Ten Tips for Effective Media Planning and Editorial Calendar Research

How to transform your editorial calendar collection into a strategic media plan.

“Media planning” is a phrase most often associated with the advertising world, where media planners slice and dice demographic databases in hopes of getting the most out of their media buys. However, taking a research-based approach to editorial contact, especially through the editorial calendars distributed by publications and online news outlets, will make your marketing public relations program more strategic and effective. This year, instead of dreading the annual ritual of poring over stacks of editorial calendars, think of it as a strategic exercise in media planning that will be the foundation for your PR program. Consider these ten tips for media planning:

1. Budget the time you need to plan
Don’t let the urgent get in the way of the important. Even if you’re busy with ongoing activities, spend part of every December developing your annual pitch campaign for the coming year. In the same way marketers carefully target their advertising dollars, public relations professionals need to target their story placements. Investing time up front on the right kind of editorial calendar research can save you many hours in the heat of the battle later on.

2. Start with marketing strategy and research
Make sure you stay up to your elbows in your company’s or clients’ market research and participate in development of the overall marketing plan and strategy. Every company does its own market research, ranging from formal surveys to informal “gut checks” by sales and service people. Use this knowledge and experience as the foundation for a PR media plan that supports overall sales and marketing strategy and goals.

3. Know your target audience
Developing a profile and characteristics of your target customers will help you determine what makes them tick and what turns them on. Before embarking on your story placement trip, you must have a solid handle on the target audience. If not, you will simply end up on a wild goose chase, spending an inordinate amount of time pursuing opportunities that are of little value.

4. What do your customers watch, read and respect?
Between broadcast media, hardcopy publications, online outlets and the burgeoning world of blogs, figuring out what your audience reads can be a daunting task. First, match your target-customer
profile to the circulation and audience demographics of your targeted outlets. Then, look beyond the publisher’s statement of circulation and readership to broader gauges of a publication’s editorial quality, influence and reputation.

5. **Know which outlets to focus on**
The right kind of editorial-calendar research gives you a solid idea of exactly where to go with your story. First, look to the outlets that are the most widely followed in your industry. But also look for the perfect fit with story ideas and angles listed in the editorial calendars. Seek out opportunities where you can give a publication the lead for its major annual trend or round-up story.

6. **Quality counts**
Sometimes a placement in a small but highly respected journal is better than a “one-day wonder” in a more widely read but less prestigious publication, especially if it tells your story exactly as you want it told. Remember, placements have a shelf life through reprints and links to copies that live in perpetuity online. So plan on pitching the quality publications, regardless of their size. They will get your story right and give you the most credibility.

7. **Develop your plan of attack**
What are the story lines you are going to pitch? How are you going to get the editor to feature your story? How and when will you find the time to make the calls? Getting to the right editor at the right time should never be a matter of luck or serendipity. Budget the time and resources throughout the year to do the right outreach to the right outlets at the right time. Develop a comprehensive, 52-week media-contact schedule and plan, then stick to it.

8. **Optimize your time**
Just as media planners in the advertising world need to carefully budget the right expenditures on their media buys, PR professionals need to carefully budget and maximize the value of their own time. The right kind of media-outreach plan lets you optimize your time by determining in advance when and where you will get the best bang for your buck.

9. **Stay on top of the story**
Editorial calendars are living documents. As the year wears on, editors reacting to a changing news environment may be looking for new and different angles for scheduled stories. Plan to revisit the editorial calendar throughout the year with fresh ideas that will put you at the front of the line.

10. **Measure and merchandise your results**
What does success look like? The pitch is done, interviews have occurred and your story gets the play you expected – but your work is still not done. Make sure your media plan lays out a measurement system that everyone agrees will track and document your strategic success in driving the overall sales and marketing program forward. Promote your success, and use the feedback for an improved plan in the following year.

Keeping these ten tips in mind will help transform your annual editorial calendar database into a true media plan and get the kind of strategic results that you and your clients are looking for.