

How to follow up without being annoying

Get your great stories off journalists' back burner
and onto the home page



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Introduction

So there you are, with your perfectly crafted pitch, to your perfectly targeted journalist, about your perfectly brainstormed story angle. You hit send and do a victory dance right there at your desk. Congrats!

Now, I'm not trying to kill the music at your dance party, but statistically speaking, none of that hard work will matter if you don't take one last step. And that is follow-up.

A pitch that doesn't require follow-up is like a journalist that doesn't require caffeine—extremely rare. Even the very best stories often get missed, ignored, or put on the back burner.

If you're not following up, and following up effectively, you're leaving placements on the table. According to the dozens of top pitching pros I've discussed this with, the difference between follow-up and no follow-up is an **80%** increase in coverage.

If it's that critical to success, why do so many PR pros skip this step? Because we collectively loathe follow-up with the fire of a thousand suns.

But not you—by the time you finish this ebook, you'll have renewed enthusiasm to help journalists avoid missing the great stories you have to offer.

Witnessing that newfound confidence in previously battle-weary PR pros is why I do what I do. I'm Michael Smart, and my job is training PR people at organizations like Zillow, Ally, and UCLA how to pitch better. I teamed up with Muck Rack because we share a fascination with octopi and a passion for helping PR pros land more placements.

So let's jump in and learn how to get your stories off journalists' back burners and onto the home page.

Michael Smart

CEO, MICHAEL SMARTPR



Pushing a story across the finish line

Follow-up can be like a race where the finish line keeps changing. You think you're there, but somehow you haven't quite made it. What do you do in those situations? You keep running.

Janie Gianotsos was cold pitching an Insider writer to establish a connection with leaders of the VC firm she repped. Her first pitch went out on December 2nd, and the journalist replied the same day with "I'd be happy to connect with one of the partners..." Great start, right? The finish line feels so close after a response like that.

Janie replied with potential days for an introductory call. No response. Three days later she sent this follow-up email:

The image shows a screenshot of an email interface. The subject line is "Re: Connect with [client VC firm]?". The email body starts with "Good morning, [writer],". The main text says: "I'm sending a friendly reminder to see if we can get a meeting time set for your interview with [exec], Partner and Head of the US at [client], for either this Thursday or Friday. Her schedule will start to fill up, so I'd love to get this on everyone's calendars today if possible." The email ends with "Thanks so much," and "Janie". On the left side, there are two purple callout boxes. The top one is labeled "Pleasant persistence" and has a dotted arrow pointing to the phrase "friendly reminder". The bottom one is labeled "Reason for urgency" and has a dotted arrow pointing to the phrase "Her schedule will start to fill up".

You can see her pleasantly persistent greeting, and her reason for urgency, which was that her executive's calendar was filling up. Turns out this email wasn't enough—still no response from the journalist.

Would you have stopped after two follow-ups? If so, you would've missed out. Janie sent a third follow-up, asking if the writer was still interested, and that resulted in an introductory Zoom on December, 15th.

After the holidays, Janie pitched a new story idea. That didn't go anywhere. But then in March, the journalist reached back out with an angle in mind, wanting to talk about female VCs. At this point Janie can practically see the finish line. But even after doing another call, there was no movement.

Janie could have quit here and said, "I've run enough." Instead she suggested an additional third-party source to support the journalist's angle. A week later, all the outreach paid off. The journalist asked for one more chat and for a headshot, which is always a good sign, and the next day the story went live.

Sometimes, this is what it takes to get the placements you want.



If that example gets you pumped, read on for how you can master the art of follow-up.

You have more to offer than you might think

Mastering follow-up starts with understanding how awesome you are. Many PR pros don't get this.

I asked 20 successful PR pros, "When you think of following up on media pitches, what's the first, most visceral thought or feeling that comes to mind?" Here are some responses:

- "Dread and doom"
- "Please don't hate me"
- "I don't want them to think I'm pestering them"
- "Ugh, obnoxious follow-up"
- "How can I not be annoying?"

I get it. I am an extrovert who attended seventh grade in the United States of America, so I am an expert on trying WAY too hard NOT to be annoying.

Do these reactions resonate with you? This seems to be a universal feeling. And it's universally limiting your success.

But it doesn't have to be that way. There's a way to eliminate those negative emotional feelings *and* improve your response rate.

Sound too good to be true? It's not. But there is a catch. You've got to forget everything you thought you knew about the PR/journalism relationship.

Okay, *everything* may be an exaggeration. Let's start with the way you see yourself. If you're not convinced you have something valuable to offer journalists, they won't believe that either. If you're terrified to follow up, journalists will smell fear dripping from your email. If your insecurity comes across in your tone and word choice, you create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Like the PR people who pitched these journalists.



*Michael Smart at age 12—
socially bruised but not defeated*



Jeff Bogle
@OWTK

The truest opening sentence in PR pitch email history:
"My constant follow-up might be irritating, but..."



Robin Wauters @ Tech.eu 
@robinwauters

"Sorry for being a pain" is not the greatest way to start when (re)sending your PR pitch

You're so worried about annoying the journalist, you use language that acknowledges you might be annoying...and you *become* annoying.

Instead of stressing about bothering someone, recognize that you're *helping*. By aggressively following up you're delivering value to the journalist. It's their *job* to uncover useful or interesting sources and information, and you are helping them do that.

Your success is theirs and theirs is yours. Successful PR pros think that way. Here are some additional responses I got to my question about how the words "follow up" make PR pros feel:

- "The value I offer."
- "They need to know this story."
- "A chance to stand out."
- "I get excited."

I love the last one. The physiological response to fear is nearly identical to that of excitement. So, try some rebranding. The next time you open your email and your palms start sweating and your heart starts pounding, tell yourself how excited you are to stand out to this journalist. Let that excitement come out on the page.

Don't apologize. Don't acknowledge being a pest or annoying. Instead, imagine how pleased your reporter's going to be when they get this email. Imagine the look on their face when they realize the assets you are offering are exactly what they need.

Imagine that journalist being so excited to get your follow-up email that they actually apologize for not getting back to you before. Does that seem far-fetched? It's not, and I've got the screenshots to prove it.

These journalists are apologizing for not responding sooner:

My apologies! This week turned out to be a whirlwind.

Sorry I lost the thread on this... (I am so bad at email.)

Sorry I haven't gotten back to you. Just been slammed and this week is no different. Maybe we can set something up for the following week?

If you hold the common assumption that journalists hate follow-up, you may need a minute to pick your jaw up off the floor. From my decades of work in media relations, I know that assumption is false. And the journalists themselves are my sources.

What we learn from journalists' complaints

Let's take a look at what journalists reveal when they complain about follow-up. If you can get past the sarcasm and disdain, it's actually pretty encouraging!



Jessica Hullinger ✓
@JessHullinger



Dear Jessica, Sorry to follow up, but I'm emailing you to follow up on the unsolicited PR pitch I sent you that has nothing to do with anything you cover. I look forward to hearing from you.



Jessica Huseman ✓
@JessicaHuseman



Dear Jessica,

Just following up on the three emails I've sent about a topic you don't remotely cover. Would you like to schedule a time to have coffee in the middle of election season? We are such fans of your work on this subject, on which you've never written.

-PR Person

I know these look bad at first glance, but when you look closer, you'll find something liberating.

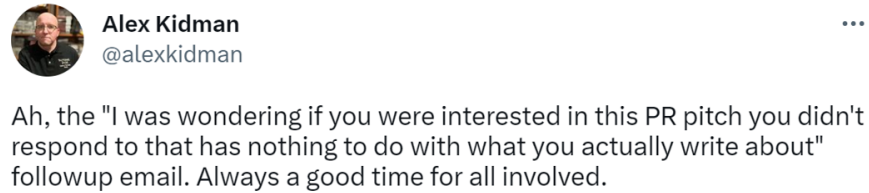
Let me illustrate this with an example. I have a coworker who hates shrimp. Years ago she ate shrimp tacos from a street vendor and spent the next 24 hours emptying the contents of her stomach and cursing "those tiny pink demons." It was not an experience she was eager to repeat. After a fair amount of persuading I managed to convince her to try the shrimp alfredo at a new restaurant. She tried it and loved it, and felt great afterward. Turns out she doesn't hate shrimp, she just hates *bad* shrimp.

Journalists don't actually hate follow-up, they hate *bad* follow-up. When you send a *good* follow-up email, the kind that doesn't make them nauseous, they appreciate it.

So let's talk about avoiding the PR equivalent of spoiled shrimp.

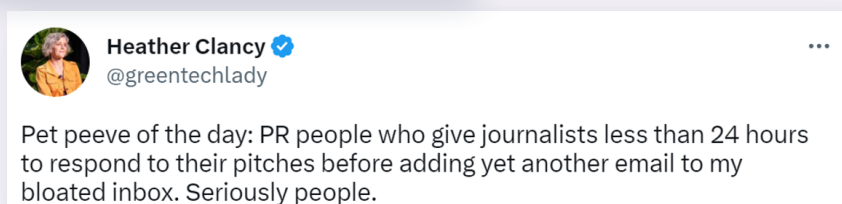
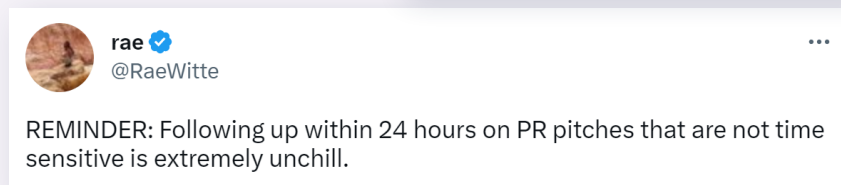
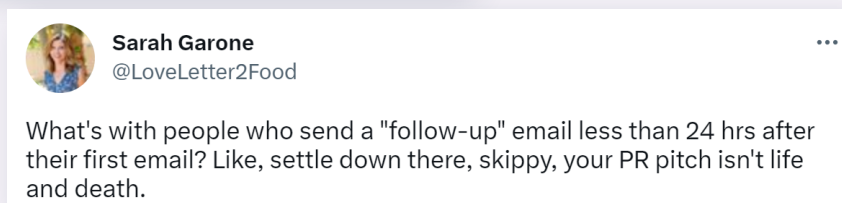
Things to avoid when following up

The first is following up on pitches for topics they don't cover.



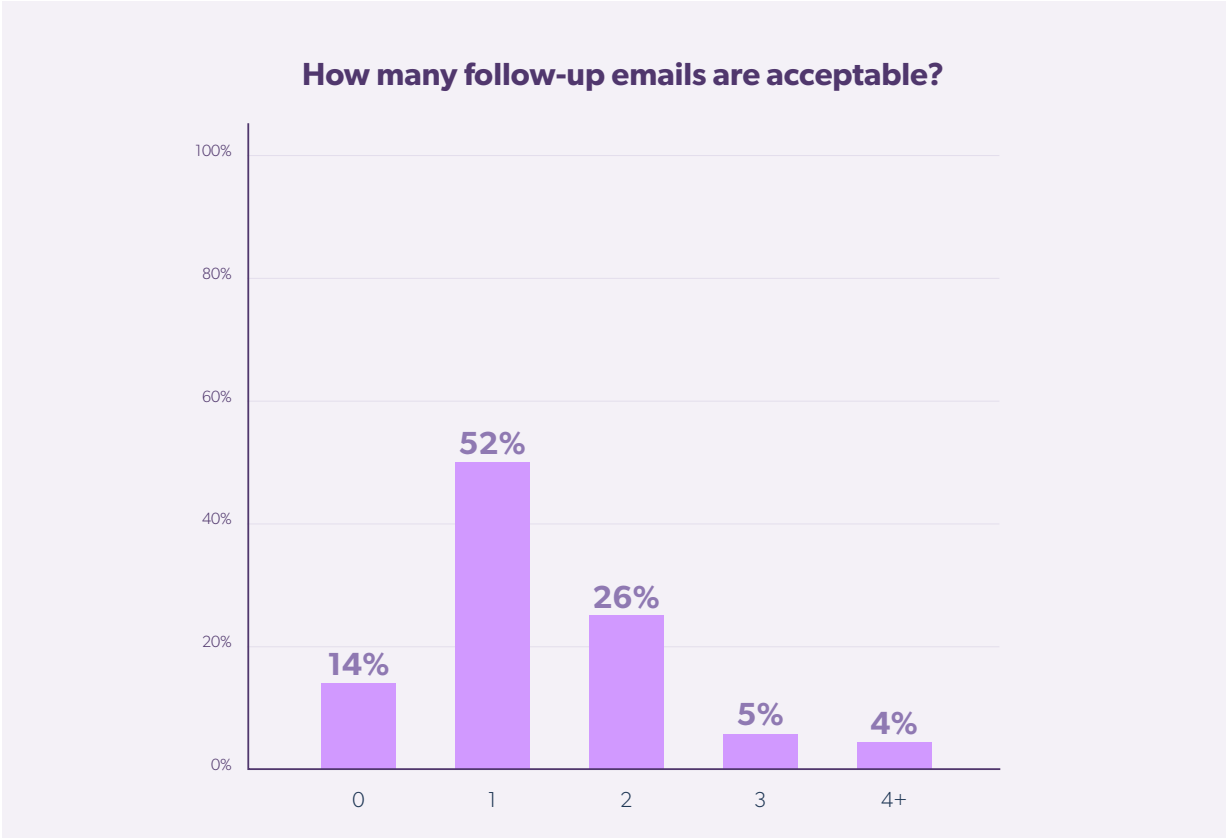
When you pitch things they actually cover and follow up when they miss it, they rarely complain—doesn't mean they always cover the story, but they rarely complain.

The next thing journalists hate about follow-up is pretty subtle, not sure if you can catch it from these posts:



Okay, journalists, we get it, don't follow-up within 24 hours. Does that mean journalists are okay with us following up *after* 24 hours? Yes!

How did we get that juicy bit of information? Well, it involved me dressing as James Bond and sneaking into the World Journalist Conference...Okay, fine, Muck Rack just asked them. Every year Muck Rack surveys thousands of journalists about their preferences regarding PR people.



You can see that nearly **86%** of journalists think that at least one follow-up email is appropriate, with 35% accepting even more than one!

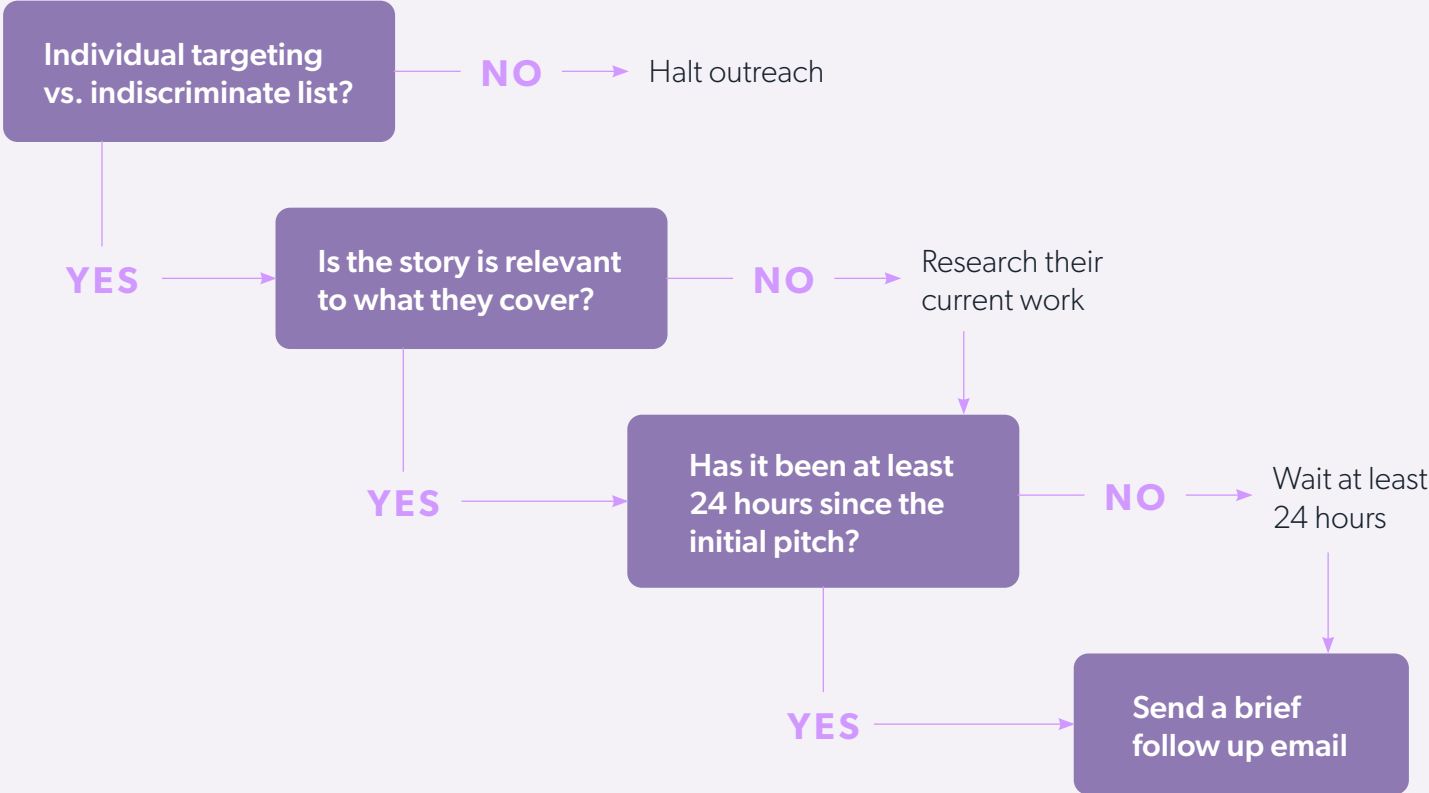
Keep in mind, when journalists are answering surveys like this, they're thinking mostly of the smelly, bad-shrimp, follow-up they get, like what was highlighted in those posts. When you apply the proven methods we'll show you, and serve up fresh and delicious pitches, journalists' receptiveness will be even higher.

Foolproof Follow-up Flowchart

Armed with the understanding that journalists are open to *good* follow-up, let's look at what makes follow-up good. A lot of it comes down to *when* and *how* you do it. I created this Foolproof Follow-Up Flowchart to take out the guesswork. And also because I love alliteration.

When you've sent your initial pitch and there's no response, when is it okay to follow up?

No response to initial pitch—okay to follow up?



First question to ask: did you target the journalist individually instead of blasting out the pitch to an indiscriminate list? If no, then halt your outreach. You can't go any further or you'll end up a subject of one of those X posts (and possibly make the journalist puke).

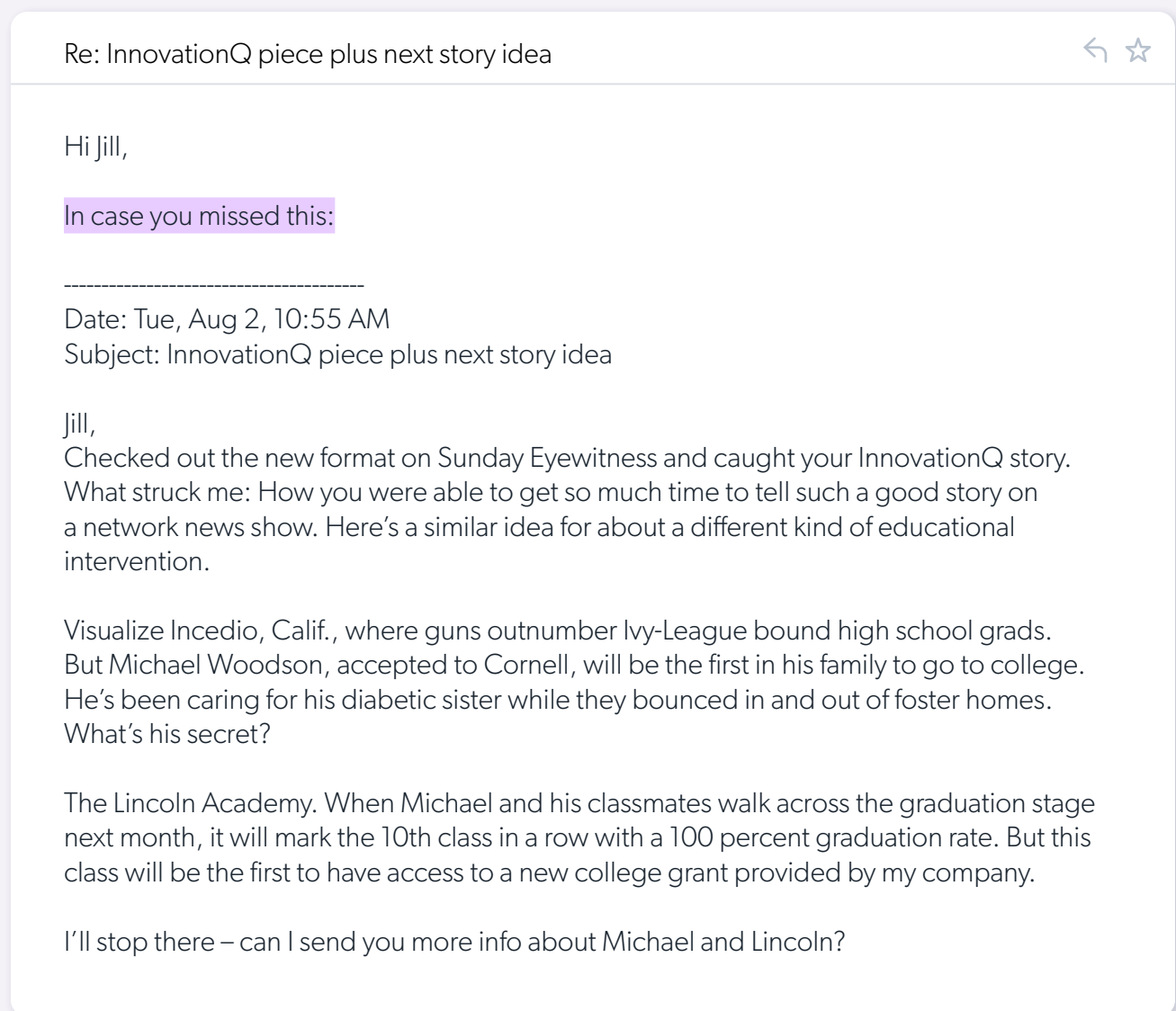
If you *did* target it individually, then ask, "Am I sure the story is relevant to what they cover?" If it's not, research their current work and try to find a way to make it relevant. This next part should be obvious, but just to be extremely clear—***if your story isn't relevant, and you can't make it relevant, don't send it!***

If it is relevant, has it been at least 24 hours since the initial pitch? If not, wait that out. If yes, go ahead and send a brief follow-up email.

Sending your first follow-up email

Do you feel that excitement leaking out of your palms and causing your heart to race? It's follow-up time! Don't let those fearful, limiting thoughts creep back in and thwart you. Hit reply to the initial email and add a one-liner at the top.

Simplicity is key. A first follow-up can be like those seemingly simple paintings you see in museums that sell for millions. And a seemingly simple one-liner like this one has propelled countless stories to coverage:



It resurfaces the initial email in a non-threatening way that feels natural.

There are several different phrases you can use, but there is one you should *never* use. See if you can guess it from these posts.

A screenshot of a tweet from Sarah Bahr (@smbahr14), a verified user. The tweet text is: "Phrases not to use in a PR pitch if you don't want to irritate a journalist: *\"Hi Maria,\" (Unless their name is Maria) *\"Following up again\" (for the fifth time)".

A screenshot of a tweet from Taylor Davies (@shutupilovethat). The tweet text is: "Putting FOLLOWING UP in all caps in your PR pitch email subject does not, in fact, make me want to follow up."

If you guessed the phrase “follow up,” you are correct. Using the words “follow up” is like telling someone to calm down. It doesn’t work and now they’re annoyed with you.

Once you’ve got your phrase to remind them of your original pitch, hit send. Sometimes that’s all that it takes to go from no reply to awesome coverage.

And sometimes it takes more than that. Which is why we’ve got a plan for...

Sending your second follow-up email

Maybe the journalist missed your second email. Or maybe they’re like me at the art museum and have no appreciation for a true masterpiece. That’s okay. Here’s how to build your second follow-up.

It's time to move past the "making sure you saw this" phase and into the "here's more value" phase. Give the journalist you're pitching something they don't have yet. Here are some great options:

- Video
- Photo
- Extra stats
- Different sources
- Updated news
- Urgency buttons (details on this coming soon)
- ~~Tickets to the Super Bowl~~ Journalists do not like bribery

Here's what this might look like:

Re: InnovationQ piece plus next story idea



Hi Jill,

I just got this video of Michael and his diabetic sister (see below for background). There's an especially sweet moment at 1:37.

Would you like to talk to them? Or can I send you any more info?

Date: Tue, Aug 2, 10:55 AM

Subject: InnovationQ piece plus next story idea

Jill,

Checked out the new format on Sunday Eyewitness and caught your InnovationQ story. What struck me: How you were able to get so much time to tell such a good story on a network news show. Here's a similar idea for about a different kind of educational intervention.

Visualize Incedio, Calif., where guns outnumber Ivy-League bound high school grads. But Michael Woodson, accepted to Cornell, will be the first in his family to go to college. He's been caring for his diabetic sister while they bounced in and out of foster homes. What's his secret?

The Lincoln Academy. When Michael and his classmates walk across the graduation stage next month, it will mark the 10th class in a row with a 100 percent graduation rate. But this class will be the first to have access to a new college grant provided by my company.

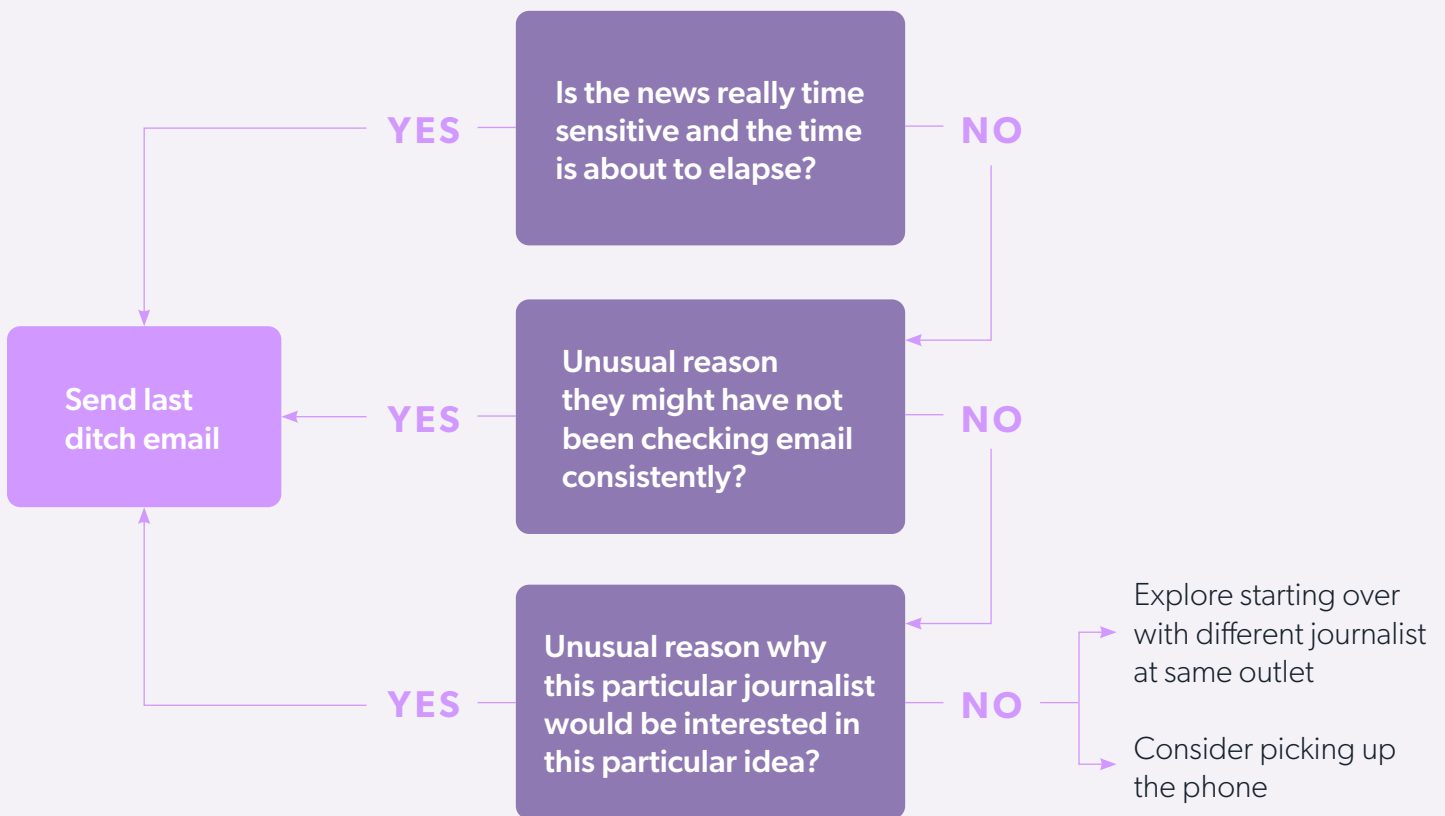
I'll stop there – can I send you more info about Michael and Lincoln?

Do you see how brief this is? No re-introducing the subject matter, or explaining that she's following up. She jumps right into adding value.

A third follow up? Really??

Now at this point, I'm liking your odds. But let's say you don't hear back from your second follow up. Is it ever okay to send a third follow up? That's four unanswered emails. We're getting into bad shrimp territory here, but there are some *rare* cases where a third follow-up is warranted. Let's look at our flowchart to find out what those are.

Is it ever okay to send a fourth email?



Is the news time-sensitive, and that time's about to elapse? If yes, by all means, send a last-ditch email.

If no, ask, "Is there any unusual reason they might not be checking email consistently?" Maybe you originally got their out-of-office, or you can tell they've been tied up in an ongoing story. If the answer to that is yes *and* that time has elapsed, then go ahead and send a final email.

If there's not a clear indicator that something is keeping them from getting back to you, you'll need a specific reason why this particular journalist would be interested in this particular story. It can't be merely relevant to them, it must be uniquely suited to this individual to justify one last-ditch email.

If that's not the case, consider starting over with a different journalist at the same outlet, or picking up the phone.

Yeah, I said it, *phone*. I know there are A LOT of feelings about phone pitching that would require an entire additional ebook to assuage, so I'm going to leave it there and focus on email.

How do you send a last-ditch email that doesn't sound desperate and smell like old seafood?

There are some key ingredients that will make this last-ditch pitch delicious.

1. Be transparent about this being repetitive and final.
2. Acknowledge how busy they are, and show some empathy.
3. Briefly explain why you feel so strongly about this story that you're reaching out one more time.
4. Remember your manners. Keep it respectful to preserve your relationship.

Here's an example of how to word this:

Re: InnovationQ piece plus next story idea



Hi Jill,

I'm writing one last time because I know what you cover and believe this story idea is a legit candidate. I've seen how many pieces you've published over the last week and know you're super busy, so maybe you missed this. If you've seen it and you're not interested, no worries.

Thanks for your consideration.

Date: Tue, Aug 2, 10:55 AM

Subject: InnovationQ piece plus next story idea

Jill,

Checked out the new format on Sunday Eyewitness and caught your InnovationQ story. What struck me: How you were able to get so much time to tell such a good story on a network news show. Here's a similar idea for about a different kind of educational intervention.

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The Lincoln Academy. When Michael and his classmates walk across the graduation stage next month, it will mark the 10th class in a row with a 100 percent graduation rate. But this class will be the first to have access to a new college grant provided by my company.

I'll stop there – can I send you more info about Michael and Lincoln?

And here's an example of this principle in action, courtesy of Erynn Kerrigan. She was swinging for the fences pitching her client as a company profile to the Washington Post.

She sent the first email March 14th, didn't hear back, and got busy with other things. A couple months later she tried a different version of that original pitch. This time she was more deliberate with her follow-up. The next day she did the one-sentence forward: "Didn't want this to get lost in the shuffle." Still no reply. For her fourth email overall, four days later, she added some value by giving a local media story as a proof point. Still no reply. Two days later she adds additional value with yet another success story and some additional stats from the client. And finally, the journalist replies, "Yes, I would like to."

And a week later, the story runs: a company profile in the Washington Post. After no replies to the first four emails, Erin sealed the deal with email five.



A note on using ChatGPT to craft follow up pitches

If journalists are annoyed by follow-up emails now, that feeling is only going to grow as lazy PR pros flood their inboxes with bad AI-generated follow-up.

It's not that ChatGPT can't help with follow up. But there are things ChatGPT does well on the first try, and things that require more work to get right.

Things ChatGPT does well:

- Creating rough drafts of commodity content, like routine internal newsletter items
- Brainstorming story angles that tie into a particular news story
- Writing sonnets about slow-cooked brisket

Things ChatGPT needs help with:

- Writing long-form articles requiring high subject matter expertise
- Identifying that one song from the 70s by those guys with the long hair
- Drafting follow up emails

Remember, when you're using ChatGPT for any type of pitch writing, it is a great tool to suggest alternative and refined phrasing, but it doesn't yet know the substance, style and tone that journalists need. You do. Use ChatGPT as a brainstorming tool, not a crutch. Always review and edit the output of ChatGPT carefully.

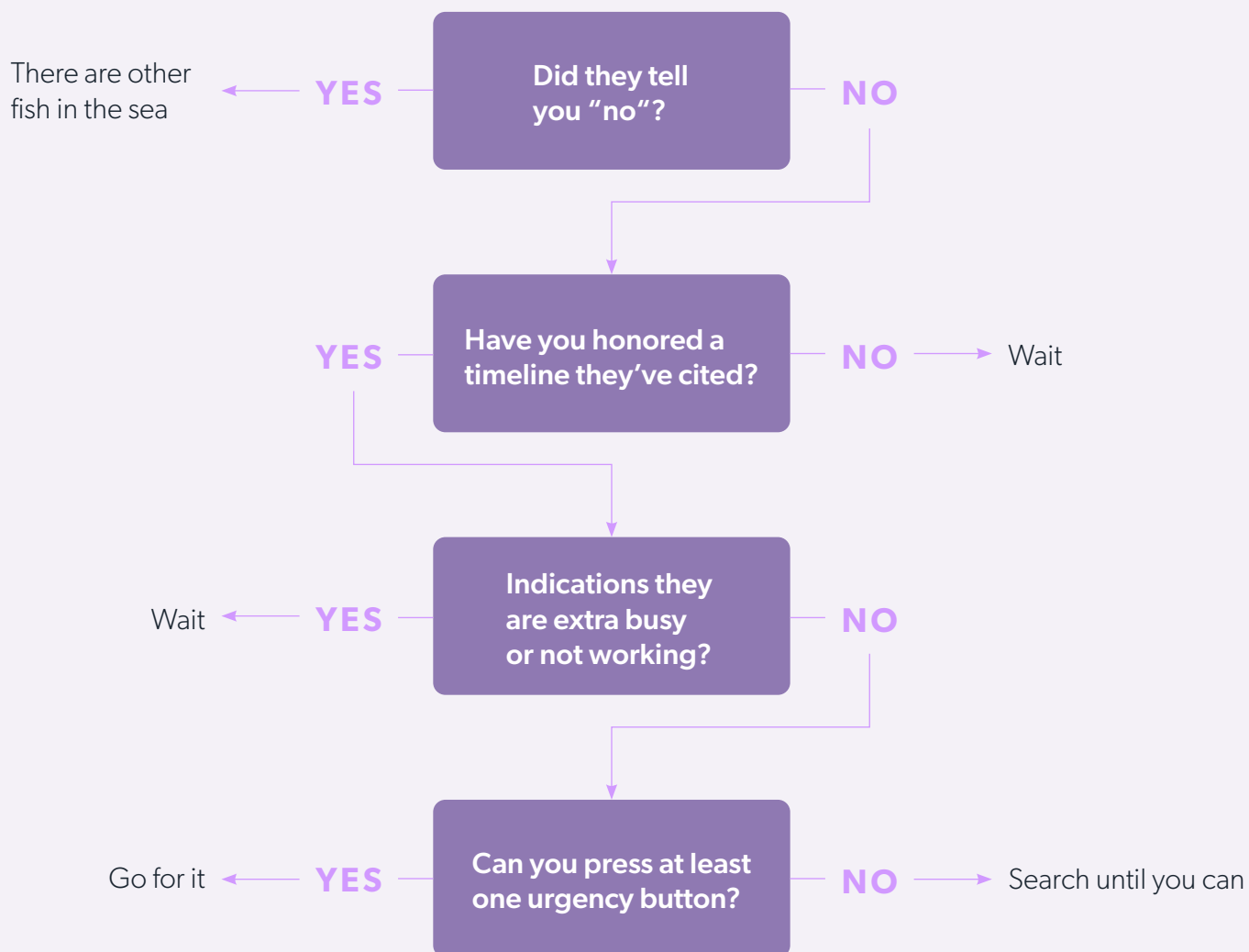


“Urgency buttons” to press when initially receptive journo goes dark

Have you ever had a first date you thought went great, but then you never heard from the person again? You probably weren't looking for dating advice here, which is good, because I have neither the space nor the expertise to advise you on that situation.

But I *can* help you with the journalist equivalent. What should you do when there's radio silence after an initially warm reception? Let's go back to the flow chart and find out!

When formerly receptive journalist goes quiet—can you still follow up?



First, did they tell you no? If so, don't cling or pine or mope. Just move on to another journalist.

If they didn't tell you no, but they stopped responding, did they mention a timeline that could explain this? Maybe they said, "I'm really busy for the next couple weeks," or, "I'm swamped until the election." If that's the case, wait it out. If you are past that time frame, move on to the next question.

Are there any indications they're not working? I'm surprised how many PR pros don't pay attention when they get an out-of-office from a journalist. If there are such indications, wait it out.

If not, it's time to press an urgency button. What is an urgency button? I'm so glad you asked.

Do you remember in elementary school when cutting in line was the worst offense imaginable? We were trained to wait our turn, and expected those who showed up behind us to wait their turn. I'm sorry to tell you, but when it comes to pitching, everything you learned about waiting your turn was a dastardly web of lies. This is not an orderly, first-come-first-served system. Imagine instead a teacher who chooses the student with the yummiest snacks in their lunch box, and lets them go to the front of the line.

Let's look at some urgency buttons you can push to entice a reporter who liked your story to move it to the front of *their* line.

URGENCY BUTTON

Source availability is changing

Teri Bond was pitching an upcoming art exhibit to the LA Times. Her initial pitch went out at the end of June and she got a vacation autoreply. She waited out the stated duration and then added on a buffer to let the journalist dig out after they got back. Then she sent this follow-up:

Studio visit re: female architect injustice



Hi [LA Times arts writer],

Hope you feel rested and revitalized after your vacation.

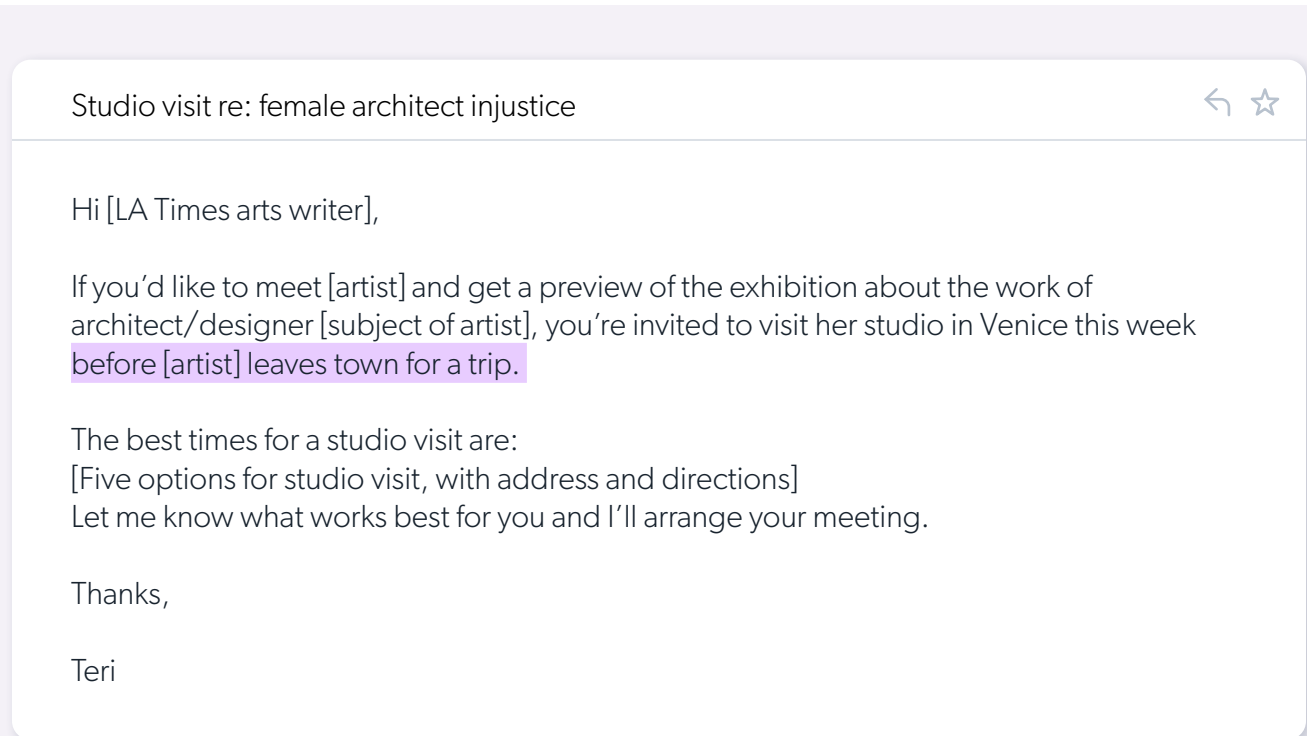
You are invited to meet [artist] and visit her studio in Venice next week, August 2-5 if you'd like. Please let Julie, copied here, know what day and time works best and she'll coordinate the details. I'm still on vacation myself.

Again, the exhibition opens September 23 and is set to be installed by September 17.

Cheers,
Teri

Notice the tone of the email is friendly and confident. “You’re invited...” No apology for following up. It’s as if Teri is thinking, “Of course you’re going to want to meet with this artist.”

There was no response. So she sent another follow-up, her third email, a week later. And this is when she pressed the urgency button of source availability.



Pointing out that the artist was about to leave town prompted a reply from the journalist. They responded: “Sorry, I lost the thread on this. I am interested in the project. Let’s set up something when [artist] gets back.”

And that resulted in a big ol’ feature in the LA Times. I’m guessing Teri’s bosses and the artist are feeling grateful that they have a PR pro on their side who’s tactful but relentless, who’s not going to stop after two unreturned emails. Wouldn’t it be great if your boss felt that way about you?

URGENCY BUTTON

A new time element since your pitch

Most of your initial pitches will be tied to a particular time element. If that element passes with no coverage, or it wasn't enough to move the journalist to action, it's time to select another element that's upcoming.

We've got two powerful examples of this approach coming up, both courtesy of Jessica Krakoski.

For the first example, strap yourself in for an emotional roller coaster. After a great pitch, but no reply, Jessica sent a follow-up. This sparked a response from the journalist and they went back and forth asking and answering questions. And then finally...SUCCESS! Her client, the author of a book about environmental issues, was invited to the most listened-to public radio station in America, KQED in San Francisco.

They booked an in-studio interview for when he was going to be in town. Jessica did a victory dance around her office. And then...FAILURE! Some big stuff goes down in the world, and the journalist cancels the booking, citing a full news agenda, and promises to reach back out.

Anyone who has pitched media knows that promise—however sincerely made at the time—isn't going to happen. Jessica knows she's got to find an urgency button she can press to get this author back to the top of their busy news agenda. She bides her time, scanning the landscape for time elements that lend themselves to her author's expertise. She reaches out to the journalist and says, "How about reviving this, bringing him in on Earth Day?" He liked that idea, and after the initial apparent failure, Jessica swung the story back to success. The interview aired on Earth Day.

Another of Jessica's clients wrote a book about the rivalry between Amazon and WalMart. She approached a New York Times writer on May 3, pegging her pitch to the book's release later that month. He agreed to take a look at a PDF of the book.

A month later, she pinged him again, and he responded kindly: "thanks for the reminder."

It's great that he was being nice about it. But Jessica doesn't settle for merely nice—she wants to have cordial media relationships AND media coverage. So about three weeks later, she sent this email with an ingenious new time element:

Reconnecting re: books for your NYT column



Hi [NYT writer] – this is the last time I'll ping you about this book on Amazon and Walmart.

Next week, Amazon Prime Day and Walmart+ Week will run simultaneously – a good example of their 25-year-long rivalry and news peg for thinking about the economics of these sales, how Prime is core to Amazon's dominance, the recent FTC lawsuit against Amazon for its Prime practices, and what's in store with a larger antitrust suit from the FTC expected sometime this year.

Hi [NYT writer] – this is the last time I’ll ping you about this book on Amazon and Walmart.

Next week, Amazon Prime Day and Walmart+ Week will run simultaneously – a good example of their 25-year-long rivalry and news peg for thinking about the economics of these sales, how Prime is core to Amazon’s dominance, the recent FTC lawsuit against Amazon for its Prime practices, and what’s in store with a larger antitrust suit from the FTC expected sometime this year.

Thanks again for taking a look at this one and considering it for your column.

The writer responded: “That’s a good hook.” And he published a column about the book the following week. Isn’t it cool when all this hard work and smart follow-up comes together?

URGENCY BUTTON

Breaking news since your pitch

Maybe your source availability hasn’t changed, and there is no cool time element related to your pitch. Look to breaking news for your urgency button.

Here’s a great example: Let’s say you pitch a story about electric vehicle tech and the reporter expresses interest and then goes quiet. In the interim, the White House releases a budget forecast. Out of that info dump you manage to pull out the hidden gem that there will be more money for EVs. You flag that for your journalist and give them a reason to cover you now instead of later.

URGENCY BUTTON

Journalist published something new since your pitch

Let's go back to our analogy of moving to the front of the line based on the snacks in your lunchbox. Do you know a journalist's favorite snack? Something they wrote. Tying your follow-up to something the journalist has written since your original pitch can be an effective way to move to the front of the line.

Tori Simmons pitched her consulting client to Modern Retail and highlighted what they could talk about to the trade writer.

He replied, "Thanks so much, Tori, appreciate you reaching out. To be honest, I'm not seeing a direction to take with this client."

This is a good time to point out it's not the reporter's job to find out how *our* client ties into *their* news. That's our job. Two weeks after Tori got that response, she found the direction for him, based on something he'd just written.

re: Your story on Amazon's new engagement tool; Resource to discuss Amazon updates  

Hi [writer] -- I was reading this morning's Amazon Briefing and wanted to follow up on my note from a few weeks ago connecting you to [client] and provide more context on what the company can speak to.

As you mentioned in the Amazon Briefing this morning, everyone has their eye on the new pilot program from Amazon that allows sellers to directly communicate with their customers. [Client executive] has been working with their Amazon contact to get some further information on this program -- such as once the beta lifts, sellers who have a minimum of 1k followers will be able to qualify.

As a refresher, [re-introduces client]. I'd love to introduce you to [exec] who can discuss topics like:

[4 bullets on how this new feature will affect retailers]

Let me know if you're interested in connecting -- happy to set something up!

Tori

The trade reporter interviewed the client and published a story the next day.

Single biggest success differentiator

Now that you've learned the elusive skills of follow-up, are you ready for this knowledge bomb? The skills are not the most important part.

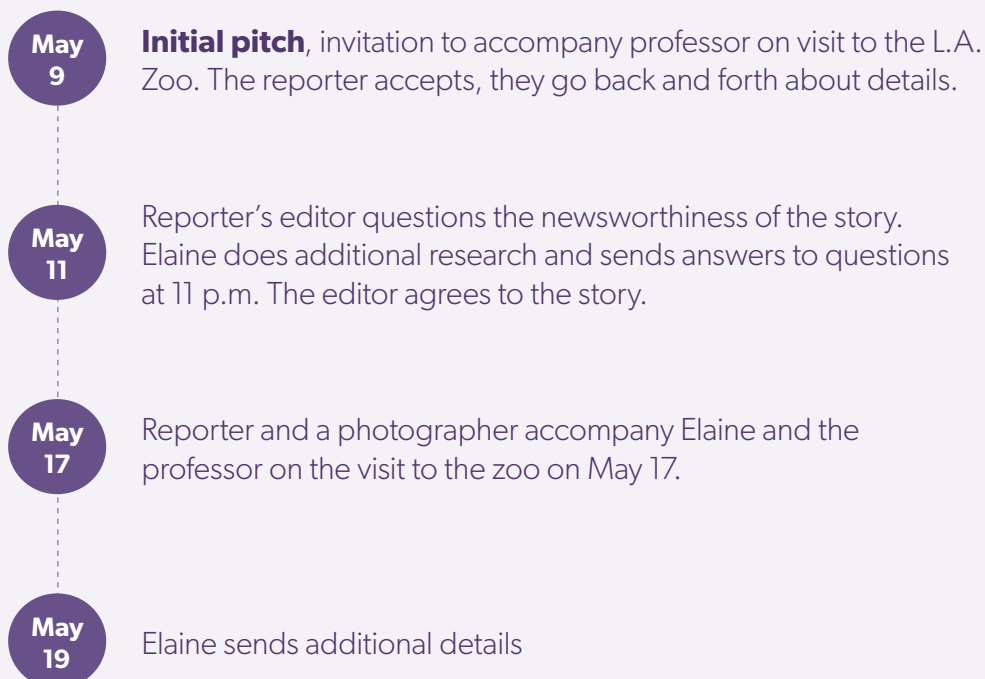
Don't get me wrong, you definitely need those skills to get coverage and keep from getting flamed on X. Those skills will put you ahead of the average pitching pro, but they aren't what will get you to the top.

In my 22 years of training 10,000+ PR pros how to boost their media placements, the single biggest differentiator that separates people who consistently land major media placements from everyone else is what I call **diplomatic tenacity**.

Here are two PR pros who embody diplomatic tenacity, and the results they generated from it.

Patience and persistence leads to LA Times front page

Elaine Schmidt represented a UCLA med school professor who studies the connections between animal and human health. She pitched an LA Times writer about a new research paper being published in a scientific journal. Here's the follow-up odyssey that resulted:



May
25

Elaine sends final version of the upcoming research paper, and asks, "Please keep me posted on the pub date of your article." Reporter replies that she has decided to turn the piece into an in-depth profile, hopefully for the front page.

June
6

Elaine emails some additional sources and asks, "We're very excited about your upcoming piece and want to amplify it appropriately. Do you have a sense of its publication timing?"

June
18

Elaine's email includes: "I'd like to pitch her to other outlets starting next month but want to respect the time and effort you've invested. Could you give me a sense of when you think your story might publish?"

Aug.
9

Elaine uses her return from vacation as a reason to ask for an update.

Aug.
29

Elaine emails congratulations to the reporter for a DIFFERENT front-page story, identifies a link between it and her client, and asks, "Could you please let me know whether her story is still in the hopper or has fallen off your radar?" Reporter replies that she's still working on it.

Sept.
7

Elaine emails referencing the reporter's X post about a power outage. She suggests additional info and offers to help with her client's story.

Sept.
9

Reporter sends fact-checking questions, which Elaine works with her client to answer.

Oct.
13

Feature profile runs on the front page, five months after the zoo trip!

Did you feel like pulling your hair out just reading through this timeline? Imagine how Elaine felt living it! And yet she responded with patience, persistence and professionalism. *That* is diplomatic tenacity. And some pretty good alliteration.

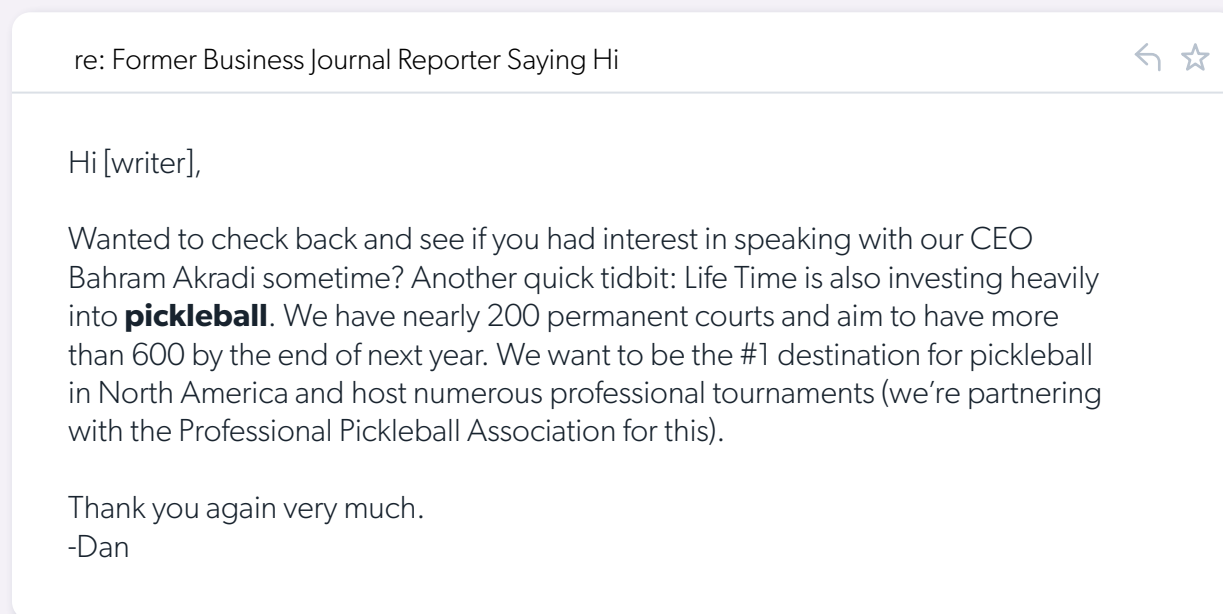
17-month journey to CEO Q&A in Fortune

You ready for more inspiration? Let me tell you about Dan DeBaun. He reps Life Time, the premium fitness brand, and he started pitching his CEO to Fortune in January of 2021.

The journalist responded to the original pitch with, “Hey, I’m slammed right now. Maybe revisit it in the next few weeks?” Dan replied right away and shared some additional proof points for the story angle.

He waited out the few weeks, then reached out again to cite another time element about an annual business milestone. And then a **year** passed. In that time Dan could have grown a beard, adopted a dog, and learned to play guitar, all without hearing back from the journalist. But Dan is tenacious. So he sent another email, making a personal connection, giving additional info, and closing with a clear call to action. Still nothing.

Five days later our determined PR pro played his ace in the hole: pickleball. This was a guess on his part, but he knew how the sport was skyrocketing in popularity. Here’s the brief email:



And that did the trick. It took 17 months and four emails after the reporter’s initial response, but Dan finally got the answer he was looking for. “Yes, there’s interest.”

A month later, he landed the CEO Q&A in Fortune. While pickleball was the angle that snagged the journalist’s attention, the profile also covered the business successes Dan had cited originally.

Final thought about diplomatic tenacity

You may have amazing writing skills. You may have an in-depth understanding of the media. But if you give up after two follow-ups, you'll never reach your potential.

Diplomatic tenacity is the ability to continue, persistently and professionally, even when you feel like giving up. When you combine this skill with the guidelines we've shared above, you become unstoppable.

Takeaways

Despite the nearly universal loathing by PR pros and journalists alike, follow up doesn't have to be this terrible, intimidating thing. Keep these takeaways in mind:

- 1. Be confident, not apologetic.**
- 2. Use the Foolproof Follow-up Flowchart—only follow up on relevant stories, at least 24 hours after the initial pitch.**
- 3. Start by forwarding the initial pitch along with a one-sentence gentle reminder. After that, add value with each subsequent email.**
- 4. When a receptive journalist goes dark, use an Urgency Button to move your story to the front of the line.**
- 5. Remember that diplomatic tenacity is the single biggest differentiator between average and top media relations performers.**



About the Author

Michael Smart is the media relations coach and trainer brands and agencies turn to when they want to improve their media pitching results. He's trained more than 10,000 communicators from teams at Zillow, Ally, Lowe's, Aflac, St. Jude Children's Hospital and other companies of all sizes. He's the instructor for Muck Rack Academy's free online certification, **Fundamentals of Media Relations**. Take the quick, fun course to dig deeper into more pitching lessons.

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**.