



# TELL YOUR STORY

COMMUNITY BANK MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE

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Our industry thrives when the collective power of community bank marketing and messaging elevates the importance of our industry in the eyes of consumers. ICBA has developed templated marketing and communications resources for member banks to help shape their unique narratives and share the overall positive story of community banking.

Each time a community bank amplifies its individual message, branding and reach, more consumers understand the economic power that community banks bring to their local neighborhoods across the country.

ICBA encourages you to “Tell Your Story” and leverage this marketing and communications toolkit as you plan your strategy. The resources in this kit include customizable press releases, op-eds and blogs, sample social media posts and imagery, as well as videos, infographics and print-ready materials. It also includes a robust editorial calendar to support community bank marketing plans that strengthen brand awareness.

We’ve also compiled this tips and best practices guide, to be used in tandem with the toolkit materials, to help you maximize available resources as you develop and implement your marketing and communications strategy for the year.

## ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL MEDIA

Building relationships with your local media takes time. Handled properly, outreach to reporters and other members of the news media is a proactive strategy that represents time well spent. Media coverage of your community bank's efforts, products and services will educate customers and local consumers, promote your business, and position you as a responsible business leader within the community.

ICBA offers the following tips on how to reach out, communicate and establish mutually beneficial relationships with the media.

- 1. Identify the appropriate contact.** Reporters are frequently assigned "beats" or areas of coverage. News distribution services provide searchable databases with reporter contact information, but you can also track these individuals by following relevant media outlets (print, broadcast or online). Social media forums (e.g., Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn) can also help you identify reporter's beats and connect with them.
- 2. Do your research.** After you identify the reporters you want to reach out to, it's critical to research their media outlet. It's important to ensure that the publication is the appropriate fit for your pitch and that the reporter knows you understand why his or her readers or viewers will identify with the story. It all comes down to the reader finding value in what you have to offer. Reporters appreciate when you take the time to read their work so do your homework to understand how your story fits into the publication's broader narrative.
- 3. Craft your pitch.** Organize your thoughts by thinking about the purpose of your call and deciding how to craft your pitch. What messages do you want to convey? What can you offer the publication's readers? How is your story unique? Whenever possible, make it local!
- 4. Respect their time.** When you connect, introduce yourself, explain the reason for your call, and concisely communicate your message. If the reporter is on deadline and doesn't have time to discuss a story idea or topic, ask if there's a more convenient time to reconnect.
- 5. Be clear and stay on message.** Talk plainly and provide specific examples and anecdotes, when possible. Remember to stick to your key messages. If the reporter doesn't ask questions that prompt your messages, volunteer them.
- 6. Be a resource.** Provide other local sources and experts to help educate reporters on newsworthy or complex issues. Use your unique perspective to put the news in context. Be helpful and responsive and follow up with important developments.
- 7. Follow the news.** You expect reporters to follow and know your business, and they expect you to do the same. This is especially important before any outreach and helps identify any breaking news that may alter their schedule. Familiarize yourself with the reporter's body of work. It'll provide a frame of reference for the reporter's reporting style and will help you avoid pitching a stale angle.

[This YouTube video](#) offers additional tips from Alexander Levitt, a former Wall Street Journal columnist with tips for how to approach reporters.

## TIPS FOR WRITING AND PLACING A NEWS RELEASE

There are many avenues to get media exposure, among them—the tried and true press release. The following tips are designed to help you pen a release that will pique readers' attention and avoid the dreaded trash bin.

1. **Ensure your release is newsworthy.** Ask yourself, "Does this story warrant a press release?" Here are some press release topics for consideration.
2. **Know your audience and what motivates them.** You're more likely to draw the interest of a reporter covering community banks versus Wall Street banks, for example. Also, if your product or service is tailored to millennials you'll likely get little traction by emphasizing extended branch hours over mobile banking.
3. **Grab them with a compelling headline.** Most reporters are flooded with emails so capturing their attention with a compelling headline is key. Keep headlines short and use descriptive terms.
4. **Get to the point but don't forget the sizzle.** Reporters are busy people so make the most of the first three lines and hit all the major points. Avoid industry jargon and use stats and punchy quotes to increase the likelihood of pickup.
5. **Proofread before hitting send.** There is nothing more embarrassing than sending a press release with typos or an incorrect word choice. Before pressing "send" make sure to proof the document. Better yet, have a coworker review. Fresh eyes are key!
6. **Provide contact information.** A release should serve as an information gateway to your organization and spokespeople. Include relevant contact information and links for further information and be ready to answer questions (or direct them to a subject matter expert) if reporters follow up.

You've got your message ready, now you need to get it into the right hands!

7. **Find the right reporter.** News distribution services can help identify a reporter's area of coverage, contact information, and insights into the type of information he or she is interested in receiving.
8. **Determine your distribution method and send the release.** Are you planning to mass distribute your release or send individual pitches to key reporters?
9. **Send a follow-up message.** Tie your pitch to something the reporter is interested in, has written about previously, or is currently working on. This is where doing your research pays off. Reporters appreciate you showing an interest in their work and making their lives easier by providing relevant and timely information.
10. **Offer photos, video and local sources such as customers.** They can add valuable anecdotes and color to the story by explaining their experiences working with the bank. Be a resource, and don't be afraid to be persistent and follow up. You will increase your odds of getting your news release placed and establishing an ongoing relationship with the reporter, which ultimately benefits everyone.



## BEST PRACTICES FOR RESPONDING TO MEDIA INQUIRIES

So, you've sent a press release and gotten a bite off the apple. What's your next move? How you respond to media inquiries is just as important as the response itself. Here are a few points for responding to media inquiries.

1. **Respond quickly.** Reporters often work on short deadlines. They appreciate quick responses, even if it is to decline an interview request or to say you do not have the information they need.
2. **Ask for specifics.** Gather pertinent details (story angle, potential questions, deadline, etc.) and schedule a time to speak with the reporter to allow time to gather your thoughts and prepare an appropriate response.
3. **Remember your key messages.** These are the high-level points you want to cover during the interview. Always find a way to insert these messages into your answer or bridge to them whenever an opportunity arises. If the reporter doesn't ask questions that lead to these points, volunteer them. At the end of an interview a reporter will often ask if there's anything else you'd like to share. This provides a great opportunity to recap your key messages or provide them if they weren't already covered.
4. **Be substantive.** State your messages in positive, proactive and substantive terms. For example, instead of simply saying, "Community banks are there to serve their community," say that "community banks provide more than 60 percent of all small-business loans to help create two out of three jobs nationwide."
5. **If you don't have the information or can't answer a question, say so.** Feel free to say, "That's not something we've dealt with at this bank, so I don't know." You can also say, "I don't know the answer to that question, but I'll get back to you." Never feel like you must provide an answer if you really don't have one. Doing so could get you into a less than desirable situation.
6. **Speak in plain language and be brief.** Avoid jargon, acronyms, and technical verbiage when possible to ensure any reader, viewer or listener can understand what you are saying. If you do not want something to get lost in translation, keep your responses so simple and clear that translation is not necessary.
7. **Refrain from going off the record.** The risks involved with this strategy generally outweigh the benefits. If you don't want to see it in print, don't say it.
8. **Provide background material.** Offer to send pertinent information to help the reporter round out the story or help support your messaging. General information about community banks is available at [www.icba.org/about/community-banking](http://www.icba.org/about/community-banking).





## INTERVIEW TIPS

Telling the unique story of your community bank is important. Media interviews give you an opportunity to showcase your bank and the great work you are doing in your community. ICBA offers the following tips to help you navigate a media interview, whether it's for print or broadcast.

1. **Get the facts up front.** When the reporter requests an interview, make sure you or the media contact at your bank ask the appropriate questions, which will help you gain insight into what the reporter intends to ask and what the story will entail.

Questions include:

- What is your story about?
  - What questions do you have for me?
  - Will you be conducting the interview or someone else?
  - Will this be a one-one-one interview or a roundtable interview? (important ask for audio and broadcast interviews)
  - Who else are you planning to speak with for this story?
  - When will the story be published?
  - When is your deadline?
2. **Don't take an impromptu interview.** If a reporter calls and wants to speak with you at that moment, take the time to ask the questions above and then schedule a time to talk so you can prepare.
  3. **Prepare for the interview.** Gather talking points and do your research on the topic and the reporter. It's helpful to look at a reporter's past stories to identify a likely story angle or pattern of questions. Also, come up with some sound bites that the reporter will want to use. This increases your likelihood of getting quoted in the story.
  4. **During the interview, think about what you're going to say before you say it.** There is no such thing as "off the record." Keep the conversation germane to the topic at hand. This is when having your three key messages is helpful. It keeps you on track so you don't venture into unwanted territory.
  5. **Always speak clearly and concisely.** Some people are naturals at public speaking, others are not—and that's ok! Being clear and concise takes practice and preparation. Record yourself and listen back to your recording. Writing down what you want to say in advance is another trick to being concise. Here are a few videos to help you prepare. Another resource is Toast Masters. There are local chapters all over the country (and world) that can help you or a colleague strengthen your public speaking skills. Some organizations start their own chapters and host during or after lunch. Nothing beats peer-peer feedback.
  6. **Spell out the basic information for the reporter.** Always spell your name for the reporter and provide your title, along with the name of your community bank. If you have an official bio, you can also send it to the reporter ahead of the interview.
  7. **Use the opportunity to the fullest.** If the reporter asks you if there's anything you'd like to add before the interview concludes, use this as an opportunity to reiterate your key message or provide a link to more information, such as your bank's website.



## INTERVIEWS FOR PRINT AND ONLINE MEDIA

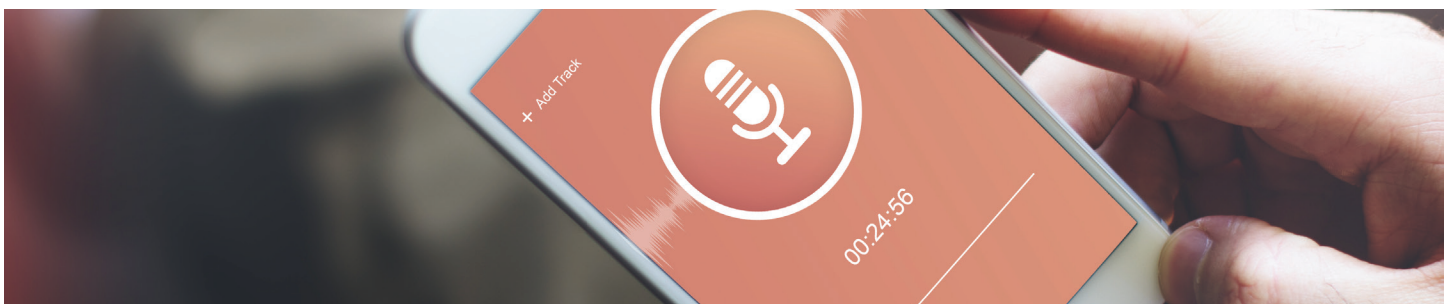
Newspaper, magazine and online media interviews can take place in person, via email or over the phone. The length of the interview and deadline for the story will vary depending on the reporter and type of publication. For example, monthly print publications typically have long lead times, whereas newspaper and online media reporters typically have the narrowest beats and, consequently, tend to be very knowledgeable about their subject area.

1. **Review your message points and keep them in front of you during the interview.**
2. **Ask the reporter if the interview is going to be recorded.** An increasing number of interviews (even those for print publications) are recorded to ensure accuracy and for liability protection.
3. **Establish an “interview atmosphere” and mindset.** Clear your desk and visualize the outcome you’d like to achieve.
4. **Don’t assume that you’ve been unclear if the reporter asks the same question several times in various ways.** This is often a technique used to elicit a specific answer.
5. **The emphasis is on the voice, inflection and pace.** Speak visually and personalize your delivery.
6. **You likely won’t get to see the story before it is published.** Most reporters are happy to go over statements you’ve given to ensure accuracy, but it’s unlikely they’ll allow you to see a story before it’s published. If they allow you to review their story, be considerate of their deadline and provide feedback as soon as possible.

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## INTERVIEWS FOR RADIO OR PODCASTS

1. **During an audio interview, your recorded voice establishes your image.** The emphasis is on the voice, inflection and pace. Typically, reporters will prefer that you use a landline for recording interviews, but cell phones are becoming more acceptable. If using a cell phone, it’s not uncommon for reporters to ask you to record your interview on the voice memo feature and send the files to them directly. This ensures a clearer sound.
2. **Establish an “interview atmosphere” and mindset.** Typically, audio interviews are done over the phone or in studio. If you are at your desk, establish an “interview atmosphere” and mindset. Clear your desk and visualize the outcome you’d like to achieve. Minimize outside noise as much as possible because it will be picked up in the recording.
3. **Speak visually and personalize your delivery.** Be conversational and animated.
4. **(Quiet) notes are okay.** It’s fine to refer to notes to reference key messages but try not to rustle papers as it can be distracting to listeners.
5. **Don’t assume that you’ve been unclear if the reporter asks the same question several times in various ways.** This is often a technique to elicit a specific answer.
6. **Always assume that the microphone is on.** If you don’t want something to be broadcast, air on the side of caution and refrain from saying it altogether.



## TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

Television is a visual medium so your physical manner and the style of your presentation are just as important as what you say.

1. **Posture! Remember to have good posture.** This means sitting up straight while leaning slightly forward.
2. **Gesture naturally.** Sitting with your hands folded or inanimate will make you appear unapproachable.
3. **Talk to the reporter, not the camera.** Ignore the monitors, crew and camera.
4. **Short answers are crucial.** Work on a few eight-second “sound bites.”
5. **Put your most important message up-front.**
6. **Don’t assume that you’ve been unclear if the reporter asks the same question several times in various ways.** This is often a technique to elicit a specific answer.
7. **Speak in a regular voice and volume for the audio check and always talk over, not into, the microphone.**
8. **Always assume that the microphone is on.** If you don’t want something to be heard over the airwaves, air on the side of caution and refrain from saying it all together. This is also true in pre- or post-interviews when wearing a microphone.

## WHAT TO WEAR (AND NOT WEAR)

1. **Avoid wearing small stripes, checks, herringbone or high-contrast colors.** They are hard on the camera’s “eye.”
2. **Avoid wearing short skirts.**
3. **If you are wearing pants:** wear high socks.
4. **If you are wearing a suit:** sit on the back of your suit jacket to keep it from bunching at the shoulders.
5. **If you are standing:** button your jacket.
6. **If you choose to wear makeup:** apply more than you may usually do so to compensate for the heavy lighting in TV studios.
7. **Don’t wear large, shiny or noisy jewelry or even pens.** It will reflect light and distract from the interview.





## TIPS FOR WRITING AND PLACING OP-EDS

Opinion pieces are an excellent way to elevate your spokespeople and your community bank on the local or national level. Op-eds further the narrative of community banking, while providing context and examples that bring to light an important issue. The following tips are for aspiring op-ed writers on how to write an effective op-ed and get it placed. Click [here](#) for more tips from New York Times op-ed columnist Bret Stephens.

### WRITING AN EFFECTIVE OP-ED

1. **Analyze the publication.** Before you even begin writing, think about which publication you'd like to pitch your piece. Look on the publication's website to see their word count and pitching requirements. Keep this information in mind as you begin writing. Publications won't run pieces that aren't in line with their requirements.
  2. **Articulate the main message in the first paragraph.** Getting to the point quickly will help ensure readers see the main point of your piece since many people often skim or don't read to the end.
  3. **Be precise and persuasive.** Keep your sentences and paragraphs tight and defend your point of view.
  4. **Consider the audience and write to them.**
  5. **Use colorful anecdotes, interesting facts and vivid language to support your message and keep readers engaged.**
  6. **Write what you know.** Your credentials give credence to your point of view.
  7. **Don't just get on your soap box.** Raise and answer your critics' strongest arguments. Use stats and figures to further bolster your argument.
  8. **Avoid the passive voice. Project a tone of confidence.** You are a thought leader. Use this op-ed as an opportunity to differentiate yourself and your bank.
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### PLACING AN OP-ED

1. **Watch the word count.** Ensure that your op-ed meets the word count requirements set by the publication.
2. **Find out the name of the editorial page editor of your local paper.** Contact information is usually available in the paper, on the website or by phone. If you have a good relationship with reporters at the publication you may want to ask for suggestions on who to direct your op-ed.
3. **Write a short cover letter or email to the editorial page editor.** In the message:
  - Introduce yourself as a local community banker,
  - Explain how the subject of your op-ed will be of interest to readers,
  - Explain how your piece will advance the discussion, and
  - Specify a date on which you plan to follow up.
4. **Follow up with the editorial page editor on the date you indicated.** Half of the battle of placing an op-ed is following up and being persistent.
5. **Use the news cycle to your advantage.** If you are writing about a hot issue, make sure to tout the timeliness and relevance of your op-ed.
6. **Accept the offer.** If the editor offers to post your op-ed online, in lieu of print, accept the offer. Online editorials can be just as effective as those that appear in print.
7. **Abide by editorial choices** unless they alter your meaning or introduce erroneous information.