



Seven Fatal Flaws Guaranteed to Kill Your PR Campaign

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By Jeff Crilley, TV Reporter; Author, [Free Publicity](#)

After more than two decades of beating the streets as a TV reporter, I've discovered that most public relations efforts fall short because of a combination of errors. And none of them have to do with funding. They are simple things that must be avoided if you want to impress the press.

1. Failure to do homework. I'm sorry folks—you're doing yourself a disservice if you're still relying on those expensive media lists that are woefully outdated. I saw one of those lists recently. They still have me as a "feature" reporter in Dallas. I haven't been on the "features beat" in almost a decade. With the Internet, there's no excuse not to know what a reporter does for a living.

2. Blindly sending out new releases. The newsrooms are getting so many these days, that simply writing some copy and pressing "send" on the fax machine or blasting out emails is a good way to get "lost." My newsroom receives at least two thousand a day. Your news release is just another flake in the snow storm of news releases that bury our assignment desks. A targeted approach to PR is the only way to go.

3. Forgetting the visuals. All reporters, print and radio included, tell stories with pictures. Even if it's just a word picture or the "theatre of the mind" that is radio, you should spend time thinking about what the journalist will see when they arrive at your news event. And in television news, it's all important. As soon as someone starts pitching me a story on the phone, I'm instantly imagining the visual elements it will take to tell the story.

4. Ignoring the news. You can't fight a feeding frenzy. It was amazing to me during the days after Katrina and September 11th, how many story pitches were coming into our newsroom that had nothing to do with those events. I wanted to pick up the phone and call up the PR firms sending us those stories and ask them to turn on the news or pick up that morning's paper. When the news media is going crazy over one story, please don't try and pitch us something unrelated.

5. Sounding like a commercial. Most news releases have this fatal flaw. The headline trumpets the "who" and not the "what." It's not about you, folks. The message should be the star of your news release, not the messenger. And even the largest companies with biggest PR staffs make this mistake. They're so eager for a free commercial, they end up sounding like one in the press release and it's a quick trip to the trash can. Don't worry, the media will tell the audience who is doing what. You'll get your plug—but only if you put the spotlight where it belongs.

6. Selling the sizzle instead of the steak. I know this is contrary to everything they teach salespeople. But news people are different. There has to be substance. I've seen people spend a lot of money on flashy press kits or delivering food to the newsroom along with news releases in hopes that this would secure news coverage. We'll gladly gobble up that pizza without ever sending a crew to cover the opening of your new Italian restaurant. Spend more time thinking about the news value of the story you're trying to get covered and less time on gimmicks.

7. Being ordinary. The most common fatal flaw by far is being boring. We live in an MTV world. Everything is fast-paced. Newsrooms don't have time to waste on news releases about ribbon cuttings. Take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. Dig a little deeper. Does the opening of that new business suggest an economic trend? Ask yourself if anyone other than your immediate family would care about your story. If the answer is "no," then you have more work to do.

This list is by no means complete. There are countless things that can kill your PR efforts, but avoiding these seven fatal flaws is critical if the goal is to actually get news coverage.

Jeff Crilley is an Emmy Award winning TV reporter based in Dallas. His book, [Free Publicity](#), is the first PR book ever written by a working journalist. He speaks at no charge of the subject of media relations. Visit www.jeffcrilley.com for more information.

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