

Media relations: What lawyers need to know to succeed

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

September 2006

Media relations – most lawyers would prefer to have anything but relations with the media. If that is the case for you, maybe you are not seeing it for the opportunities it can present. And, if you are contributing articles to industry and business publications, then you are already engaged in one action of a media relations strategy.

Media relations: media = a means of mass communications and relations = a logical or natural association between two or more things. (www.dictionary.com) Together, media relations is the relationship you create with people who have the ability to communicate to others on a mass level. It looks like this: the job of the media is to deliver the news. Your story is news – so there is the logical or natural association. Why couldn't you want to have your story communicated on a mass level? Let's look at why you should.

The opportunities:

- Raise your profile.
- Be the source the media goes to in your practice area.
- Support your other business development efforts and attract new clients to your practice.
- Instill further confidence in your current clients.
- Influence public opinion about you and your practice.

Raising your profile increases your credibility. You know what that is worth. Being the source the media goes to means that they come to you first when they need thought, opinion or technical assistance in your area of expertise.

It gets your name out there. Your target audience will come to know you as the expert you are in your practice area. New clients will follow. Your current clients will feel more confident in their decision to retain your

services. Influencing public opinion means the public is talking about you which will support all of the above. And ... all of the above will contribute to your overall business development plan and help you attract more business to your practice. These are just a few of the opportunities available to you as a lawyer when you develop and execute a media relations strategy.

OK, so at this point, you might be thinking these are good outcomes – your practice could use them. So now what ... how do you create a media relations strategy? How do you get started?

How to create a media relations strategy:

- Understand your firm's media relations policy.
- Work within it.
- Have a clear understanding of your target audience.
- Develop a list of the media sources that reach your audience.



Gary Mitchell

GEM Communications Inc.

Suite 675

142-757 West Hastings St.

Vancouver, BC

V6C 1A1

(604) 669-5235

www.gemcommunications.ca

©2007 GEM Communications Inc.

Raising your profile increases your credibility. You know what that's worth.

Media relations: What lawyers need to know to succeed

- Prioritize your list based on the percentage of your target audience they reach.
- Understand how each media source operates, (style, tone, approach, slant if any).
- Develop your news idea for each source.
- Take media training from a professional.
- Communicate regularly with each source.
- Do not communicate unless your news is 'newsworthy'.

If you are at a firm, understand your firm's media relations policy by connecting with your firm's marketing person, whether that is the administrator, marketing manager or director. Work with that person to make sure your goals are aligned with the overall goals of your firm and that they don't encroach on any of the other lawyers at your firm.

Evaluate who you are looking to target for business – your audience. Are they corporate, institutional, government, not-for profit, and which specific industries and/or departments?

Research the media sources that target your audience. Decide on the top three to five sources that reach the maximum number of potential new clients. Get copies of their publications, read the articles and stories, watch and listen to radio and TV to learn more about the style and personalities of the journalists, reporters and editors. Based on your current cases, decide where you will get the maximum impact. Hire a professional media trainer before approaching any media. Offer to provide thoughtful articles to targeted publications on a regular basis. Send out news releases regularly to your targeted list of sources and follow up by e-mail and phone to offer further information and/or to schedule interviews.

And lastly, do not send out releases just for the sake of it. Look at the story from the media's point of view – is it interesting? Will it help to sell the publication or add value to the source?

Now this may seem overwhelming; it's not. With just a few simple, planned tactics, you will start to see a great improvement in your ROI for your business development

efforts. You know the market is competitive. You know you need to bring on new clients. The bottom line is that you as the individual lawyer can and should be taking the initiative to create a media relations strategy of your own.

Don't wait for your marketing department, or think it's only their job to do this for your firm. This is your practice. This is your business. If there is a marketing person at your firm, they will be thrilled to get you started. In fact they will bend over backwards to help you because they truly understand how valuable and cost effective media relations can be as a business development tactic. And if you are in a solo practice there is no shortage of qualified consultants to assist you.

Do your research, create a plan, execute it and enjoy the rewards. Where can you get help? If you're not already a member of the Legal Marketing Association, I highly recommend you join it. Visit www.legalmarketing.org for more information.

This article first appeared in the September 8, 2006 issue of The Lawyer's Weekly.

Gary Mitchell is the managing director of GEM Communications Inc. a firm specialized in marketing, business development, management training and implementation for law firms. He serves on the board of directors for the Legal Marketing Association, Vancouver Chapter as the chair of the marketing and media committee. Gary can be reached at gary@gemcommunications.ca

