

Breaking Through in December: Tips for Scoring Ink During the Page-Cluttered Holidays

Ah, the holidays. With so much holiday hype, Nutcracker performances, tree-lighting ceremonies and dancing elf toys dominating media coverage, how do PR pros manage to sneak their clients' news into this crunch? Below PR pros and newspaper editors alike offer tips for landing coverage when every page is filled with Santa:

1. Find out who will be writing holiday features. “Researching media contacts who have covered

the holidays in the past is necessary for getting coverage during the busy season,” says **Jill Yamamoto** of **Richmond PR**. “Research will help uncover the writers who would not usually cover lifestyle or entertainment. An example would be a metro writer who does an annual holiday story as a break from his normal beat.”

2. Jump on the holiday bandwagon. “The key is—don't fight Santa,” says **Glen Stone**, public affairs manager for the **Toronto Board of Trade**. “You'll never win. Instead, find a way to hop on his sled. You have to recognize that the holiday domination of news stories is inevitable, and try to use that to your advantage by developing and pitching holiday-oriented stories.

“It sometimes takes imagination to find the link

between what you do, sell or represent and some facet of the holiday season. For example, we noticed last fall that both Christmas Day and Boxing Day were falling on a weekend. Someone had the thought, ‘How are businesses going to decide whether to close on Friday or Monday?’ So, we did a survey of our ten thousand members and used it as the basis for a media release, pointing out the possible confusion to shoppers and employees. The story was picked up by a national TV outlet, CTV Newsnet, as well as by local media.”

“The key is having some kind of hook to the holidays, bearing in mind that for some products and services it may be quite a stretch,” confirms **Lawrence Savill**, an attorney for **Chadbourne & Parke LLP**. Every year during the holidays, Savill produces “CDs of original, allegedly-humorous, law-related rock-and-roll holiday songs that are composed, performed, and produced by this practicing litigation attorney.”

Savill’s CDs, which include songs like “You Don’t Wanna Cross Santa” (“cross” as in cross-examine, of course), and “Billin’ on Christmas Eve,” have received coverage in *The New York Times*, CBS Newsradio, and a long list of other outlets. “What could be more newsworthy than a lawyer with a sense of humor around the holidays?” he asks.

Although you don’t have to be a satirical songwriting powerhouse to score coverage, cleverly or humorously tying your news to an aspect of the holidays will boost your chances for getting a second look from editors.

3. Pitch well in advance. “The holidays cut both ways,” says **Richard Weiss**, founder of **WeissWrite.com** and a former metro editor and writing coach for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. “The media is often desperate for stories—but too many are alike, sending readers into diabetic comas. You can get your story in by planning ahead—weeks ahead if possible. At the *Post-Dispatch*, we would ask reporters to prepare stories a couple of weeks ahead so we’re ready for those lean news weeks. The bar is set kind of low then, but as these stories roll in and the list is fattened up, you’ll be hard pressed to get your holiday piece even if you’re pitching the local version of Mother Theresa.”

“I would say that in some ways it’s easier to get an idea pitched and accepted,” confirms **Tom Hallman**, a features editor with the *Oregonian*. “All papers are looking to fill the pages with a smaller staff during this time. A lot of stories will be pre-written, so send materials a month or three weeks in advance so we have enough time to work on the story and get contacts.” 🌟