50 characters, and make it clear what the pitch is about. Avoid jargon or vague language.
- ☐ **Highlight hook:** Mention the most compelling and newsworthy aspect of your pitch in the subject line to grab the recipient's attention immediately.
- ☐ **Avoid all caps and excessive punctuation:** Writing in all capital letters or using too many exclamation points can make your pitch look like spam. Stick to proper punctuation and capitalization.

Personalization

- ☐ **Do your homework:** Research the reporter you're pitching. Understand their beat, writing style, and recent articles. Show that you've taken the time to get to know their work.
- ☐ **Reference past work:** Mention specific articles or pieces they've written that are relevant to your pitch. Explain how your story aligns with their interests or expertise.
- ☐ **Use their name:** Always address the recipient by their name. Avoid generic greetings like "Dear Editor" or "To Whom It May Concern."

Storytelling

- ❑ **Get to the point:** The reader should be able identify the ‘So what?’ of your pitch quickly. Include captivating and relevant anecdote, statistic, or question that immediately draws the reader in.
- ❑ **Focus on the human element:** Highlight the human aspect of your story. Use real-life examples, quotes, or testimonials to make the pitch relatable and emotional.
- ❑ **Create a narrative arc:** Structure your pitch like a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Clearly outline the problem, solution, and the impact of the story.
- ❑ **Show, don’t tell:** Use vivid language and descriptive imagery to help the reader visualize the story.

Using AI for pitching

- ❑ **Generate ideas:** Use AI for a starting point to outline or draft your pitch, but always add your own human touch the the final version.
- ❑ **Tailor your pitch using AI insights:** Utilize AI tools to analyze data and identify the most relevant journalists, outlets, and timing for your pitch. This ensures your pitch is targeted and timely.
- ❑ **Create alternate versions:** AI can help draft pitches with different tones based on the reporter you’re pitching—for example, AI can help create a localized version of a national story.

Following up

- ❑ **Give it time:** 51% of journalists prefer that PR pros follow up 3–7 days after the initial pitch.
- ❑ **Don’t push it:** 45% say one follow up is ideal.
- ❑ **Respect their preferences:** Respect the journalist’s preferred method of communication (hint: you can find this on their Muck Rack profile).
- ❑ **Be polite and professional:** Maintain a polite and professional tone in all your interactions, even if you don’t receive a response. Building a positive relationship is essential in PR.

Get your pitch noticed

One of the biggest media relations challenges is simply getting journalists to respond. There are a few reasons why this is so challenging.

- Two-thirds of journalists have been impacted by economic uncertainty
- Most journalists receive up to 5 pitches per day and publish 2–4 stories per week
- The majority of journalists produce content in two or more mediums

It's important to be respectful of journalists' time and preferences. The best way to do that? Send them relevant, helpful information. You should also keep your communications concise.

Here are a few tips to help keep your pitch around the recommended 30 to 100 words:

- Cut the small talk. No need for well wishes—just get to the point!
- Skip formalities. Write in a conversational tone.
- Proofread! Run spell check then read your pitch aloud before you hit send.

Another great way to woo those in the media is to anticipate their needs by providing images, videos, [sound bites](#) or [data](#). Contacts for sources are great, too, but think about unique sources that journalists may not be able to easily access, like experts or customer references—not a company spokesperson.

Ultimately, consider who you're pitching and what they'll need to tell an effective story on their platform. By providing resources upfront, you can make the journalist's life easier—giving you a much better chance at achieving media placements.

"Thanks to Muck Rack, our communication with reporters is more authentic and valuable versus adding them to a mass email blast."



Sam Brewer
Associate Director of External Communications, GBH

Measuring and reporting your media relations success

“Before Muck Rack, I spent three hours putting together the daily report. Now, it takes half that time.”



Rachel Klinkasis
Communications Specialist, Prologis

So you landed a placement. Congratulations! This is just the beginning.

Now, the question becomes: How do you measure success, and report that success to stakeholders?

That’s where PR KPIs (key performance indicators) come into play. These help support a team’s or company’s goals with quantifiable measurements.

These metrics will vary by industry and campaign, but common PR KPIs include:

Media mentions

A media mention refers to any mention of a brand’s name, campaign or message through any media channel. This is one of the most fundamental measurable earned media metrics.

Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis refers to the tone in which your brand is mentioned. This can be positive, negative or neutral. This helps PR pros determine the success of a campaign.

Reach

Reach refers to the number of people who see your media coverage per month. This can be paid or organic. It's worth calling out that reach is often considered a limited data point because it only calculates quantity, not quality.

Share of voice

Share of voice (SOV) helps PR pros compare brands against their competitors. It helps determine how much your brand dominates the industry conversation.

Social media engagement

Social media engagement refers to likes, comments, shares, retweets, clicks or mentions through social channels.

Creating actionable PR reports

1. Set specific goals

Remember your PR OKRs from the beginning of this guide? Those are the specific, measurable goals that you can report on. It's also important to align with relevant teams (like marketing) and stakeholders on these goals to make sure you're all on the same page.

2. Measure what matters

Remember: KPIs will vary by industry and campaign goals, so focus on the most relevant goals that directly reflect your campaign's progress and your organization's mission.

When determining what KPIs to include in a report, think back to the specific goals behind the campaign. What numbers will best show off progress or achievements? Consider the type of campaign—like brand awareness, social, integrated marketing and communications—then drill down to better understand what KPIs will best reflect these goals.

3. Provide context for the available data

With PR reports, it's not enough to dump a bunch of data into a document and call it a day. You must include context around the data—the "why." Here are a few strategies to better tell this story:

- Conduct interviews across departments to understand how your campaign impacted them.
- Choose the right benchmarks.
- Focus on providing actionable insights.

4. Incorporate visual elements into PR reports

Add more impact and value to your PR report by including visual elements, like charts, graphs and other infographics. This is a great way to show your progress.

No need to dig into a spreadsheet for this capability. [A dedicated PR reporting software](#) can automatically generate compelling graphics for you. Just be sure to keep your audience in mind and not include too many visuals. This could become overwhelming.

5. Leverage tools that deliver actionable insights

Finally, when creating a PR report, lean on tools that'll help you deliver actionable insights. For instance, Muck Rack's powerful software lets you build customizable dashboards in seconds. They're interactive, sharable and updated in real-time. This allows you to analyze, benchmark and compare coverage.

There are other benefits to using PR software to collect and analyze this data, including:

- A more streamlined workflow. Everything is in one place with Muck Rack, so you need less tools, which makes for a better workflow and easier training process.
- Better data organization. No need to figure out the best way to present the data. Muck Rack does this for you.
- Automate your reports. Muck Rack can automatically aggregate press hits in real time. That means no more searching the web. Instead, for each piece of content, Muck Rack tells you where it's been shared, what journalists have shared it, social sentiment and media outline information.

"Muck Rack's monitoring and reporting is a huge innovation over the way we used to handle reporting with other systems."



Ellen Murphy
SVP, Syneos Health

Takeaways

- 1. Understand the value of media relations:** A solid media relations strategy is mutually beneficial to PR pros and journalists, and it is essential for PR success. Targeting the relevant reporters through media monitoring will help you build strong media lists and ensure you're pitching the right people.
- 2. Set measurable goals:** Effective media relations start with clear goals and objectives. PR professionals can use OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) to set measurable and challenging goals, encouraging collaboration and alignment within the team.
- 3. Pitch effectively and build relationships:** Crafting a pitch that stands out is crucial. Journalists prefer relevant, concise pitches that connect to trending stories and are sent via 1:1 email. Building authentic relationships with journalists by engaging with their content and providing valuable resources can enhance media relations efforts.
- 4. Report media relations success to stakeholders:** A good PR report is actionable, contains data with context, visuals and, ideally, is automated.

About Muck Rack

Muck Rack's Public Relations Management (PRM) platform enables thousands of organizations including Google, International Rescue Committee, Pfizer, Golin, Zapier and Duolingo to build trust, tell their stories and prove the value of earned media through its media database and monitoring and reporting features. Journalists use Muck Rack's free tools to showcase their portfolios, analyze news about any topic and measure the impact of their stories. Learn more at muckrack.com.