

# How to: get noticed by journalists

Lessons for companies and PRs in engaging with and getting themselves noticed by journalists

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A study published in April by the Financial Times and web effectiveness experts Bowen Craggs & Co found that many corporate websites are failing when it comes to making information easily accessible to journalists.

The [FT Index 2011 report](#) suggested the reason companies and PRs often struggle to engage with journalists in the digital era is often down to the fact many press officers and communications advisers are former journalists who left the industry before the advent of online and social media.

This guide is intended to help PRs, press officers and companies large and small get noticed by journalists. It includes lessons learnt in the study and tips from David Bowen (pictured), a former journalist who is now a senior consultant at Bowen Craggs & Co advising companies, including several multinationals, on their online communications.

## **1. Do not always give the journalist the story on a plate**

Journalists do not want to write the same story as their rivals.

Give them a ready-made story, and they will either ignore it, or look for a way to put a different twist on it (not necessarily in the company's favour) *FT Index 2011*

"Most journalists want to have some sort of edge over their competition," David Bowen told [Journalism.co.uk](#).

"There's a certain sort of journalist that will pick stuff up and run with it but most want to have an advantage over everybody else."

The advice from the study is: "Give them a ready-made story, and they will either ignore it, or look for a way to put a different twist on it (not necessarily in the company's favour).

"The last thing they want is to write the same story as other people. What they do want is leads, which explains the keenness with which they have taken to Twitter."

"Companies need to take a journalist-centred view" and consider what the reporter wants, Bowen added.

## **2. Make company information easy to find and clear**

The FT and Bowen Craggs & Co study stated that journalists "tend to be in a hurry, and impatient" and as a result the "inclination is often to pick up the phone rather than trawl a site".

The solution, Bowen advises, is to make sure basic information is easy to find and that it is not too long.

"Include brief information and hard facts written in a succinct way."

Another suggestion from Bowen is to produce a fact sheet that can be viewed on a webpage or downloaded. His advice is to include a print button to allow journalists to easily print the key information and omit other parts of a page.

Bowen encourages companies and PRs to imagine the journalist reading the brief is in the back of a taxi on the way to an interview, skim-reading it online, perhaps on a phone, or on a print-out.

The report says: "Companies can make themselves unpopular by failing to make press contacts easy to find."

## **3. Put a selection of company images on your site or on Flickr, assigning creative commons licences**

Journalists need photos to accompany stories and you can help by providing a library both as part of your site and on Flickr.

Sub editors, reporters and picture desks will frequently perform a [search for creative commons images](#), those which have been assigned a licence to allow them to be published. You can adjust the level of copyright to control how images can be used.

The study heralded two companies for providing strong picture libraries: [Nestlé](#), which includes video, documents and photos and [Novartis](#).

"But in general I'm always surprised by the very poor selection of photographs," Bowen said.

Some companies and PRs have started to wise up and create picture libraries, particularly on Flickr.

"There has been a real trend to do this during the last year," he said.

He advises to include a range of images: of people, buildings and logos.

Bowen suggests having a variety of photographs of each senior member of staff. He gave the example of the Russian company Gazprom, which has a [vast picture library](#) (see below screengrab) with a range of images, including projects and events. The image bank also includes a range of [images of the chief executive Alexey Miller](#), some formal shots, others slightly more informal without a jacket.



And, like in point number one, journalists do not want to have the story or pictures that their rivals have. "What they the don't want is the same as everyone else," Bowen said.

#### **4. Send media releases in the body of an email**

PDFs and Word documents can be problematic. Many journalists will not have the Word application on their computer and some company mail systems will isolate or restrict emails.

Do not waste precious space in the subject field. Some journalists will be reading their emails on mobile devices where space is limited to around 35 characters. Keep the subject snappy and to the point.

Bowen said it is good practice to both include the contents of the media release in the body of an email and to include a document as an attachment. "But the ability to cut and paste is important," he said.

#### **5. Learn how to monitor Twitter**

Companies need to understand Twitter – both to feed journalists leads and to get early warning that a nasty news storm is about to blow in *FT Index 2011*

Use it as a "proxy search mechanism", Bowen advises.

"The thing that really came across [in research for the FT study] is the importance of an understanding of social media, particularly Twitter."

"Journalists use it as a source for possible scoops."

The real trick is getting journalists to follow you by providing enough interesting nuggets of information, Bowen said.

But more important than tweeting interesting pointers is to learn to monitor what other people are saying about you.

Learn how to set up columns to follow keywords in an application such as TweetDeck (you can learn how to set up an RSS feed in our [10 Twitter tips for journalists](#)).

The report says: "Companies need to understand Twitter – both to feed journalists leads and to get early warning that a nasty news storm is about to blow in."