

# Media Outreach 101

## Earning Positive Attention for Your Company & the Industry

Engaging with reporters and media is one of the best ways to build awareness and public trust. It can help highlight good works your company and employees do, and it can help people better understand what goes into roadbuilding and the facts about asphalt mix production.

While there are many variables as to whether or not a story will be picked up by a newspaper or broadcast station, the value of building a relationship with media and offering them the right stories are extremely beneficial for achieving business objectives. News stories can take the form of current company initiatives and projects, expert responses to relevant and timely news events, or can be used to address negative news or brand/product misperceptions.

Asphalt paving and production companies can promote the science and engineering of asphalt pavements, highlight current paving projects, celebrate notable employees or public-service activities, and explain the economic impact of a roadway or construction activities. This sort of engagement can help garner trust and goodwill from road owners, neighbors, and the driving public.

The following is a high-level overview of how to pitch a story to the media:

**1. Identify a newsworthy story —**

Consider the story you want to promote and the objectives you wish to meet.

**2. Compile a list of relevant reporters —**

Think about the type of news outlet that would best serve your message and target audiences and look for reporters that have covered similar topics.

**3. Create the pitch —**

Write a concise pitch in three to five paragraphs, offering an expert spokesperson to speak on behalf of your story/initiative.

**4. Email the pitch —** Send out your pitch during the first half of the week, personalizing each email to the respective reporter.

**5. Email follow-up —** If your pitch does not generate a response, follow-up on your initial email two to three days later.

**6. Phone follow-up —** If your first follow-up is unsuccessful, call the reporter directly one week after the initial pitch, remind them of your original email and offer your spokesperson for an interview.



Pitching and securing a news story can be complicated. Media outreach requires a strategic and thoughtful approach, implement the following steps and best practices to help ensure success.

### 1. Ask yourself: Is this story newsworthy?

Before you put together a news pitch, you must determine if the story is truly newsworthy. It's important to calibrate your expectations; journalists are flooded with pitches, sometimes hundreds over the course of the day, depending on the outlet.

Thinking about the following parameters can help your story stand out:

- **Impact** — The greater the consequences and number of people affected, the greater the newsworthiness. Is there a new twist on something familiar that may have a great impact? Are there any economic, social, or environmental impacts that can be detailed?
- **Timeliness** — The story needs to be relevant and the timing should seem natural. Ask yourself: Why does this story need to be told now? Has this story been told before in your market? How is this different than similar stories that have been covered?
- **Human Interest** — There is potential to get “tunnel vision” and only think about the value of the news in the context of industry. It's important to recognize the big picture. How will this story or announcement benefit people, businesses, or a community? What would catch your eye if you didn't work within this industry or were involved in this project?

### 2. Determine whether the story is relevant to a local or national audience.

Think about who will be affected most by this story. Does the story have implications for the industry as a whole? If so, a national media outlet or trade publication could be the best fit. If the impact of a project will have the greatest impact on a local community or a single state or region, a local or regional consumer-oriented outlet should be considered.

It's important to note that there can be overlap in these categories. For example, a large natural disaster that affects a local community's infrastructure may receive national attention. While it only immediately impacts a specific community, a story could be pitched to national outlets as well. Conversely, you may be able to provide a local perspective on a national story, for example the importance of investing in infrastructure.

It is important to monitor the news and see what topics are receiving attention.

### 3. Put together a list of relevant media outlets and reporters.

Once you've determined your audience, you can identify the media outlets and reporters that would be most likely to cover the story. Is this story more technical and industry focused, or consumer focused? In this step, select your outlet (i.e., blogs, trade press, national or local outlets, or a combination of the four, if applicable) and research news stories to find reporters who have covered similar topics.

Be aware of previous news coverage of your company by your selected outlets; it's possible to re-pitch reporters who have written about your company or the industry favorably in the past. Think about reporters' beats. A transportation reporter is likely to be interested in an active interstate rehabilitation project, for example; a science reporter may be interested in learning about warm-mix asphalt technologies.

Start to compile a list of appropriate journalists, their emails and their phone numbers. Only one journalist per media outlet should be pitched.

**Best Practice Note:** *Generic newsroom contacts should be a last resort, only use if you're unable to find the direct email for your targeted reporter. The story is more likely to be picked up if sent directly to relevant journalists.*

#### 4. Select your spokesperson.

Who is the expert on the subject that should be interviewed by the reporter? Offering a spokesperson who is directly tied to the project or subject at hand is essential. This person should hold the most knowledge about the project and be ready to answer any questions regarding technical or economic implications. They also need to be ready to address potentially negative or controversial questions.

This person should also be well-spoken and comfortable answering questions over the phone or on air, if you are pitching broadcast media. Someone who has had experience with media interviews is preferable.

*A few general rules for a spokesperson:*

- **Be prepared.** Know who you will be speaking with, what sort of reports they have previously filed, and what other issues might arise in an interview.
- **Expect to be interrupted.** A reporter generally isn't looking to present your story in a vacuum. They may bring up concerns or questions that differ from what you planned to talk about.
- **Remain calm.** Even if the reporter asks questions in a confrontational manner, do not rise to the bait; respond in a reasonable manner. This is especially important for an on-camera or on-the-air interview.
- **Don't lie to a reporter.** If you are uncertain or don't know an answer, say so and either offer to follow up on it later or suggest another resource who might be able to answer, such as your State Asphalt Pavement Association.
- **Stay focused.** You have a story to tell, but it's easy for a conversation to wander into areas you aren't prepared to discuss. Keep on topic and return to your planned topic as quickly as possible.

#### 5. Write your pitch.

Now that you have your audience, outlet, and reporter determined, you can develop a tailored pitch. Note: It is highly recommended to include touches unique to the reporter your pitching in the email, mentioning past relevant coverage and specifically addressing the reporter by name in the greeting, for example. The subject line will serve as the story hook and will require impressive content to get the reporter's attention. The subject line should be like a headline; it should explain, in just a few words, the news story and its implications well enough to entice the reporter to read the body of the pitch. The pitch itself also needs to be as concise and to the point as possible.

Structure your pitch in the following way:

- i. **Introduction** — A topline overview of the newsworthy story should be mentioned immediately. Follow that with the contractor and owner names, hyperlinking to applicable webpages, if possible. Include a SAPA contact, too, if they can discuss the project. For project story consider including contact information for the DOT or project owner. Check with the owner to see who should be listed; they may have a spokesperson who is not your contact. If you provide contact information for others, make sure they are forewarned; you don't want someone to be surprised by an unexpected call from a reporter.
- ii. **Body** — Describe the project in further detail and its implications. In this section, convey the newsworthiness of the story. If there are any notable statistics to include, detail them in this section. The body of the email should be no more than one or two paragraphs. Remember, you aren't telling the full story here, just enough to pique the reporter's interest.
- iii. **Conclusion** — Offer up your expert spokesperson for an interview, noting their title and experience. Be sure to include their availability for an interview. The pitch should end with you telling the reporter to reach out to you to coordinate the interview.

## 6. Distribute your pitch and follow-up.

Timing is everything when it comes to emailing your pitch. In order to increase visibility and response by a reporter, we recommend initial pitches be emailed between Monday and Wednesday between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and noon. Follow-up emails should be sent two to three days after the initial pitch. If follow-up emails receive no response, call the journalist directly.

As with the emails, call earlier in the day rather than later. Reporters are often on deadline in the afternoon and are less likely to be receptive to an unexpected call. During the phone call, remind the reporter of the email pitch, reiterate your spokesperson's availability for an interview, and ask if they would be interested in setting up an interview.

## After the story

Once a story is published or aired, share it on social media if you are happy with the coverage. You should link to the online version of the story, and use your post to add additional details or context. Also, be sure to tag the media outlet in your post or tweet.

## Become a source

Beyond pitching a story, you can also offer your spokesperson as a background source for a reporter, someone who is willing to help explain industry practices or terms or who can be on-call if the reporter has a question. Offering media an educational/informational tour of a plant or job site without the expectation of a story can be a good way to build a rapport and trust with a reporter, and it can help them improve their understanding of the industry and our work.

*For more information on communicating with the media, contact NAPA Vice President for Communications T. Carter Ross at 301-731-4748 or [cross@asphaltpavement.org](mailto:cross@asphaltpavement.org).*

## MEDIA INTERVIEW TIP SHEET

### QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

Below are a few questions you should ask the reporter before accepting an interview offer.

- When is the reporter's deadline?
- What is the angle of the story?
- How long will the interview be?
- What format? (e.g., phone, in-person, live, taped)
- What topics will be discussed?
- Who else is being interviewed for the story?
- When will the story run?

### GENERAL INTERVIEW TIPS

- **Develop three key messages.**
- **Keep it simple. Avoid using jargon or acronyms.**
- **Be quotable. Don't ramble. Speak in short sound bites.**
- **Don't repeat a charge or pick up the interviewer's negative language.**
- **Remember you are ALWAYS on record.**
- **Stay in control. Never lose your cool.**
- **Don't speculate or answer questions outside of your responsibility.**
- **"No comment" is a comment.**
- **Practice, practice, practice. Practice in front of a mirror, in front of your friends/family/colleagues or even in front of a camera.**
- **Add anecdotes and personalize your story.**

### WHAT TO WEAR FOR TV INTERVIEWS

- **Your wardrobe should be consistent with your message.** If you are delivering a serious business message, wear a suit, sport coat, or conservative dress. If you're at an event or outdoors, summer business casual may be acceptable.
- **Dress in cooler fabrics.** The lights in studio may be hot. Avoid heavy sweaters and wear light clothing so you don't sweat.
- **Accept makeup.** Some television stations will provide makeup for men and women; accept it. However, don't assume makeup or hair will be provided, especially for outdoor shoots, so arrive camera-ready and be prepared for wind. Check in advance with the producer for these details.
- **Wear solid colors.** Avoid small checks, stripes, sheen, and other patterns. They are distracting to the viewer and can cause a zebra effect on camera.
- **Avoid large or distracting jewelry.** The viewer wants to focus on you. Jewelry can be distracting and noisy (bracelets, shiny cufflinks, large earrings, etc.).
- **Avoid logos,** unless you are wearing a casual polo shirt specifically designed for an event.
- **Avoid wearing a plain white shirt or dress** unless you have a dark blazer or jacket. It can blend into a lighter background.
- **Steam or iron your clothes** to ensure they are well fitted and wrinkle-free.
- **Empty pockets** of keys and loose change that can jingle.
- **Leave your mobile phone** with someone out of frame, and make sure it's turned off.