



# Hope you're well!

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## A PR GUIDE TO JOURNALISTS' BIGGEST PET PEEVES

Brought to you by:

**MUCK RACK** & **Michael Smart** 



**Michael Smart**  
CEO | [MichaelSMARTPR](#)

## INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

# Making fun of PR pitches is too easy. That's not what this report is about.

.....

We're not here for laughs, but for lessons. Some will likely reveal pitching blind spots you have, and that's a great thing! The same way someone telling you there's spinach in your teeth is a humbling but ultimately beneficial thing.

Other takeaways might not be new to you. But share our data and examples with your bosses, and you'll likely see them ease off pressuring you to use outdated techniques that often backfire. We have social media to thank for this.

I've been hearing journalists' complaints about PR pitches for the 20+ years I've had this gig. For most of those years, PR folks often missed individual feedback from journalists because delivery was limited to a couple hundred people at a time during media panels at PR conferences.

But the skyrocketing popularity of Twitter among the journalism tribe in recent years has laid bare the conversations they used to have only around the water cooler. Better still, we can now document and measure their unsolicited feedback about our work, instead of relying on hearsay or one-off anecdotes.

Back in late 2017, [the Muck Rack Blog](#) started aggregating tweets that contain the words "PR pitch" via a monthly post. As I'm writing this, there are **33 months worth of tweets** in that treasure trove—560 tweets to be exact. My team and I categorized and catalogued each tweet with the goal of showing you the trends that emerge from journalists' feedback on PR pitches. I'll apply my experience as a "journalist interpreter" for PR people across all industries to translate what many of these tweets really mean for your work.

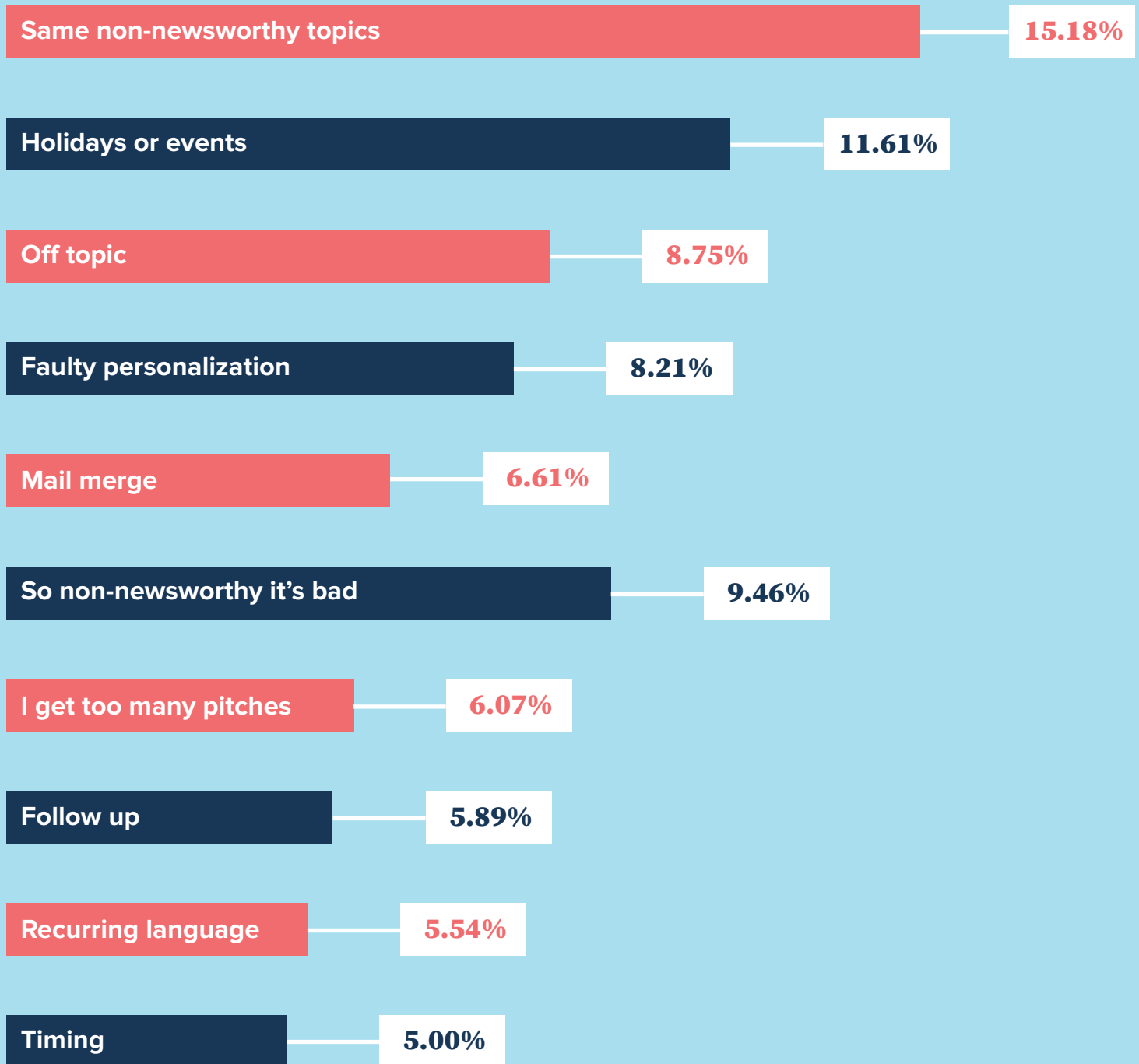
I'll also tell you which journalists' gripes I disagree with—that is, which PR practices a small minority of them decried that are actually effective. So you won't be swayed by a vocal minority, however emphatic.

With that said, I need to repeat the standard disclaimer I make any time I start talking about an individual journalist's stated preferences or opinions: these are perfectly accurate and valid insights into that one journalist. Like all those people who love to hate Hawaiian pizza—let's not serve any to those people. The rest of us can eat as much as we like (because it is, in fact, delicious). I'd never say one journalist is wrong for disliking a certain pitch or lamenting a certain PR practice. I will, however, point out that their opinion doesn't represent all journalists, even if their language implies that it does.



**So here we go with the lessons we can learn from the most common journalist gripes about PR on Twitter.**

# Distribution of the 560 tweets in the study period (Dec. 2017 - Aug. 2020)



(Some tweets mentioned more than one issue)

# 1

## “Tl;dr”

If I could only share one tweet to represent the other 559, it's this one. Congratulations to Jessica Huseman for her integrative skills :) Journalists don't like receiving follow up **(6% of all complaints)** on generic pitches **(11%)** that weren't even relevant in the first place **(9%)** at an inconvenient time **(5%)** that reference their previous work incorrectly **(2%)**. No surprise here.



**Jessica Huseman** ✓  
@JessicaHuseman

Dear Jessica,

Just following up on the three emails I've sent about a topic you don't remotely cover. Would you like to schedule a time to have coffee in the middle of election season? We are such fans of your work on this subject, on which you've never written.

-PR Person

## 2

## “I get too many !@#\$\$% PR pitches”

It’s also no surprise that one of the most common themes was a vague lament about being overwhelmed by pitches—**about 6% of tweeters** went this route. We get it—journalism is a tough job, and it’s natural to vent to your friends . . . and **2,631** of your closest followers. But you and I can’t control the overall volume of pitches, only the work we do. So let’s move on to more constructive criticism we can act on.



**Sean Robinson**  
@seanrobinson1e4

Fantasy idea to counter endless streams of PR pitches:  
PR person: Want to write about this?  
Me: I'll consider it. (Opens chest of flintlocks and swords)  
But you'll have to duel this other PR person to the death first.

3

## “Do any of the generic blast pitches actually work?”

This one is like men who try to solve their girlfriends' problems instead of just validating, or people who cheer for the New York Jets. **We know it doesn't work, but we keep doing it anyway.** Same with blast pitching.



## LAUGH WITH ME AT HOW OFF-TOPIC THIS PITCH IS. {9%}

It's clear that most journalists get dozens of off-topic pitches daily (some get hundreds). But some of these errant missives still stir up wonder and awe at just how bad of a fit they are.



**Amy Resnick**  
@AmyResnick

Worst PR pitch YTD: (keep in mind I focus on institutional investing)

Is Underwear A Good Valentines Gift For Men?



**George Mannes** ✓ @dogbitesmannes · Aug 6  
PR Pitch o' the Day:

Hi George,

Working on any potty training stories?

Editor of AARP the Magazine



## The Lesson: Don't send blast pitches.

### BUT IF YOU MUST:

Use your human eyes to review the list out of respect for the human beings who will be receiving your email.





## THEY CAN'T EVEN GET THE MAIL-MERGE RIGHT. {6.5%}

It is apparently a journalist/blogger rite of passage to get their first obviously mail-merged pitch. Because they love to post it to Twitter. And experienced journos get so many that they do, too.



**Stephen Shankland** ✓  
@stshank

Thinking about changing my Twitter name to %%FirstName%% %%LastName%% in honor of badly mail-merged PR pitches.



**astrid taran**  
@astridtaran

I just love how PR pitches are getting more and more personal these days

Hi Press Release,



## The Lesson: Don't use mail merge.

### BUT IF YOU MUST:

The bare minimum rule is you must **send test emails first**. Make sure you send them to various types of inboxes (Gmail and Outlook at least) to avoid errors like this one:



**Brianna Travers** ✓  
@briannatravers

Why do I get the feeling this wasn't a personalised PR pitch?

Hi **Brianna**,



## DID YOU EVEN LOOK AT YOUR LIST BEFORE YOU SENT THIS BLAST? {2%}

But still - you really shouldn't be sending blast pitches. Otherwise you end up offending the very journalists you're trying to cultivate relationships with. Like these:

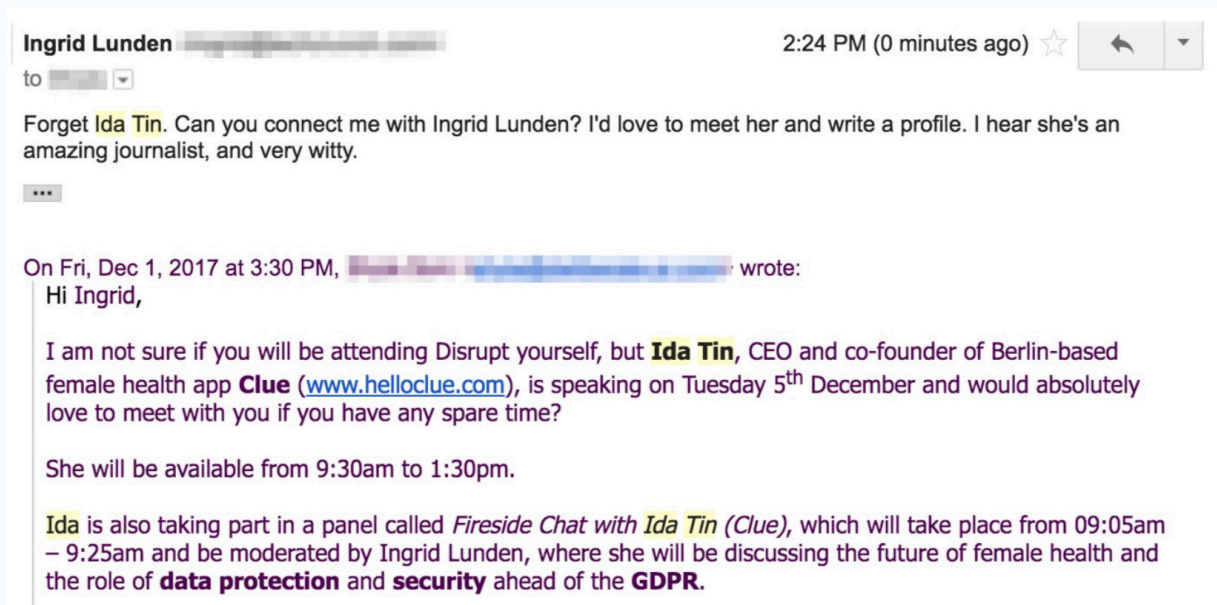


“ Just got a PR pitch to interview an artist. The pitch cites a previous interview the artist gave as evidence of what a good interview she'd be. It is a good interview. I conducted it. ”  
[@nicolerudick](#)



“ Today in robotic PR pitches: 'Dear Ingrid, Would you like to meet Ida Tin in Berlin on Tuesday? She's being interviewed by Ingrid Lunden earlier in the day on stage.' ”  
[@ingridlunden](#)

In case you missed it, **Ingrid Lunden is the journalist being pitched** that she might want to meet Ida Tin, who is being interviewed by Ingrid Lunden on stage. Further down in the thread, Ingrid the journalist shared her email reply to the pitch:



And the PR person missed a real opportunity because **they never responded** to Ingrid's playful reply.

## 4

**“Not even a nice try —  
I can see right through  
you.”**

What's worse than sending generic blast emails? Attempting to make your pitches appear personalized when they're really not. It's like the cheesy pickup lines where you try to make someone think they know you but they don't. And it works about the same. Which is to say, not at all. **8% of journalist tweets** complained about some variant of this.



## I CAN TELL YOU'RE USING A TEMPLATE...



Celia Llopis-Jepsen 🤖  
@Celia\_LJ

I love when I get PR pitches like this. :) They make me feel so special.

Hey Celia,  
I've been reading your **latest article** (link it to the **article URL**) about **article headline**, and I wanted to let you know that we just released new data report about the CBD market. The report covers more than 50 CBD brands and 3500+ products.



## The Lesson: Don't use a template.

### BUT IF YOU MUST:

At the very least never paste the actual template into the email. Craft the entire pitch in Word or Google Docs, then only paste the finished product. So you don't accidentally send the blank template and ask the journalist to play PR Mad Libs. Doesn't end well.



Timothy B. Lee ✓  
@binarybits

I can't decide if the PR person who sent this just forgot to fill in the blanks, if he did it on purpose in a bizarre attempt to pique my interest, or if it's ironic commentary on the genericness of PR pitches.

Hey, Timothy -  
Don't worry... \_\_\_\_\_ hasn't launched yet, but we are about to be EVERYWHERE!  
I was doing some research online and from what I can tell you often write about new technology and the impact it has on archaic industries... Well, the \_\_\_\_\_ is about to get disrupted, and \_\_\_\_\_ will be leading the pack.  
If you're not the best person to be speaking with over at freelance, would you mind pointing me in the proper direction?  
I just wanted to get \_\_\_\_\_ on your radar and I will be back in touch in the near future.  
Cheers,

## And here is the best tweet in this entire ebook, which earned 29,000 likes:



Resist Covid ✓  
@BeckettMufson



Dear PR professionals, don't do this when you're emailing journalists:

We've been making ourselves familiar with your pieces, and absolutely fell in love! We especially loved *(insert exert here about specific piece to butter them up and say why we liked it)*



### SO YOU LOOKED UP ONE ARTICLE OR TWEET / POSTED — THAT DOESN'T MAKE ME TRUST YOU.

You want your target journalists to feel like you're sending them a customized pitch. So you find some of their recent work to cite to prove to them that you researched them. That's a great step... as long as you cite their actual recent work.



“ Lol. Latest PR pitch “I saw your most recent post...” (links to post from \*2006\*) “... and was wondering if you'd like to learn more about...”. TWO THOUSAND AND SIX. Not 2016. 2006. Rest assured, that was not our “most recent post.” ”

@mmasnick



“ Just got a PR pitch that began, “Hi John. I saw your recent coverage of bikinis...” Pretty sure the sender has not really seen any of my recent coverage. ”

@Stribguy



“ most PR pitches:

Hi [30% chance of this being the wrong name]! Loved your tweet about [random nothing tweet they saw when they glanced at your Twitter for the purpose of this email]. I agree!

Reaching out to offer an interview with [client] on [topic you would never cover]. ”

@readDanwrite



## The Lesson:

**Referencing journalists' work is a sound approach. The key is the execution.**

The work must be recent, and it must be clearly relevant to what follows in the pitch (but not a duplication, because they've already covered that).



### THAT'S NOT MY NAME.



Jon Hansen  
@JonHansenTV



Would it be rude to reply to every PR pitch with "Its Jon not John" ?

3:14 PM · Jun 11, 2020 from Chicago, IL · Twitter for iPhone



## The Lesson:

When you do go through the effort of sending a targeted pitch, at least spell the person's name right, and don't turn it into a nickname. I add that as a Michael myself (not a Mike, although I know and love many Mikes, very fine name that is), it's not a huge deal but certainly gets you off on the wrong foot.



5

**“If I get one more  
pitch about \_\_\_\_\_  
I’m going to chuck my  
laptop through the  
window”**

Journalists getting inundated with pitches about the same non-newsworthy topics was the most common complaint in this study. I broke these into two groups—pitches tied to particular events or holidays **(12% of all tweets)** vs pitches about particular issues or subjects **(15% of all tweets)**.



## HERE WERE THE MOST-CITED EVENTS OR HOLIDAYS AND THE NUMBER OF TWEETS COMPLAINING ABOUT THEM:



### Christmas/holidays (13)

Most were people who don't cover products/gifts complaining about getting gift guide pitches in the summer. That's not a timing problem, that's a targeting problem.



### Valentines Day (6)

(plus 2 for Galentines Day)



### Super Bowl (5)

Several of these mocked references to "the big game."

### These were each referenced twice:

4/20 | Tax Day | Earth Day | Mother's Day | Father's Day | Halloween

.....

Like Ben Affleck playing Batman, **some things just aren't a natural fit**. Here's a representative example of how PR people routinely take a topic that has nothing to do with a holiday and force a connection:



**Pride Month** and **International Women's Day** were each mentioned twice. But those tweets weren't necessarily complaining about using these as news hooks. Rather they called out companies they saw as exploiting the commemorations and/or not actually supporting the causes. For example:

Here's a helpful contribution from a journalist on the subject of pitching around a commemorative event. Marisa, an editor at [Good Housekeeping](#), respectfully shared a peek at what it's like to be her and get so many pitches citing the various "awareness months" that all fall in October.

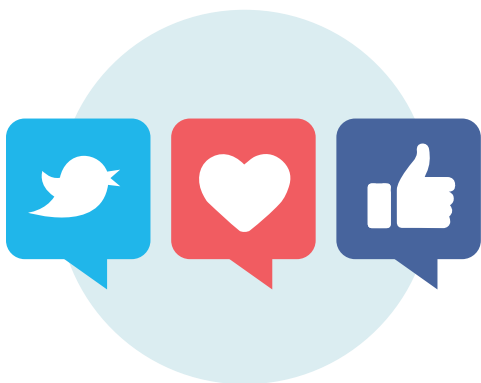


## The Lesson:

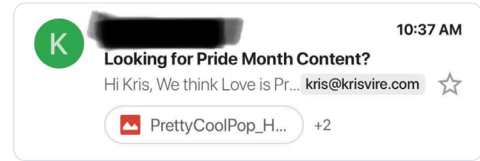
Avoid the popular holidays mentioned above, simply because you're facing a lot of competition.

### BUT IF YOU MUST:

Make sure you're not stretching too far to tie in your idea. Using a time element remains a strong pitching tactic when done correctly.



Actually, I'm looking for PR pitches that acknowledge LGBTQ people exist year-round and not just in June!



I would like to share with you a few lines of PR pitches I've received recently (all due respect to the pitchers, who are doing their jobs to the best of their ability). I call it this series ... October is!

2:17 PM · Oct 8, 2019 · Twitter Web App

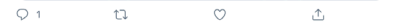
2 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 1 Like



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

Replying to @mar\_to\_go  
October is National Eczema Awareness Month!

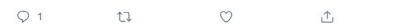
October is National Eczema Awareness Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is National Window Covering Safety Month!

October is National Window Covering Safety Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is National Disability Awareness Month!

October is National Disability Awareness Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Month!

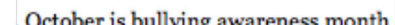
October is Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is Bullying Awareness Month!

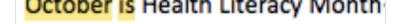
October is bullying awareness month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is Health Literacy Month! (Yes, this is where I got lazy and just searched "October is" in my email, hence the yellow highlight.)

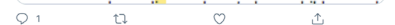
October is Health Literacy Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month! (is our nation cybersecure?)

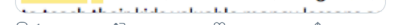
October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is National Financial Planning Month!

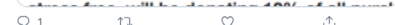
October is National Financial Planning Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month (and also Infant Loss Awareness Month, which is the one topic I actually didn't get a pitch about).

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Marisa @mar\_to\_go · Oct 8, 2019

I don't mean to belittle any of these. All of these topics are things people care about. But if you've got an issue and you're looking for a month to make people aware of it, please consider months other than October.





## HERE WERE THE MOST-CITED ISSUES OR SUBJECTS:

### THREE TOPICS DOMINATED HERE:



#### Coronavirus/COVID (30)

These were all in March/April of 2020, so we appear to have learned our lesson since then.



#### CBD (24)

A constant flow of these over the course of the study.



#### Cryptocurrency/blockchain (17)

These peaked in the summer of 2018 but continue to vex journalists today.

## HERE'S A TWEET THE SUMS UP THIS TYPE OF COMPLAINT NICELY:



“ Every third PR pitch I get reads like this:

Hi John,

I just wanted to follow up my earlier note and see if you were interested in talking to a subject matter expert for an article about why bitcoin and CBD oil are now being considered as treatments for 5G-inflamed COVID-19?i ”

@jonostrower

### SAID ANOTHER WAY:



“ Coronavirus is the CBD of 2020 PR pitches. Sheesh.

@LoveLetter2Food ”

### AND EVEN AN EMPATHETIC WRITER CAN'T HANDLE IT:



“ out of respect for the hustle I do my best to never complain about PR pitch emails but the TK on the blockchain sitch is gonna break me ”

@emanuelmaiberg



## OTHER TOPICS JOURNALISTS COMPLAINED ABOUT HEARING TOO MUCH ABOUT INCLUDED:

### Pumpkin Spice (4)

Yes, in a study of journalist tweets over the last three years, the fourth-most complained about PR pitch topic was pumpkin spice. People really do love to hate this thing.



Pamela Babcock  
@BabcockPamela

Fall has arrived. Just got PR pitch asking if I want to write about pumpkin-spiced-themed dog leashes and harnesses.

### Game of Thrones (4)

I don't blame the PR pros, seems like this is all anyone was talking about when it was airing.



## The Lesson:

Coronavirus was and is a huge news story. Nothing wrong with pitching around it, but only if you've got a **relevant angle** and you've **targeted the right person**. It will be the same with whatever the next huge news story is.

There's a different cause behind the bevy of CBD and crypto complaints, and it doesn't really have anything to do with PR. So much investor money flooded these two new markets that everyone and their cousin was hiring a PR agency. Way too much supply of pitches and not enough demand from journalists (or their audiences). Eventually investors will tire of paying for outreach that doesn't get results and this will level off. But it's really tough if you're a legit PR pro in either of these fields. **You have to do more to stand out.**

## 6

**“The only thing worse than your pitch is your follow-up.”**

I’m a big proponent of following up on your pitches. According to anecdotal evidence I’ve assembled over the years, **three-fourths of your placements won’t happen until you follow up** on your initial outreach. That’s like only eating a quarter of a Hawaiian pizza and then dumping the rest in the garbage (which, depending on your view, may be a tragedy or a victory). But nearly **6% of all the tweets** in this time period complained about following up.



“ Dear Jessica, Sorry to follow up, but I’m emailing you to follow up on the unsolicited PR pitch I sent you that has nothing to do with anything you cover. I look forward to hearing from you. ”

@JessHullinger



“ I’m really surprised by the number of people who are repeatedly following up on the PR pitches they send me, despite the fact that my out-of-office message says I’m on maternity leave. ”

@kat\_boogaard



## The Lesson:

Don’t be deterred from following up in general by these tweets. They were complaining about getting followed up on **BAD PITCHES**. (See the sections on off-topic and blast pitches above). Nobody complained about the 20 movies that followed *The Avengers* (RIP Chadwick). They liked the original and they liked what came after. And none of these tweets complained about getting follow up on pitches they liked. I have email evidence that journalists actually thank helpful PR pros who follow up on properly targeted, relevant pitches (although of course they’re not gonna tweet about that—all their journo Twitter friends would think they’ve gone soft!)



## GETTING MORE PRECISE:

Three tweets specifically decried following up within 24 hours of the initial pitch.

“ What’s with people who send a “follow-up” email less than 24 hrs after their first email? Like, settle down there, skippy, your PR pitch isn’t life and death. ”

@LoveLetter2Food



## The Lesson:

Easy. Don’t follow up until **at least 24 hours have passed**. Even then, if you don’t have breaking news or an impending time element, two to four days is more comfortable.



## EVEN A PATIENT JOURNALIST GETS TICKED WHEN PR PEOPLE FEEL ENTITLED TO A RESPONSE.

“ Anyone else notice an increasing aggressiveness in PR pitches lately? I’m getting “I’ve reached out to you many times” and “Please respond now” emails from national PR firms on pitches that have nothing to do with my magazine’s scope. ”

@MileHighRobert

“ Hi! I would really just like to talk to you to clarify why you didn’t respond to my email.”

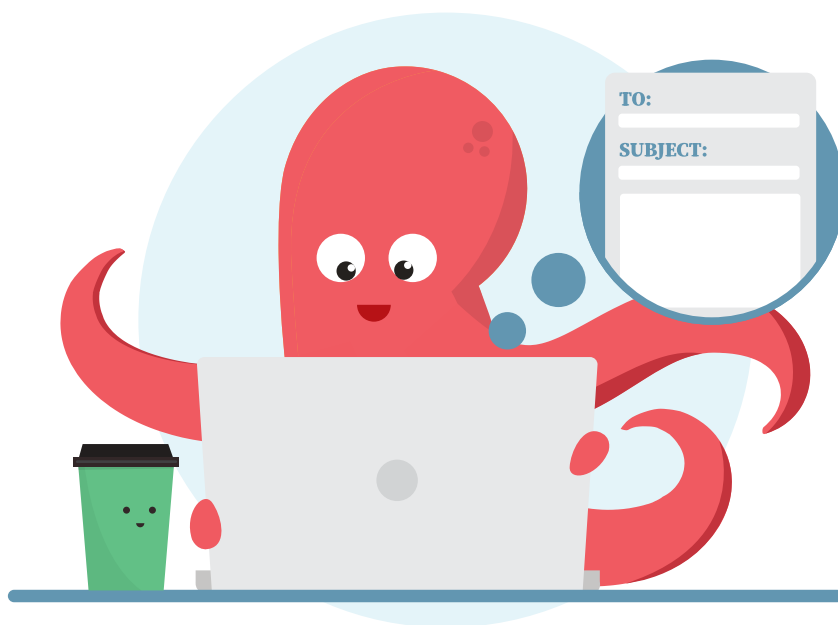
These PR pitches are starting to sound like creepy ex-boyfriends. ”

@tomandlorenzo



### The Lesson:

Remember that annoying college roommate who would leave passive-aggressive notes saying things like, “Looks like someone left their dishes in the sink again”? Don’t be like that. Don’t cite the number of times you’ve reached out. Don’t do anything that can come across as implying that the journalist is being rude or unprofessional for not replying. **Remember that we are guests in these journalists’ inboxes, and we want to be invited back.**



7

**“Wait, now PR people  
are contacting me at  
my \_\_\_\_\_ ?!”**

Nearly **4% of tweets** complained about PR pros crossing the line in terms of where they’re contacting journalists. Most of them focused on personal email addresses. A few others complained about getting pitches via **Twitter** or **Instagram DMs**. One journalist protested vehemently about getting pitched via **LinkedIn**.



**oset babür**  
@baburoset



why....would....you....pitch....someone....a...PR...pitch....on...Instagram DMs.....



**gabrielle korn** ✓  
@Gabrielle\_Korn



PR pitches to my personal gmail is how I know we're in The Bad Place

I was actually surprised how few tweets complained about receiving phone pitches. Only eight tweets about that in nearly three years, and one of those was about getting called at home and another about getting called on a personal cell phone. Journalists haven't suddenly grown less sensitive about phone pitches, so PR people must not be calling as often anymore.



## The Lesson:

I found most of the tweets about personal email reasonable and clear—doing so without permission is a clear no-no. I'm not so emphatically opposed to using direct messages on social platforms, because I sometimes hear about this practice being successful. In fact, a reply to that tweet above even confirms this:



**Ana Espinoza**  
@Espinoza\_Ana

Replying to @baburoset

I swear, some people encourage publicists to DM and even \*prefer\* it. The internet is wild.

But DMs are better used to react to their work and build relationships rather than pitch.

8

“No, I am **NOT** well  
and I will **NOT** have  
a nice day!”





“ How every bad PR pitch begins ”

**Brett S. Vergara** @BrettSVergara · Sep 20, 2019  
 \*writing email\*  
 I!!!  
 Hope!!!  
 All!!!!  
 Is!!!  
 Well!!!  
 With!!!  
 You!!!

@SarahHauer



“ If the email starts with “hope you are staying safe and healthy,” it’s a PR pitch. ”

@Gsabella

I noted any instance more than one tweet called out particular wording that was unrelated to the pitch topic - these constituted 5.5% of all the complaints. Most of the language journalists mocked falls under the category of “small talk.” Small talk is like kryptonite for many journalists - if kryptonite made you roll your eyes and then delete emails. You’re probably just being your authentic polite self, but journalists are not looking for nice on cold pitches. They want you to get to the point. Here are some of the phrases called out repeatedly and the number of tweets that specifically mentioned them:

“Hope you’re well” (4)

“Nice to e-meet you” (3)

“Hope you’re staying safe and well” (2)

#### OTHER REPEAT OFFENDERS:

**These uncertain times (2)**

You’re just trying to acknowledge reality, but this has grown stale

**Disrupting (2)**

Overused buzzword

**Deskside (2)**

It used to be really common to ask for a “deskside briefing,” but younger journalists aren’t familiar with the term and think it’s a word worth mocking



## The Lesson:

**Cut the pleasantries and get to the point.**

#### BUT IF YOU MUST:

If the super-friendly PR pro deep inside you cannot get on board with the curt journalist tone, keep your greeting brief and personalized, like  
***“Hope you’re doing okay in that snowstorm.”***

9

## “Bad timing, bro (too early and too late)”

**5% of the tweets** referenced some aspect of bad timing - pitching too early (most common) or too late, or at an odd time of the day.



**Mike Conklin** ✓  
@mikeconklin

"Celebrate National Dog Day with CBD" is a terrible PR pitch at any time. But especially at 3:30 on National Dog Day.



**Greg Bluestein** ✓  
@bluestein

Not exactly the best time

May I call you on this story idea?

Today at 10:52 AM

The internet has changed everything from the way we shop to keeping up with the headlines. Cell phones brought us a 'constant connection' and opened up new ways to communicate. Microsoft and email improved the way we communicate and work, so what is blockchain changing? Some say blockchain is not all that it is cracked up to be and has not changed anything, but most would say blockchain is changing the way we do everything – from money and banking, to healthcare, to the way merchants reward us, to helping those who suffer from addiction.

We have experts in blockchain who can speak to this and more – may I schedule an interview between you and one of our experts?  
Thank you,



(To a political reporter — guess what was happening on Nov. 6, 2018?)



## The Lesson:

**Do pitch with at least one day's notice. Don't pitch reporters when you know they'll be extraordinarily busy** (like a politics writer on Election Day). But other than that, don't stress about what time you pitch—for every journalist who is bugged you emailed them at 9 p.m., another will be more likely to respond because they have fewer emails at that time of day.

## “How dare you?!”

“**Reading the room**” is one of the key reasons PR people have jobs. And based on my interactions with PR pros, coming across as tone-deaf is one of our biggest fears. That’s evident in the fact that **only two percent of tweets accused pitches of insensitivity**. No surprise that several called out companies for selling during the early days of the COVID outbreak. And two complained about pitching around Kobe Bryant’s death. (Sigh of relief—there were zero tweets complaining about insensitive pitching around the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests.)



**Lora Kolodny** ✓  
@lorakolodny

Some of these companies really should have suspended their direct email marketing and spray-n-pray PR pitches at this time and just focused on their own social accounts and websites. Inbox clutter is not helping. And no, I'm not buying any \_\_\_\_\_ at this time. Thanks.



**Mark D. Somerson**  
@MarkSomerson

PR pitch of the morning:

You can stop sending these. Thank you very much.

"Kobe - preparing for sudden death. 500 words"



## The Lesson:

Although a few exceptions get more than their share of attention, we're doing pretty well at reading the room. Don't be gun-shy after the once-a-century maelstrom of coronavirus spawned a flurry of complaints. When you target the correct journalists (sensing a theme here?) who are not preoccupied with whatever the big news is, then most of the time they are understanding that your employer is still moving forward and you still have a job to do. They do, too, and when you align with their needs, they'll thank you.



11

## **“I’m just going to leave this right here . . .”**

I can picture PR teams huddled around the conference room or Zoom session, desperately brainstorming creative angles to breathe new life into the boring or routine info their clients or employers have given them. They grab hold of a new idea, shoot it out to the world...

... and unwittingly generate nine percent of all the journalists complaints about PR. This is the category of pitches that were so non-newsworthy that journalists offered them for collective mocking. Here's a sampling. (Stick around for the last one - easily the worst pitch in this entire study).



“ It’s not even 9 a.m. and we’ve got a great contender for the PR pitch of the week:  
“UTI? More like UT-Bye!” ”  
[@SunBizGriffin](#)



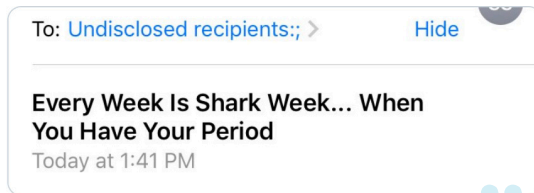
“ Can we agree that 2019 is the last year anyone should use the phrase “Let’s taco about”  
followed by a Cinco de Mayo PR pitch? ”  
[@kylelarnold](#)



“ I get a PR pitch: a study “has uncovered a dark truth – that British workers are extending  
their toilet breaks much longer than the average time taken for a bowel movement”.  
No, I’m not joking ”  
[@reutersLjungg](#)



“ Local reporter haunted by PR pitch



[@aeis17](#)



## The Lesson:

We’ve all come up with terrible ideas. In the late 90s, someone at [Cosmopolitan](#) decided to launch a line of yogurt, for crying out loud. I never want to put a damper on creativity, but run your unorthodox pitches by an objective third-party before you send them to people who are paid to be cynical. Be sure to get a thumbs-up from someone who isn’t wedded to your idea.

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## **Some helpful tips journalists offered**

In this section I've gathered subjects that didn't generate a lot of tweets but teach valuable lessons.





**Erik Sherman** ✓  
@ErikSherman

I should create a filter that automatically deleted any #PR pitch that contains an exclamation point.



## The Lesson:

This rule isn't necessarily as sweeping as Erik suggests, but think twice before using an exclamation point. Journalists, as a group, are not as perky as we PR folk.

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**Jacob Wolf** ✓  
@JacobWolf

If you use "e-gamers" in your PR pitch, you can basically assure yourself that I will not read it.



**Kelli B. Grant, CFP®** ✓  
@kelligrant

I have this PR pitch in my inbox where the rep has confused "tax return" and "tax refund" throughout. "How not to blow your tax return." Sigh. Nope.



## The Lesson:

It can be hard when you get a new job or a new client and you have to learn an entirely new language. But it's worth it. Read the journalists who cover that space so you don't inadvertently use vocabulary that shows them you don't know what you're talking about.

Three tweets covered email etiquette that maybe everyone except these three PR pros already knows, but I'll share them here just in case:



“Reminder: If you send me a wide-release PR pitch with that super-obnoxious “high priority” exclamation mark thingy, it’s just going to get deleted.

@MrJonathanEvans



“I do not know how to say this more directly: I do not take your PR (pitch) email seriously if it is coming from a gmail address.”

@MyVicariousLyfe



“A CES PR pitch cc’ed to a few hundred journalists has just set off a reply-allpocalypse.

@robpegoraro



---

Finally, here’s a [helpfully long thread](#) from freelancer Jen A. Miller (she emphasizes elsewhere that she’s not Jennifer Miller) that encapsulates many of the lessons in this ebook, plus a few extra goodies. And a crab holding a steak knife! Definitely worth checking out.



## Good job, crew!

When I started collating and labeling the tweets, I set up categories based on complaints I've heard from journalists over the years. And when I was done counting, I was pleasantly surprised at how few complaints there were about the following issues:

## PHONE PITCHING

See “Wait, now PR people are contacting me . . .” section above

## TOO SELF-PROMOTIONAL (4)

For a discipline that is—at its core—about promoting things, this is a pretty low number.

## TYPO (4)

Because many journalists are proud self-proclaimed grammar nerds, I expected to see more of these. Why is it that we can write generally clean copy but not get mail merge right?

## FAUX COMPLIMENT (3)

When I teach PR pros to reference journalists’ earlier work, they often hesitate because they don’t want to come off like they are offering a bait and switch. But speaking generally, we must be doing it right, otherwise we’d see more complaints here.

## TOO LONG (1)

Only one of these! But as much as I want to, I can’t draw too much comfort from this, because I see thousands of pitches a year and many of them are too long. I assume journalists delete most of them before they even realize how long they are (see complaints above about “too many pitches” and “blast pitches”).

## DECEIVING (1)

This is great news, because I’m pretty confident that a journalist who gets a pitch that relies on intentional deception would “out” it for the protection of their journalist colleagues. So it must not be happening much.

## Tweets I disagree with

Okay, “disagree with” might be too strong, but **“Tweets that sound like they apply to all journalists that actually only apply to the tweeter and a few others”** is a horrible subhead.

Reminder—any journalist gripe tweet is only an accurate window into how to pitch that one journalist, and I respect their feelings. But, as I’ll explain, in some cases those perspectives aren’t shared by a majority of others.

These next complaints all fall into the category of, “That’s not really a bad pitch, just terribly targeted.” Before you shut the door on a topic that a journalist is frustrated with, click through to their bio first and see if maybe it’s just a mismatch.

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#### THE DC CORRESPONDENT FOR A CANADIAN NATIONAL NEWS OUTLET:



**Jackson Proskow** ✓  
@JProskowGlobal

Just received an unsolicited PR pitch for a vegan dating service. 🙄



#### A FINANCIAL TIMES WRITER WHO COVERS FOUNDATIONS:



**Aziza Kasumov**  
@azizakasumov

just gonna leave this pr pitch here

**Potential Topics:**

-Boomers into Zoomers: A Boomer Guide on how to setup and use Zoom.



#### DC CORRESPONDENT FOR TIME

(I know this one is a little cheesy but if sent to a lifestyle mag or blogger it would go down easier)



**Vera Bergengruen** ✓  
@VeraMBergen

This is it. This is the worst PR pitch I’ve ever received in my inbox, I hate everything about it

Forget the High Calorie Pumpkin Latte,  
Live Your Best Life This Fall with A  
Healthier Pumpkin Spice! Inbox



The only thing these next two might have been guilty of is being slightly ahead of their time. But if PR people saw these tweets and backed off pitching these angles, they would have missed out on a ton of coverage:



**Beth Demmon (like "Lemon" not "Demon")**  
@delightedbite

no no no NO NO NO I just got a PR pitch for "this weekend's cocktail special: The Quarantini, a regular martini that you drink at home, alone."

There are now more than 8,000 stories resulting from a Google News search for "quarantini."



**Cole Cooper**  
@iamcolecoop

Someone just sent me a PR pitch for WFH clothing options for Coronavirus. Like wtf? Capitalism strikes again

The socks are objectively hideous, but the angle itself had merit and got covered a jillion times.

**PITCH: Your Home Office Outfit Ideas from East Dane, Minnetonka, T-Bô and more**

Hi Cole,

For those working from home due to the coronavirus outbreak, I'm reaching out to share some outfit ideas to consider from East Dane, Minnetonka, and T-Bô for any upcoming stories or roundups.

Happy to share affiliate details if needed.

**Anonymous Ism** Tie Dye Socks, \$25.00, linked here [EastDane.com](https://EastDane.com)

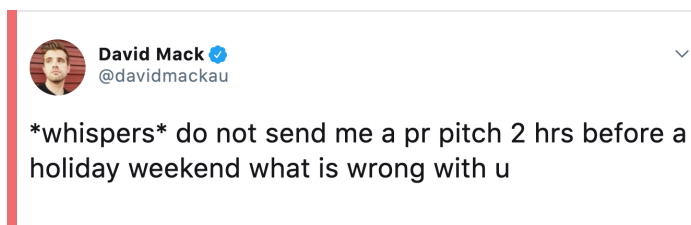


**Ami** 3-Pack of Socks, \$75.00, linked

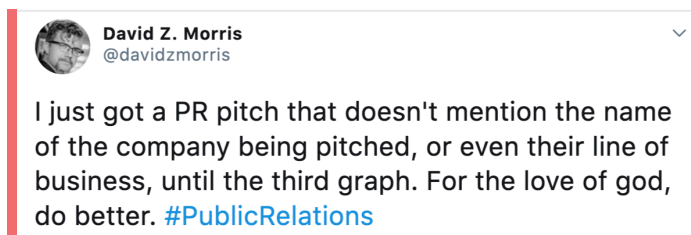
## Now I'll share tweets one-at-a-time and then my contrarian perspective.



Sal may not like this, but there's nothing inherently wrong with the approach. My guess is that the pitch that prompted this tweet started with a bad quote. If you lead with a compelling zinger on a timely subject, and then verify the credibility of your expert in the next graf, that could be a fine pitch.



I'm okay if people think I'm whack for my take here, because I've got data to prove it. I once tracked a sample of 19 PR pros who pitched on Friday afternoon before Memorial Day, and their hit rate was slightly HIGHER than usual. Yes, it's more likely that the journalists you're pitching will be OOO or hurrying to get that way. But you also face way less competition for the attention of the ones still working.



I respect David's experience as a [Fortune](#) writer, and clearly this style of pitch doesn't work for him, and probably for a segment of business journalists. But other journalists will complain when a pitch is too company-centric, too self-promotional. Therefore PR pros will identify a broader trend or issue, and then explain how their company fits into that (sometimes not until the third paragraph). See how that's an attempt at being journalist-friendly?





**Jared Newman**  
@OneJaredNewman

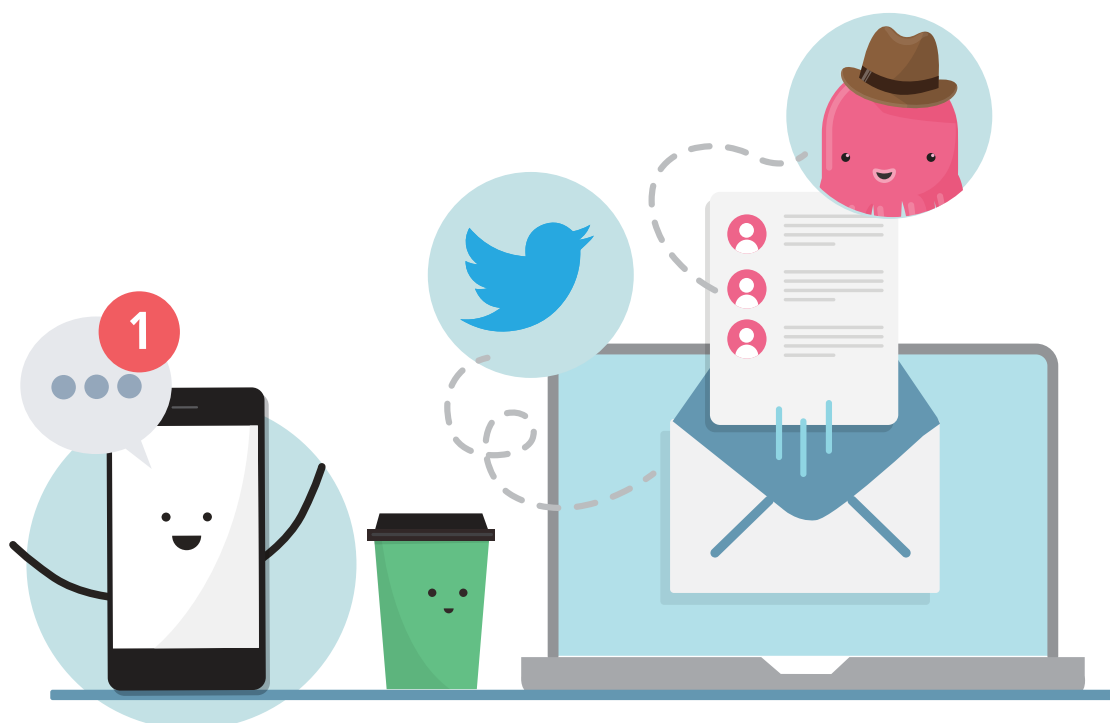
The one category of PR pitch I will never understand is "pre-researched listicle that just so happens to include one of our clients." Does anyone actually run with these?

Obviously not pubs like [PC World](#) where Jared works, but the answer is "yes." Smaller outlets, or those who demand their employees crank out multiple stories a day, do run these if properly researched and not too self-promotional.



**Molly Mirhashem** ✓ @moll... · Aug 6  
nothing ruins an afternoon like a weight loss PR pitch! (don't send me these!)

I don't think it's too crazy to think that a running editor at an outdoor magazine might cover a weight loss story. Now that Molly has clearly stated her preference, it should be honored. But that doesn't mean that other journalists won't cover weight loss, or even that other running or fitness editors won't cover it. It may be the most covered topic in the world!



## Conclusion

The journalists who post these tweets get the satisfaction of venting and sharing their frustration. The other journalists who read them get to laugh and commiserate. And you—the savvy PR pro who studies them—get the chance to learn and do better. Don't read too much into them and get paralyzed with paranoia. Apply the lessons and watch your hit rate increase.

### TO YOUR SUCCESS!




## About the author



Michael Smart is the media relations coach and trainer brands and agencies turn to when they want to [improve their media pitching results](#). He's trained more than 10,000 communicators from teams at GM, Intercontinental Hotels, St. Jude Children's Hospital and other companies of all sizes.

He's the instructor for Muck Rack Academy's free online certification, Fundamentals of Media Relations. [Take the quick, fun course to dig deeper into more pitching lessons.](#)



## About Muck Rack



Muck Rack's Public Relations Management (PRM) platform enables PR teams to work together to find the right journalists for their stories, send customized pitches, build meaningful relationships with the media, monitor news and quantify their impact. Thousands of organizations use Muck Rack to take their communications to the next level.

Muck Rack is also the solution of choice for journalists, who use Muck Rack's free, automatically updated portfolios to showcase their work and to provide information about what stories they're looking for.

You can learn how Muck Rack can help you and your team by requesting a [tour of the platform here](#).