

Let me start with a few questions:

- ◆ How many of you know the name of your local paper's editor, business editor, metro editor?
- ◆ How many of you would know one of the editors if he/she walked into the room?
- ◆ How many of you have their phone numbers in your Rollodex or Palm Pilot?
- ◆ How many of you have visited their newsrooms?
- ◆ How many have an inkling of their deadlines, or number of editions or coverage tendencies?
- ◆ How many of you have asked to meet with the papers' editorial boards -- the opinion-makers?
- ◆ How many of you have asked a newsroom delegation to visit you?

Not bad. Should be better. What we have here is failure to communicate.

- ◆ It's all about relationships -- professional relationships.
- ◆ Breaking news -- good or bad -- is not the time to build a relationship, or fill someone in on deadline on the importance of your news. It's a time to capitalize on a relationship already built.
- ◆ It's people to people, and issue to issue. How is an editor supposed to grasp the "positive news" when he/she may not have a clue about your news at all?
- ◆ Frame the story with the impact in mind. Why should folks care? What's the heart of the matter: help people, save money?
- ◆ If you put something in quotes in a press release, consider the comments fair game for use. But many papers had rather follow up with an interview.

Some don'ts:

- ◆ Don't be a stranger. Know your key contacts, work your "beat" like a reporter works his/hers.
- ◆ Don't be a wimp. Don't run away from the "bad" news. Always comment. Otherwise, you lose.
- ◆ Don't fire and forget. Make sure someone really will answer the contact number on your press release. Follow up the release -- fax or e-mail -- with a phone call. "Did you get it?" "Got any questions?" "Anything more I can do for you?"
- ◆ Don't write the story. You can bet major papers in your markets won't use your version. Provide facts, impact, context, contact people -- and make sure those folks are available -- for all papers. Make sure the editor -- who deals with dozens of contacts like your every day -- knows why yours deserves attention. Make sure your people are on board with talking with reporters before the release goes out.
- ◆ Don't take it personally. Sometimes you get your story in; sometimes not. Sometimes you stumble into the biggest news day of the year. Imagine the stories pitched the day before 9/11. If you make a pitch and it doesn't work out, don't sulk. Call the editor and find out what happened -- assuming you know who to call.