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How to Publicize a Project: Media Relations Part II

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Public relations is an invaluable marketing tool, creating visibility and brand recognition for your firm, credibility and third-party validation through editorial placement, and hopefully, lead generation. How do you land coverage in key publications? Here, we decipher the different editorial opportunities out there and how to pursue each one to publicize your project.

There are three kinds of editorial opportunities: articles that are staff-written by the publication, byline articles that are contributed by industry experts (i.e., you!), and articles that are either written by you or the publication and are published in conjunction with advertising or payment (also known as “pay-to-plays”).

* **Editorial opportunities** are articles in publications that usually have been scheduled according to the publication's editorial calendar. Unless noted otherwise, these articles are written by editors or freelance writers hired by the publication. There is no cost to participate in these opportunities. In fact, straight editorial opportunities like this are public relations in its purest form: information gathered by a neutral third party (the writer or editor), who crafts the article with the most relevant and interesting information to the reader, provided by you, the expert. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, you can research editorial calendars for your target publications (usually found in the online advertising/media kit), and pitch your project news or company as a source for the publication's upcoming article. Offer to set up a phone interview with a designer or project team member, and send a relevant project summary, ideally with photos. An e-mail pitch is fine. Most monthly magazines work two to four months ahead of the publication date, so be sure to leave yourself enough time to contact the editor.

- * **Byline articles** may also appear on a publication's editorial calendar, but may not be marked as such. This is where you need to do your homework: scan the publication, check the editorial guidelines online, or e-mail the editor directly to ask if the publication accepts contributed – or byline – articles. Some do, and some don't, but if you look online their policies are usually clear. Bylines are considered editorial content, meaning there is no cost to contribute. Bylines are also planned well in advance, so pitch with plenty of time before the publication date to ensure that your proposal gets read.

For byline articles, the author drafts the article (word count depends on the publication) and usually supplies a few photos and possibly a headshot. Think like an editor and a graphic designer: the article with the photos should tell a story and create a pleasing layout consistent with the publication's design. A byline is a perfect opportunity to showcase your expertise on a given topic or highlight best practices with a project example or case study. It is not an opportunity to plug a product or give kudos to yourself or your project team. In its completed and published form, a byline article can become a valuable piece of marketing collateral – with the benefit of the publication's masthead at the top!

- * **Pay-to-plays** are paid editorial placements (articles) accompanied by advertising placed by you or your sub-consultants or colleagues. Fees for these placements vary widely, but don't be shocked by a price tag of a few thousand dollars for a full-page layout. Pay-to-plays can sometimes be difficult to discern, so if an editor offering a great opportunity contacts you, remember to ask if there's a cost to participate.

Pay-to-plays have their place in the PR roster, and while they can be expensive, they also serve a useful purpose. Sometimes the cost of a pay-to-play is reasonable when split between a few project members, and the end product is a re-printable article on a joint project. Be wary of the editorial pitch that offers you an article for nothing – the catch is usually on the condition that you provide a list of sub-consultants or colleagues that the editor can approach for advertising. Consider whether the release of this information is worth the opportunity, and how you would feel on the receiving end of such a solicitous call.

Editorial opportunities are the bread and butter of public relations, so you'll be well served to understand the different varieties out there. In this economy, pay-to-plays seem to be everywhere, and publications have become lean with fewer editorial opportunities. With a little due diligence, you can choose the editorial opportunities that are best for your firm.