

How to Maximize Your Chances of Getting a Television Interview on a Budget

By Asha Blake and Bradley P. Boyer

Lawyers of all experience levels and in all practice areas need to market themselves. Indeed, in order to practice your trade, you need clients. You need to find, reach and speak to those clients — regardless of your marketing budget or the time you can invest. Everyone has a different opinion about the most effective lawyer marketing — is it attending seminars, giving speeches, writing articles, attending networking groups, meeting with potential clients? The correct answer to this question probably depends on you and your practice area. As lawyer marketing expert Sharon Berman of Berbay Corp. notes “There is no one best way to market your services. The optimum marketing plan encompasses a number of tactics.”

LAST IN A THREE-PART SERIES

Prepared as a collaboration between a television journalist and lawyer, building on their various strengths and experience to provide professional unique insight into television media. Part two appeared on Oct. 22.

One tactic for supplementing your marketing plan is television media coverage. A television interview gets your name out to a large number of potential clients and also helps to brand you. This will serve to differentiate you from your competitors — when they attach links to “case alerts” that they have drafted, you can refer to your interviews instead. But the bigger question is: How do you maximize your chances of making this goal a reality?

Watch television news. Quick, how many local television reporters can you name? What station do they work for? If you come up short on the information it's because you are not watching enough television news. Watch all stations on a rotating basis. Get to know the on air reporters that appeal to you or are covering a story that might be related to what you do for a living.

Find and use a reporter's e-mail address or connect via social networking sites. Many television stations put a reporter's e-mail address on the station Web site page. However, social media is another option. Eric Spillman, a well-respected reporter for the KTLA Morning News in Los Angeles, indicates that e-mail is not the best way to reach him since he gets more than 100 e-mails a day and doesn't have time to read all of them. He is a big fan of Twitter and Facebook. According to Spillman: “In light of the limited time I have during the

work day, if I don't know the viewer/writer on a personal basis, it's unlikely I will answer the e-mail.” The bottom line is — get to know the reporters.

Invite a reporter to coffee and pitch a story. If you feel you have a truly compelling story to tell, reach out to your favorite reporter and if he or she has an interest, invite that person to coffee or a quick meet and greet. The word to stress here is *compelling*.

KTLA Morning News anchor, Frank Buckley says, “Don't pitch stories that are stupid, the stories you pitch should inform viewers in some way.” Thus, be careful in what you pitch because you may only get one shot and you want to put your best foot forward.

Get to know the assignment desk managers and workers. Most viewers are unfamiliar with the term “assignment desk,” but it is the nerve center of the newsroom. Most stories are sent to the assignment desk and are parceled out to reporters from there. The “desk” as it is called, receives most of the story pitches from public relations firms and anyone else who wants to get their story on the air.

Make it easy for the reporter to interview you. You have a better chance of making the air if you make it easy for the reporter. Reporters like to have your “after hours” numbers to check out facts, they also may need you to drive to the station to do an interview because the camera crew may have been pulled for another assignment, but the station can do your interview with a stationary studio camera.

Understand how a newsroom works. There is a morning (9 a.m.), afternoon (3 p.m.) and evening (7 p.m.) show meeting. This is when the producers discuss what news stories are available and which reporters will cover them. If you are in a reporter's “rolodex” of “go to” people, this is when you will get a call. Understand, the reporter has usually less than an hour to find and set up interviews so call them back as soon as their call comes in to your office.

Seek out late night developments. Strange as it may sound, if you watch the late night news, and feel you may be the right person to be interviewed for a story, call the assignment desk of whatever station you were watching and offer

to comment on the story for the morning show. The early morning producer needs people like you to interview and will be happy to learn there is a potential live interview available at 6 or 7 a.m.

Understand the “flavor” of the news that stations cover. All television stations have a certain flavor or personality towards what they do and what they like to cover. You might not want to pitch your services to a station that really doesn't want or like your sensibility regarding news subjects. In other words, some stations like to consider themselves “hip” while others think they are the “news of record.” Figure out which one you are and go towards your kind.

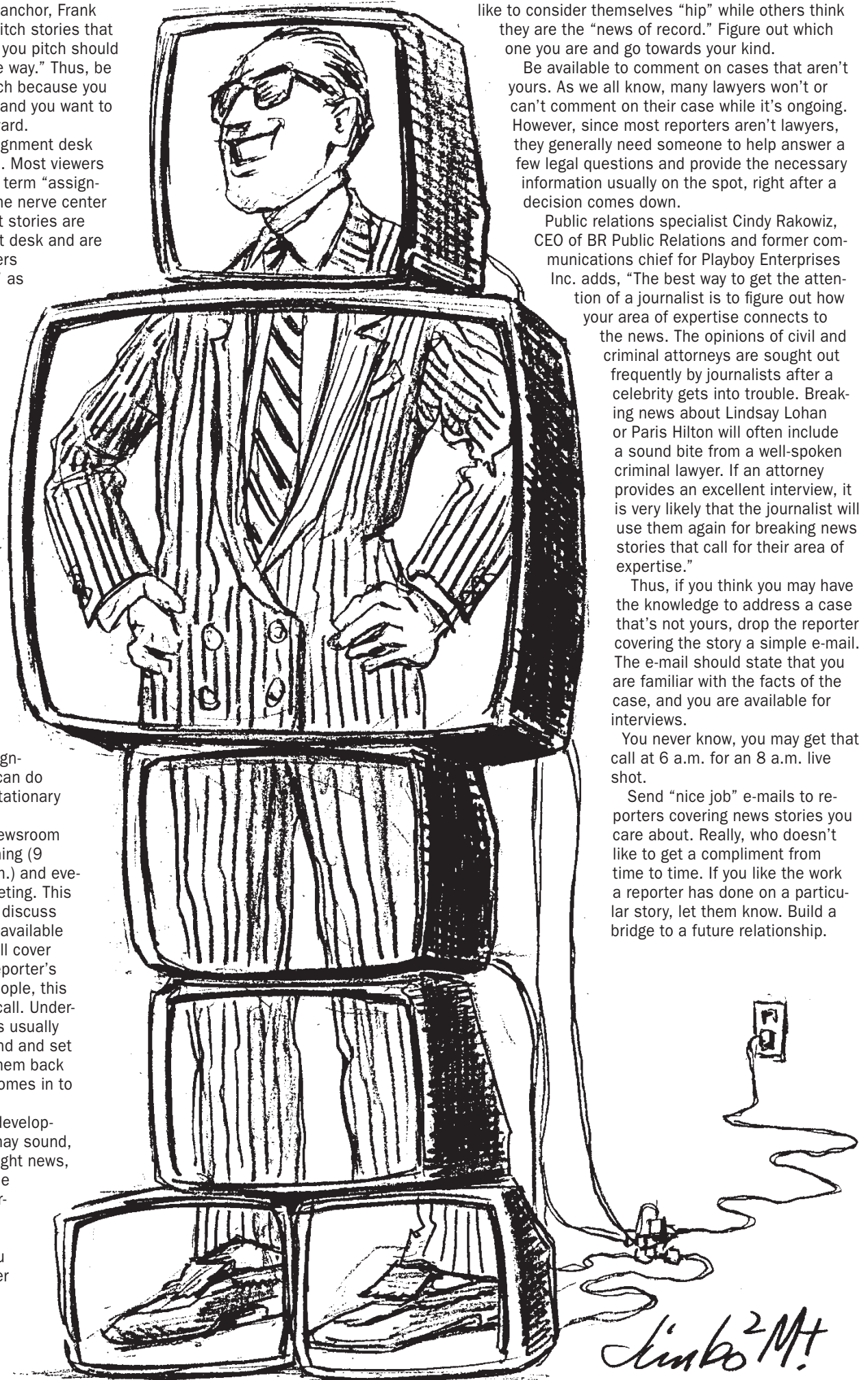
Be available to comment on cases that aren't yours. As we all know, many lawyers won't or can't comment on their case while it's ongoing. However, since most reporters aren't lawyers, they generally need someone to help answer a few legal questions and provide the necessary information usually on the spot, right after a decision comes down.

Public relations specialist Cindy Rakowiz, CEO of BR Public Relations and former communications chief for Playboy Enterprises Inc. adds, “The best way to get the attention of a journalist is to figure out how your area of expertise connects to the news. The opinions of civil and criminal attorneys are sought out frequently by journalists after a celebrity gets into trouble. Breaking news about Lindsay Lohan or Paris Hilton will often include a sound bite from a well-spoken criminal lawyer. If an attorney provides an excellent interview, it is very likely that the journalist will use them again for breaking news stories that call for their area of expertise.”

Thus, if you think you may have the knowledge to address a case that's not yours, drop the reporter covering the story a simple e-mail. The e-mail should state that you are familiar with the facts of the case, and you are available for interviews.

You never know, you may get that call at 6 a.m. for an 8 a.m. live shot.

Send “nice job” e-mails to reporters covering news stories you care about. Really, who doesn't like to get a compliment from time to time. If you like the work a reporter has done on a particular story, let them know. Build a bridge to a future relationship.



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