

How to successfully pitch opinion pieces

 By [Vanessa Clark](#)

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In [part one](#) of this three-part series, I defined what opinion pieces are and why they are such a vital PR tool. Now, in part two, I take a look at the mechanics of pulling together an op-ed and getting it placed.

1. Have a strong opinion

First and foremost, make sure your client has an opinion. More than that, make sure their opinion adds value, moves a story along and is controversial, rather than just regurgitating what others have said.

Unfortunately, some companies simply can't easily agree on a point of view, whether for personality or business reasons. If this is the case, as a PR professional you are going to be hard-pressed to produce an authentic and evocative opinion piece for your client.

It can be done, but I believe the most successful pieces are based on a strong opinion generated by a client, then packaged and conveyed by the PR.

2. Structure it clearly

Almost as bad as no opinion are too many opinions. It generally works best to limit an opinion piece to one, clearly-structured, well thought-out opinion, than a rambling synopsis of several ideas.

Rather strip out the excess opinions and build future articles around them.

3. Play up a news angle

Next, hook your opinion to **relevant** (for your client) news angle. Perhaps a new piece of legislation has been passed that your client can comment on? Or a relevant annual holiday or event is coming up? Or a report has been published?

Take a global trend and localise it, or vice versa. And don't forget the perennial end-of-year trend articles [*in the case of Bizcommunity.com, the perennial beginning-of-year [Biz Trends Report](#) series! - managing ed*]

Tread carefully around disasters and other bad news, though, to avoid being seen as profiting from another's distress. If you are going to take this approach, you **really** need to add value and the topic needs to be incredibly relevant to your company's agenda.

4. Prepare an outline in advance

Depending on turn-around time and the journalist's preferences, you might prepare the piece in advance, or first pitch the outline of the idea before proceeding. I usually have at least a very detailed, approved outline including details of supporting material, if not the final version, before pitching.

You don't want to start writing the article once a journalist has accepted it, only to find it's not really going anywhere, or your client changes their opinion (it happens!)

5. Pitch it as an exclusive

Decide which is the most strategic publication for you to pitch your piece to and then offer it on an exclusive basis.

You may be able to place adapted versions in publications in different non-competing sectors, but typically you are far more likely to have your piece placed if it's offered on an exclusive basis [*Bizcommunity only accepts exclusive opinion pieces - managing ed*].

6. Understand the editorial process

Understand the editorial process of the specific publication and how they deal with opinion pieces and other features [see [*How to contribute to Bizcommunity, from op-ed pieces to news - managing ed*](#)].

For print, your deadline is probably going to be well before the news pages, which means there is the risk your opinion piece gets bumped for another, more topical piece. Most editors will honour their agreement with you and place the article in a later edition.

Also, if you are pitching two separate articles to two editors at the same publication, let them know. If they have a policy around limiting comment from an individual company per edition, they won't take kindly to having to scramble to replace content at the last minute.

7. Tailor the piece to the publication's audience

Whether you ghostwrite the piece, have your spokesperson write it, or a combination of the two, make sure the quality of the writing is up to scratch. But not only that: make sure it complies with your target publication's house style and is aimed at the publication's target audience.

In addition, find out the deadlines, word limits and preferred formats-and stick to them.

Remember, one of the biggest selling points of an opinion piece is that it's a ready-made, original, thought-provoking piece of writing that the publication can use as is. This allows staff writers to focus on other pieces. If the journalist has to rewrite the piece for clarity, you'll nullify this advantage.

8. Be tactful throughout the internal editing process

Handle the internal editing process tactfully with your client, as you will need to balance their (hopefully) strong opinion with the editorial requirements of your target publication.

This is sometimes easier said than done, however, and all too many opinion pieces fall victim to an acrimonious edit process.

It is your job to know your target media well enough to produce rational, objective and compelling reasons for specific

approaches and edits. Stay calm and leave emotion and ego at the door. At the end of the day, you and your client are chasing the same goal: getting the correct message out in the most effective way via the most appropriate channel.

9. Provide follow-up info

Make sure you include a biography of the spokesperson with details of the company, contact details and a web address [for Bizcommunity, please also include social media links, eg Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ that the client is happy to share with the world - managing ed].

If the publication is online, hyperlink pertinent keywords in the bio for that all-important link love to your client's site.

Along with the bio, send over decent photography in the correct resolution for the medium. Some publications may insist on a certain style of mug shot but, even if they don't, there is no excuse for a cropped birthday party snap with bad lighting. I always tell my start-up clients that decent photography is a great PR investment.

In part III, I'll take a look at what to do if your opinion piece is rejected, and how to extend the life of an opinion piece to get the most bang for your buck.

A version of this article first appeared in volume four of the [PR News Media Training Guidebook](#), published by Access Intelligence LLC. The publication offers tips, best practices, key strategies and practical checklist from media training experts intended to increase PRs' chances of success as they send their messages out into the 24/7 media cycle.

For more:

- Bizcommunity: [\[The ready-made feature I\] Opinion pieces make your client shine](#) by Vanessa Clark
- Bizcommunity: [\[The ready-made feature III\] Reincarnating your opinion piece](#) by Vanessa Clark

See also:

- Bizcommunity Press Office: [If you're content, we're content](#)
- Bizcommunity: [How to contribute to Bizcommunity, from op-ed pieces to news](#)
- Bizcommunity: [B2B magazines need to up their game](#) by Angelo Coppola

ABOUT VANESSA CLARK

Hi! I'm a freelance journalist, copywriter and editor based in Cape Town, South Africa. I write as a journalist and for corporates and agencies. My specialties are business-to-business and technology writing. I like unpacking complex ideas so they are more easily understood - especially when it involves innovation taking place in South Africa, and the rest of Africa.

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