

CULTURE COMMS

MEET THE JOURNALISTS SESSION MINUTES

Panel:

Dea Birkett – Chair & Director Kids in Museums

Tom Rowley – Daily Telegraph

Rebecca Atkinson – Museums Journal

Emily Beament – Press Association

Q: What stories do you look for?

All: First line, and pitch is very important.

Emily – PA: I look for stories that are new and grab me from the first line.

Tom – DT: I want the kind of pieces that you read at your leisure with a cup of tea in your spare time.

Rebecca – MJ: For the MJ I look for new and readable stories, relevant for specialist publication.

All – Prefer to be contacted by email.

Q: What can PRs do to help get their stories heard? Your top tips!

Tom – DT: Don't send a whole press release first off. Send a short snappy email summing up the story and angle (make sure you target the publication).

Rebecca – MJ: Tailor your pitch and make it obvious if photos are available – include if you can.

Dea – Attachment media should be accessible in one click.

Emily – PA: Don't send PR as an attachment. Lots of work is done on the go so making something mobile friendly increases chances of getting something read there and then. Make it obvious what multimedia features you have to add to the story, you don't need to pitch this separately to digital at PA.

Q: When to pitch a story?

Tom – DT: Try and tell journalists as soon as you can, rather than post event.

Rebecca – MJ: We try not to let personal interest detract from getting other stories in, important to try and get a balance. (Though FYI Rebecca is a photography fan!)

Emily – PA: PA aims to be first, fair and accurate. They also avoid taking political lines, so their coverage tends to be mainly factual.

Dea: Look up writers on linked in/twitter, research them so you can be specific in your pitch. Important to try and know the person, not just the publication.

Q: What do you want PRs to stop doing?

Tom – DT: Be clear on the term exclusive and what it entails.

Rebecca – MJ: Don't be too corporate. If journalists phone then they want to speak to a person rather than the system so take their enquiries over the phone if possible, rather than ask them to email it over again.

[If they called you, this might also be a useful way to respond if you are just giving them background information, then you can also be sure they really understand the position.]

Emily – PA: Do wait a while before you make a follow up call after sending through a pitch or press release.

Q: How can you best get to know your journalists?

Emily – PA: A coffee is fine or an invite to the actual event so they can see for themselves. Going to an event can also increase chances of a story as it will give them a vested interest in the story.

Tom – DT: Also agrees it's most effective to invite people to events and strike their interest.

Rebecca – MJ: In addition, if you want to try and get journalists out of London, increase the value of attending your event by partnering up with other organisations who are also promoting something.

Q: Are there particular images/ shots you prefer for a story?

Rebecca – MJ: Don't mind if they're generic, as long as they best show off the work in the story.

Tom – DT: Try and think like a photographer if you can. Also what would make a good photo for the publication, rather than what you would like included as an organisation.

Q: We want to reach as people as possible in one hit. Offering and pitching exclusives is a slow process, especially when you're running out of time to get the story out – what should we do?

Emily - PA: PA have a short lead time so one or two days is enough time, and since they are a main news source you can get on the day news to them and it still has a good chance of being picked up elsewhere.

Tom – DT: Offer exclusives but hold something back for news day to maximise the publicity you can do.

Rebecca – MJ: It's a good idea to look and see how you can make more than one story out something for different publications.

Dea: It's about realising that there are more stories than your initial first pitch so be open to journalist ideas too.

Q: What makes a launch event worthwhile to attend?

Rebecca – MJ: For me it's about personal interest, a demo or an offer. Including telling journalists if they can bring friends or family, for example if it's family friendly, say bring your family.

Tom – DT: Doesn't do on the day journalism.

Emily – PA: Unless there's something new at the launch event, journalists are not going to spend time going if all the info has already been sent, so do consider holding something back for news day. It's also worth doing a press event a week before to give journalists time to form the story.

Q: Should PRs use twitter to pitch stories?

All: No, email contact is still preferred.

Tom – DT: I do read my emails so that's still the best way.

Q: Are press packs useful?

Emily – PA: If a journalist is attending an event human contact and chatting through any background or details is best. Including if you have any experts on hand, this increases the value of the event and the journalists understanding of the story.

Tom – DT: Quite happy to receive a few facts and top lines in a press release at a launch/ event.

Dea: It's not print versus digital – you can pitch everything to one journalist. Knowing what's on offer, including multimedia, can in turn help with their editor pitch.

Q: With budgets becoming tighter and tighter, how important is video content?

Emily – PA: Phone video is fine if budget is an issue, but if it's professional B roll is preferred.

Rebecca – MJ: You could also ask a journalist if they want to send a videographer themselves.

Q: How important is it to you that readers can go to the event you are covering?

Tom – DT: I write self contained stories so not usually relevant.

Emily – PA: The story needs to be more than getting people to attend an event anyway. Event promotion should just be one part of the story.

And finally...

Q: What are your one liner summaries in five words?

Tom – DT: Don't be scared, say hello!

Emily – PA: Be enthusiastic about your story.

Rebecca – MJ: Tailor it for me.