

The Publicity Club of New York presents  
"Beyond The Headlines - News Programs That Make You Think"

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Thank you. I'm going to assume you know what NPR is, we're like the CBS SUNDAY MORNING of radio. And someone in this room has done a very good job, I know one of you represents Pepto Bismol as a client and their new desserts are excellent and from what I understand you can eat as many as you want and you won't get an upset stomach.

I've read a few of the statements, the past transcripts of a few of the people who have spoken before the Publicity Club. I concur with the general sentiment: Cigarettes, asbestos, lead paint and the fax machine all bad things. Please don't pitch us by fax. And the other thing that everyone says, it's obvious but, we usually throw those out. The other thing that I think everyone has said who has ever spoken at the Publicity Club I agree with also: Know the show, different shows are a little different. Not the specific people but we do get a lot of inappropriate pitches, I mean if some guy on the Grand Concourse is ripping off motorists it's more of a "Shame, Shame on You" segment. I don't see where that's going to fit in with NPR coverage.

We do all these pledge drives where we say, "You're the 'public' in Public Radio," and of course that stops the minute you want to get a client booked on our air, right? So here's how it works: NPR is not a radio station, NPR is, as Bill O'Reilly suggested, a left-wing cabal funded by the North Koreans. That is true. We're on the record, that is true. NPR provides programming, it's a programming stream. If tomorrow every college or municipal government or station -- these are some of the people that own the stations, sometimes like in New York the stations own themselves -- but if they all said, "You know, this 'Morning Edition/All Things Considered' thing really isn't working out for us," there would cease to be an NPR. NPR provides programming, different radio stations decide whether to play the programming. How does this affect you? Well, to some extent you really don't have to know that much about it, but why it might be helpful to publicists is if you're going to pitch, for instance 'Marketplace' which is a show on National Public Radio, guess what: it's not on National Public Radio, it's on Public Radio. 'Marketplace' is produced by American Public Media, the sworn enemy of NPR, it is the Madame Defarge to our Charles Darnay, and -- I thought that was funny -- and the other thing is, it's not really that important if there's a show that you're familiar with you don't have to do so much research to know where it's coming from, but know this: There's a big difference between local and national. And there's also something in our system that is called a "Dibs List." So if you pitch something to "Morning Edition" or "All Things Considered," if one takes it, the other won't. Here are the shows that are part of the "Dibs List" because we don't want to duplicate the same interview. I know it seems like Thomas Friedman has been on NPR since he came out with his book, but what that is is he'll do a local interview, he'll do an interview on "Marketplace", he'll do

an interview on a show like “Fresh Air” and then he’ll do an interview on “All Things Considered”. It sounds like it’s four interviews on NPR, it’s four interviews taken by your public radio station. Here are the shows that are part of the NPR proper and participate in the “Dibs List”: “Morning Edition”, “All Things Considered”, “Talk of the Nation”, my show which I’ll get into a little bit it’s called “Day to Day” and all the weekend variations of those shows, so “Weekend Edition Sunday”, “Weekend Edition Saturday and the two weekend “All Things Considered”. But this means if you want to pitch Terry Gross or you know some client who’s been on Terry Gross, which is produced by member station WHYY out of Philadelphia, fee free to pitch “All Things Considered” too. But you know, tell them, “This guy’s gonna be on Terry Gross,” or “We’re trying to get Terry Gross also.” It’s not a one or the other.

My show is a show called “Day to Day” and if you’re not familiar with the show it’s because we’re kind of a rumor and a secret in New York. I think it’s on right now, it’s on a third, little-known NPR station, right? We’re like one of those clubs who won’t let you in, that’s how cool we are. It’s on 91.5. The idea was, “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered” were very successful shows and also were this kind of NPR brand and listeners and station owners were saying, “We’d like a third tent pole, something to bridge the gap between those shows.” So they invented a similar show to those which is a magazine show. It now, just like all those other shows, has the two hosts, the boy-girl host situation. It’s a blend of host interviews and reports and it’s played on over 100 stations now. All of the time, “Talk of the Nation,” which is just a straight panel discussion/call-in show – that’s a 2-hour show, a lot of stations took away an hour of that to play us – that’s what my show is, I’m the New York correspondent for NPR.

Some of this can get confusing so I’ll try to just help you, if you want to pitch people at NPR, what to do. I talked to some of my colleagues in the New York bureau and I said, “Give me some notes about what I should tell the publicists,” so here are my notes:

- 1) Drop the TALE OF TWO CITIES joke.
- 2) The best pitch is usually an event, not an issue. Don Hewitt said, “The flood’s an event, Noah is the story.” So pitch me something, pitch me a story, pitch me something current and pitch me something that I can get a scene out of. If you have a report and you have a study, that’s OK, but if you can take me some place and we can record two people interacting, that’s a lot better. You might have a good idea for that, we might say, “We think that’s a host interview and we think your study is enough,” but try to think just a little more creatively of a place you could take that rather than just an interview with the CEO.
- 3) Sometimes someone will call up and say, “The QE2 is in town,” or someplace where a local news story would probably would go there and they’d do something for a minute and a half and that’s a quality report or a local newscast. It doesn’t really work for us because what’s the bigger issue? I know that you’re having an event and I know it’s not just the big pancake it’s the world’s biggest pancake. While local news will get a shot of the pancake, you have to do something a little

more for us. Put us as part of a trend, “You know, breakfast foods are getting really big,” or give me someone who could connect it to someone who is not connected, to the listener who is not, off the bat, too pancake-centric. He doesn’t necessarily care about the pancakes but if you want to talk about an overall issue that the pancake represents that’s more up our alley.

- 4) Watch for blatant product placement. All of us who work for NPR work for a nonprofit. We didn’t get into it to give publicity to for-profit corporations. If it’s a nonprofit it’s a plus in our book, but even if there’s an interesting product, that alone would get you coverage in great media. The Wall Street Journal is definitely going to want to report on a really cool gadget because it’s a really cool gadget. We’re not. Even though I’m interested in reading about really cool gadgets in Wired and other columns, it just doesn’t fly on NPR. So again, position it as part of a trend, position it as part of a story, try to think of a way that the public radio listener is going to want to be more engaged.
- 5) Who to pitch: NPR is a big thing and it’s hard to get your head around. There are desks and there are shows. Like any news organization we have a science desk and a national desk and an international desk, but within that structure there are also shows. So there will be a producer of “Morning Edition” and they will work with the science desk to figure out what goes on the science desk. It gets a little confusing. Obviously if you know specific reporters and have heard specific reports, then that’s good, it’s good to pitch them. One reporter told me, “Look, I just did a report that polar bears are having a hard time swimming these days because of global warming. So the next day I got a pitch about polar bears. I just did polar bears!” But still, I kind of disagree with him, I mean if I’ve done something you at least get in the person’s mind and the network will say, “Oh, this is our polar bear guy, he knows a lot about polar bears.” If you have pitched that specific person, that’ll be good. At least he’s made a mental note of it. But in general, our main number in Washington DC to get in touch with any desk is 202513-2000, ask for the national desk, the science desk, all the appropriate news organizations. You can ask for a specific show, but it probably is better to go right to the desk. And if there’s an appropriate person, here’s how you crack the code of our email addresses: first initial last name @npr.org. that’s everyone’s email address so if there’s someone specifically, “Hey, I just heard your report, would you be interested in this?” they might be interested in that.

OK, let’s see what else I have on my list... Oh yeah, I also asked, “Who are the best PR people you’ve dealt with?” a little segment we’ll call on this part of the broadcast, “My Favorite Flack.” So here’s what I got – oh, they don’t like that? That’s a bad term in the industry? I liked one flack so much I married her. One person said, the guy whoever it is who’s coming to the Javitz Center – this is pretty specific, I don’t know who represents the Javitz Center – he loves the

Javitz Center guy because what the Javitz Center guy does is he forces all his vendors to give him a little story so he can turn around and say, "Here's our big event." I guess maybe you could stop right there, "Oh, we're having the Boat Show." Well, that might help, I might be able to get some people, but instead he talks to all the interesting vendors who are coming to do the Boat Show and he pitches them four different story lines. He loves that. It's a little extra work but it's thinking like the reporter. And another, I'll tell you about a story I had today. When I told my fellow reporters I was doing this they said, "Oh great, whatever you do make sure we don't get any more emails." So remember, first initial last name @npr.org. Here's something I did today and this is why it worked: There's somebody representing a company, I won't say the name of the company, they issue reports of interest to consumers, sort of a Consumer Report-ing-type company, and he knew what I was interested in. We're not going to do a story on every study they come out with, but this is pretty genius: they do all their car reliability studies, he called and he said – and what's interesting about this is you know Ford is in the news, you know they're losing all their market share, I can't tell you exactly what they're going to be coming up with and then I put the screws to him and he did, but he said, "There's stuff in this report that relates directly to the US auto industry. If you look at the reliability survey, who's not showing up there, the US auto makers, I think it's a good opportunity," and it was. It's perfect, right? That's an issue in the news that's marrying a product to it. Now you're saying, "Look, sometimes my client's the pancake. Sometimes my client's not Consumer Reports, what can I do?" I'm just saying get in the mindset, try to think a little creatively, try to think about what comes out of the end of the radio and try to pitch a report to the right people that sounds like that.

Alright, that's about it, thanks.