

# Pitching a Story to the Media



Pitching your story to reporters and other newsmakers isn't a difficult task, but it takes persistence and determination. Pitching is basically making the case for why your story or event is worthy of news coverage.

## ***Developing Your Pitch***

The tips that follow are useful reminders of how to talk about something you know a lot about to someone who knows very little and doesn't have much time.

**Find a "news hook" and stick with it.** A "hook" is a way to make your story more interesting to a reporter, especially something that relates to current events. When talking to the media, remember that hundreds of things happen every day. Why is it important for your story to be covered now? Examples of hooks include anniversaries, controversy, a special event, celebrity involvement, localizing a national story or relating your story to an upcoming holiday or event (e.g., "back to school" or "toxin-free holiday shopping").

**Introduce the topic and maintain a normal conversation.** Reporters do not want to feel like you are talking at them. They are much more receptive if you engage them. Be sensitive to their interests and direct the conversation accordingly. Are they especially interested in breast cancer? Talk about our organizational work. Do they light up more when you talk about the event you are pitching? Talk about the history of the topic or event. Ask questions about what they're interested in.

**Stress the human interest angle: people are drawn in by stories.** Reporters will be more interested in hearing about the breast cancer survivor who will climb a mountain with her two sons, or the 77-year-old widow who now works as an educator, than quotes of breast cancer statistics (which they can find for themselves).

**Tell them why the story is unique.** Be enthusiastic that this is an inspiring event or topic. Talk about the timing of your call, emphasize the innovative approach to an event or fundraiser. Differentiate yourself from others pitching by talking about why the event or issue is important TODAY.

**Get leads and advice from reporters.** If you speak with someone who is not a reporter at the news outlet, or is not in a position to cover the story, ask them if they think someone else would be. Is it the type of story National Geographic would cover? Who should you talk to there? Do they have a number for the appropriate person? How would they suggest pitching the story?

*Much of the advice above is courtesy of the SPIN Project, [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org).*

## **Writing News Releases**



Putting together a press release or media advisory is a simple way to give reporters essential information about your story or event. These pieces should be sent out prior to making pitch calls and include all essential contact information. Following are some helpful hints on how to structure and write news releases.

**A Media Advisory** is a short, one-page, concise piece advising the media of news to be made. Typically, a media advisory invites reporters to cover some event or press conference or notifies them of your news. The media advisory is sent out before the event or news takes place.

In media advisories, list the “Five W’s”—who, what, when, where and why—after the headline and lead framing paragraph.

**WHO:** Who is announcing the news? This will probably be your organization or coalition. But remember, the news is not the fact that your group is announcing something, but what is being announced. Therefore, the lead paragraph will first communicate the news, then indicate who made it. A brief list of key speakers may be included here, with their names and affiliations.

**WHAT:** What is being announced: a media event, rally, protest, press conference or release of a new report?

**WHERE:** The location of the event. Include the actual address or directions, unless it is an obvious place like the main steps of City Hall.

**WHEN:** The time—include a.m. or p.m.—and date. Make certain the day and date correspond.

**WHY:** This is your key message. It is “why” you are making news.

If your event will feature strong visuals, tip reporters off to the photo opportunities at the end of the media advisory. This is essential to attracting TV coverage.

**A Press Release** is typically written like a news story— containing quotes, and background—and summarizes your news. It is written as if it were to appear in the morning newspaper—though, of course, most media will not run your release verbatim. The press release is often handed out at a news event or included in a press kit. The key to successful news releases is brevity and factual accuracy. Get to the most important part of the news as soon as possible and make sure everything is accurate: facts, name spellings, dates and times. Some reporters have said that if their attention is not piqued by the headline or the end of the lead paragraph, they rarely read any further.

## **Technical Elements of News Releases**



Starting at the top of the page, all news releases should contain:

- Either “For Immediate Release”—meaning the information can be used as soon as a reporter gets it; or “Embargoed Until [date]”— meaning the reporter cannot use the news until the date specified.
- The date the release is distributed.
- Contact name(s), email and web addresses and phone number(s), including cellular phones.
- A “boilerplate,” a 2-3 sentence description of your organization, coalition or group in clear, concise, jargon-free language.
- End both advisories and press releases with the marks ###, or -30-. This lets journalists know the release is over.

### **Sample Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, March 2, 2006

Contact: **Marisa Walker, Breast Cancer Fund, (415) 346-8223 x17, [marisa@breastcancerfund.org](mailto:marisa@breastcancerfund.org)**

#### **Young Breast Cancer Survivor and her Surgeon Prepare for July Mountain Expedition**

##### ***Training Hike this Saturday in Marin County, Calif., Kicks Off Spring Training***

SAN FRANCISCO—At the young age of 30 and with no family history of the disease, Anu Gupta doesn’t seem like a typical breast cancer survivor. Yet as breast cancer rates climb, her story becomes less unusual.

This July, Gupta and her breast surgeon, Dr. Susan Kutner, 53, will attempt Mt. Shasta in Northern California to raise money toward eliminating the chemical exposures and other environmental factors that may contribute to the development of half of all breast cancers. That includes cancers in young women who have no other known risk factors for the disease, such as family history, smoking and obesity.

The two women will climb with a team of 38 others from across the country organized by the Breast Cancer Fund. Many of the climbers are women living with breast cancer. Others have family members or friends who have confronted the disease. For most climbers, the expedition is an expression of finding strength through adversity.

“After treatment, I didn’t want breast cancer to be [the focus] of my life,” said Gupta, of Los Gatos, Calif., who finished treatment for stage II breast cancer on September 26. “I thought the climb would be a great challenge, to prove to myself that physically and emotionally I was past it.”

*The Breast Cancer Fund works to identify and eliminate the environmental causes of the disease.*  
415 346.8223    [www.breastcancerfund.org](http://www.breastcancerfund.org)    [info@breastcancerfund.org](mailto:info@breastcancerfund.org)

Kutner, who is from San Francisco, has signed on for her fourth Climb Against the Odds. In past years, she has been an integral member of the team and taken on responsibility for monitoring her teammates' health, particularly those still in treatment or recently finished.



Gupta will join other members of the Bay Area climb team this Saturday, March 4, for a rigorous training hike to the top of Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, Calif.

This year's Climb Against the Odds expedition is the seventh major mountain climb organized by the San Francisco-based Breast Cancer Fund. Previous expeditions include Mt. Aconcagua, Argentina (1995); Mt. McKinley, Alaska (1998); Mt. Fuji, Japan (2000), Mt. Shasta, Calif. (2003 and 2004) and Mt. Rainier, Wash. (2005).

Since the 1960s, a woman's lifetime risk of breast cancer more than tripled in the United States, to one in seven today. As many as 50 percent of breast cancer cases remain unexplained by traditionally-accepted risk factors; scientists increasingly believe many cases are linked to environmental factors.

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*The Breast Cancer Fund is the leading national organization working to identify and eliminate the environmental causes of breast cancer. [www.breastcancerfund.org](http://www.breastcancerfund.org).*

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