

# The Sources *HotLink*

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Twenty-eight

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November 2003

## The State of the News Media

BY MARK LAVIGNE APR



One of the first rules of media relations is know the media. When you know something about the environment in which journalists have

to work you appreciate their deadlines and their perspectives, all of which helps to improve your skill in reaching them with your story or news release.

During the past decade the news media, particularly private sector newspapers, magazines, radio and television outlets, have suffered from the same economic turmoil as other private sector organizations. Globalization, recession, national and multi-national mergers, and technological revolution have significantly affected the business side of the news media, which has caused upheaval in newsrooms across the country.

The computers and computer networks have enabled the same news reporting functions of ten years ago to be performed by fewer people while the same technology has exponentially increased the amount of news available for reporting. Consequently, there is more news to be processed by fewer people. Staffing levels have been dramatically cut, roughly 75% in radio, 50% in newspapers and 25% in television.

Furthermore, a dramatic shift in advertising revenues from mass advertising to much more targeted marketing communications has dras-

tically reduced advertising revenues available to the majority of private sector mass news outlets. The rise of direct mail, promotions and specialized media has spread advertising revenues across a much broader plane of media. The consequence for anyone submitting a news story or media release – the “news hole” (the space in which proactive news can be placed) has dramatically shrunk.

Other trends include a maturing news media. Many journalists, those who survived recessions, mergers and technological downsizing, have stayed in their positions longer. The rate of turnover in the news business traditionally is high but in major news markets such as Toronto there is far less movement than ever before, partly because fewer jobs are available. It still takes the average journalist ten years to get promoted into major markets. Once they arrive, economic conditions keep those reporters in their same jobs, rather than moving up into editorial positions. Because of these factors, journalists are older, smarter, generally more educated, and usually more cynical than their predecessors. Cynicism often breeds distrust making the current generation of news reporters more suspicious and more formidable than ever.

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## HotLink welcomes Toronto 1 to the airwaves



Kudos to family-owned and operated Craig Media for launching Toronto's newest, coolest television station, TORONTO 1. Destined to be the channel of choice for many urban professionals, TORONTO 1 clearly focuses on all that is unique to Toronto, portraying Toronto just as it is – a sophisticated, multi-cultural, arts and enter-

tainment hub for all of Canada. If you have a news story, announcement or event that needs to reach a GTA audience, submit your media releases to [torontotoday@toronto1.tv](mailto:torontotoday@toronto1.tv) or [assignment@toronto1.tv](mailto:assignment@toronto1.tv) for late day coverage.

## Meet the Media

*The first rule of media relations is know the media. As part of a new series, HotLink provides the introductions. Our selections are purposeful and highly informative, beginning with this newest duo in television news.*

Meet veteran news anchors **Ben Chin** and **Sarika Sehgal**, hosts of TORONTO 1's hip current affairs magazine program *Toronto Tonight* (airing daily at 7:00 p.m. and 11:30



p.m.) Both are accomplished writers, reporters, news producers and anchors, as you will learn by reading the following -

**Ben Chin** comes to TORONTO 1 from CBC News, where he most recently anchored Canada Now in Toronto. Over the past five years, he hosted or guest-hosted numerous programs on CBC Television and CBC Newsworld, including The National, Saturday Report and Sunday Report. He has also anchored live coverage of breaking news events on both networks, including the aftermath of 9/11, the first hours of the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, the tainted water outbreak in Walkerton and the deaths of the Queen Mother and Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

He began his career at Toronto's CityTV in 1989, working as a general reporter and anchor for eight years. In his post, he broke numerous stories, including the child-abuse scandal at Maple Leaf Gardens. He also covered the trials of Paul Bernardo and Karla

Homolka.

Chin was born in Geneva, Switzerland to a South Korean diplomat's family and lived in Europe, Asia and the Americas before settling in Toronto.

Considered a rising star in Canadian broadcast journalism, Toronto-born **Sarika Sehgal** moved to TORONTO 1 from Hamilton's CH News where she served as executive producer and co-anchor of the station's 6:00 p.m. and late night newscasts. In her role she reported live on breaking news from the war in Iraq, giving viewers a unique Canadian perspective on unfolding events. She also worked at CTV Calgary affiliate CFCN where she anchored and co-produced the top-rated Noon News, reported as an expert health journalist and subbed as an anchor of the evening news.

After graduating from Humber College's TV and Radio Communications Program and earning a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto, Sehgal began her broadcast news career as a producer at CTV's Canada AM.

*Is there someone in the media you would like to "meet". Please send your suggestions for this HotLink feature to our Editor at [lfenske@sources.com](mailto:lfenske@sources.com).*

The Sources **HotLink** – November 2003 Phone: 416-964-7799

# Writing a Successful Case Study

BY STEVE SLAUNWHITE

As I pointed out in my previous column on case studies, readers love a good story. That's why these chronicles of success will often stand out on the editor's desk while press releases, media kits and other media communications fight a tough battle just to get noticed.

Case studies tell the story of a great product or service and a happy customer. Often (ideally) the customer is interviewed and quoted in the article.

Unlike a press release, there is no standardized format for writing a case study. They can be as short as a single paragraph, or as complex as a four-page document with sidebars, summaries, and charts. Having written hundreds over the years, I recommend they follow what I call "The Case Study Sequence."

**The customer.** In the lead paragraph, focus on your customer, not on your product or company. Gain attention with an interesting lead.

**The challenge.** Next, introduce the problem. What condition was your customer trying to change or improve? If possible, use the customer's own words in the form of a quotation.

**The journey.** What steps were taken to solve the problem? What other products or services were investigated? Why didn't these work out? Many case study writers skip this section. Don't you skip it. This is the

place in the story where the reader begins to identify and empathize.

**The discovery.** How did the customer find out about you? In an ad? At a trade show? Through a media interview? This section often acts as a bridge to the remainder of the case study.

**The solution.** This is where you have unbridled freedom to pitch your product or service without fear of sounding too promotional. The earlier sections have earned you this right.

**The implementation.** How was your product or service implemented? Was there any downtime or disruption involved? How long was it before it was up and running at 100%? Be honest about any problems that arose and how they were resolved. Highlight instances where you went "the extra mile" to satisfy the customer.

**The results.** How well did your product or service solve your customer's problem? Be as specific as you can here. If possible, use hard numbers such as savings, revenue gains, sales growth, and return on investment. This is another good spot to include a customer quotation. And a great place to summarize and close your story.

*Steve Slaunwhite is an award-winning copywriter and consultant specializing in marketing communications. He can be reached at 905-846-2620 or [www.steveslaunwhite.com](http://www.steveslaunwhite.com).*



*"Whenever I'm dealing with the unfamiliar – and that seems to be happening more as new specialties emerge – Sources invariably puts me in touch with the people I need to speak with."*

William Shields,  
Editor Masthead magazine

## HotLink Resource Shelf

REVIEWED BY LYNN FENSKE

### The New PR Toolkit Strategies for Successful Media Relations

By Deirdre Breakenridge and  
Thomas J. DeLoughry  
Financial Times Prentice Hall,  
2003, 240 pp., \$38.99 Cdn.  
ISBN 0-13-009025-5

Do your PR strategies fully exploit the power of the Internet? Have you learned to cut through all the electronic noise and clutter to get your message to its rightful audience? If not, you need to read this book.

"The New PR Toolkit" provides relevant observations on how the Internet has revolutionized public relations by amplifying the public's demand for immediacy and 24/7 access to information. And while most PR professionals are able to work more efficiently and effectively because of the 'Net, not all of us have mastered the next-generation tools of our trade. Here's where this book comes to our rescue.

In the first 25 pages the authors identify the key considerations. Consider how E-mail challenges the traditional measurement markers of frequency and reach. Or how it has irreversibly extended our business day. Now the whole world can come at you from all directions with just the click of a mouse – any time of the day.

So what to do?

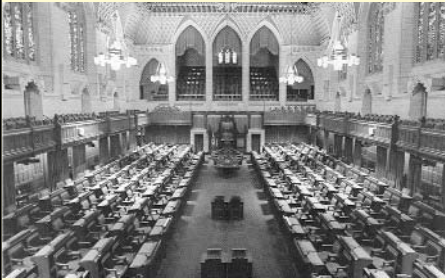
Retain all proven methods of researching your target audience and researching the media. Know what each wants. Know the latest audience trends. The book clearly outlines the basics. Follow the authors' principles and learn from the successes and failures of the specific campaigns they draw attention to. You'll get what you need to lay the groundwork, put the tools to work and protect your brand online.

As for what's in the toolkit – the authors teach you how to master online newsrooms, E-mail, E-newsletters and Webcasts to your best advantage.

For anyone in marketing communications, I recommend you read this book and keep it handy for quick reference. Don't be shy about doing so. Even the most seasoned PR professional can benefit from the advice provided within.

*Lynn Fenske is a copywriter and communications strategist specializing in public and media relations. She can be reached at (416) 232-0652 or [lynnfenske@sympatico.ca](mailto:lynnfenske@sympatico.ca).*

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## Media Relations — Behaviours Unbecoming

Communications consultant Barbara Florio Graham provides us with an excerpt from her book, “Five Fast Steps to Low-Cost Publicity” (available from the author at her web site [www.simonteakettle.com](http://www.simonteakettle.com)) that highlights what not to do when dealing with the media. Collected over the years at Canada’s National Press Club in Ottawa, here’s Barbara’s compilation of media relations behaviours to be avoided:

- ◆ the news release on an important issue which arrives just before deadline
- ◆ any print information without the complete name, title (if appropriate) and telephone number of a contact person
- ◆ the contact person who is unavailable when telephoned
- ◆ telephone calls which are not returned promptly
- ◆ contacts who telephone at inappropriate times, and don’t bother to ask if it’s a good time to call
- ◆ telephone callers who don’t get immediately to the point
- ◆ contacts who think they can dictate (or even suggest) which reporter should cover the story, how it should be treated, the length, placement, etc.
- ◆ information which doesn’t check out
- ◆ gaps in background information, which are not immediately apparent because too much extraneous information was provided, or because it is not organized efficiently
- ◆ the subject of an interview who asks to see the story before it goes to print
- ◆ the interview subject who insists upon changing the wording of a quote when you call to check
- ◆ the interview subject who decides, after the interview, that most of the discussion is off the record
- ◆ telephone calls complaining about story placement, angle, etc.
- ◆ complaints concerning errors of fact, made to superiors instead of to the reporter, or complaints to the reporter about tiny, insignificant “errors”
- ◆ compliments to everyone except the reporter involved (the best compliment is a Letter to the Editor, with a copy to the reporter)
- ◆ the nervous interview subject who waves back and forth in front of the microphone (whether on radio or TV), or who touches the microphone and/or cord
- ◆ the apparently glib interview subject who suddenly freezes in front of the microphone
- ◆ someone who smokes, coughs, or giggles on air
- ◆ the person who tries to influence the reporter by bragging about his or her contacts in the community, on the paper, or elsewhere
- ◆ the academic, artist, or executive who treats reporters as unfortunate, working class, under-educated slobs
- ◆ the individual who asks for tear sheets, copies of audio or video tapes
- ◆ the person who attempts to buy favors with lunch, booze, etc.
- ◆ the interview subject who decides that, on the basis of a couple of meetings, the reporter is now a personal friend, who can be introduced to others on a first-name basis
- ◆ the individual who gives someone else a reporter’s home telephone number without first asking for permission



*Barbara Florio Graham is a writer, teacher and communications consultant whose clients have included 14 Canadian government departments, 12 national and international organizations, 14 regional organizations, as well as many corporate and business clients. She can be reached via E-mail at [www.simonteakettle.com](http://www.simonteakettle.com).*

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