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"Getting Quoted"

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Every day, you pick up magazines and newspapers where you read stories that include lines such as "Metropolis contractor Jim Olsen, of Kryptonite Construction, commented that he thought the project would contribute significantly to the downtown development, not to mention create a wealth of new jobs."

Ever wonder why "Jim" is always the individual the media interviews? Wouldn't you like to know how you can become the "expert" quoted next time?

Newspaper and magazine editors are constantly in need of knowledgeable and authoritative sources for their stories. Sometimes it's just to pick your brain a bit for background data, or to solicit direction to other sources of information. I constantly get calls from editors asking if I can steer them to contractors/architects/developers/real estate brokers, etc., who can provide background for specific stories, and I'm always happy to cooperate.

The other area where editors need your input is in garnering actual quotes that can be attributed to a recognized "authority" on a topic, similar to the example cited earlier.

How do you become the person they seek out? Volunteer! It's just that simple.

The way to begin the process is by building relationships with editors. When an editor first runs one of your press releases, make it a point to call and express your appreciation. Schmooze a little; ask about the types of stories the editor is generally interested in. Subtly try to inject a bit about your own background, your company, the type of work you do, etc.

Close the conversation by offering yourself as a resource—something like, "If I can ever be of help on a story, either by providing information, other sources you could speak with, or just offering a quote or opinion, just give me a holler. I'd be happy to help." (And when they do call, respond promptly. Editors work on tight deadlines, and those who fulfill their needs get called on again and again.)

Keep the relationships active. If you're in the area, stop in and introduce yourself. Editors appreciate being able to put a face with a name. Few people ever make the effort to visit them, and they'll remember it. Keep the visit brief. And don't do it so often that you become a pest.

Include editorial people on your mailing list, not only for press releases, but for newsletters, direct mailings, new brochures and the like. It keeps you "in their face," as well as keeping them current on your company's activities.

If you read a piece in a publication that you particularly like, drop the editor a note, e-mail or give a quick call to compliment them. (Only do this if you're sincere. Otherwise they'll see right through you and the effect will be negative.)

Also, if you spot an article somewhere else that you know would be of interest to them, either on a personal or professional level, clip it out and send it to them, with a handwritten note saying, "Thought you'd find this interesting."

It's all these little reminders and personal touches that cultivate relationships, and lead to you being thought of when a source is needed or consideration is given as to who should be the subject of a feature story. Unlike the Army, this is one instance where volunteering is a great idea.

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