How to deal with the media

(FOR ARTISTS)



MENORCA PULSAR

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About the author of this guide

My name is Carles Gomila, artist and co-founder of Menorca Pulsar, and I have twenty years of experience in the art market.

Many artists wonder what the hell they must do to have a presence in the media. The short answer is that you simply have to train for it.

The long answer is everything you will read below. **Here I explain why they do not pay any attention to you. And why will they listen to you if you do things in a certain way**.

If a single artist's eyes are opened by this article, it will have been worth it. I really hope you enjoy it and get the most out of it.

I originally wrote this guide in Spanish, and it has been translated into English by Jorge Fernández Alday, the other founding partner of Menorca Pulsar. Yes friends, everything you see is done and organized by just two guys. We're quite crazy, but we love it!

Introduction

Artists are illiterate communication wise

Artists and media need each other, but communication is not always good. But what am I saying? artists are a disaster for these things!

Artists need to have a solid relationship with the media because no one will remember us for a *tweet*, but they will remember us for being on a newspaper cover.

Sometimes journalists are not as professional as they should be, that's true. That's always the perfect excuse for becoming the victim and whining a little, instead of taking the initiative and making things happen.

But the truth is that **artists rarely make the effort of learning the basics about how to deal with media**. And worse than that: they make big mistakes and get angry when a media outlet does not pay any attention.

And yes, of course there are lazy guys in every newsroom, but that's no excuse for not doing things right. Rest assured that the benefits of getting off your throne and learning to deal with media are enormous.

Actually, getting off your throne always gives benefits in some way. In this and in any other sector.

What media should be

The media, ideally, should be providers of good information. If not, do not bother sending any press release to those who do not meet rigorous standards.

A serious media publishes useful, interesting and relevant information for the citizen. It does so through stories that convey facts, emotions and fascination to readers. That keeps them informed and entertained, and at best encourages them to take actions

Therefore, **do not bother to send a press release of an exhibition to any sensationalist media**.

Good journalism is like good art.

No doubt there will always be journalists interested in serving their audience the best dishes, who will be interested in listening to you. The only requirement is that you have good material to offer. And when I say "good material", I absolutely mean “a good story".

In communication —as in art— there are no magic formulas that guarantee success. However, there is no clear strategy either. I’m explaining this below.

Journalists have spam for breakfast

Journalists are fed up with dozens of irrelevant, empty, boring and lax press releases that only aim to advertise at zero cost. Of course, that kind of goes straight in the bin. I would do the same.

Perhaps it has happened to you that, when sending your press release, you have been sent a document with advertising rates. Do not get angry and be analytical: **the most likely thing is that your press release looks more like spam than newsworthy information**.

If your email does not contain newsworthy value, it will go to the commercial department, where they will offer you the possibility of buying that value. You will have lost your time and the journalist's, and you will also lose money if you decide to pay to place your column. Without a *bait*, everyone loses.

The focus of your press release is the bait that should arouse the interest of journalists with your story. Without that spark, the fate of your press release is the bin. Having a healthy relationship with the media depends primarily on three things:

I. The approach and documentation of your press release
II. How you write your email
III. Who you get your email to

If you have nothing important to say, just zip it

If you do not have relevant and quality information to offer, do not expect your shit to be published. **The information must be newsworthy and hint at a good headline**. In addition, it must have a stimulating and high impact image (which is, finally, our specialty).

Also, if you send your shit too often, their confidence in you as a source of information will be poisoned and they'll end up not opening your emails. You do the same with the supermarket offer pamphlets, right? Well, then you know, it's going in the bin.

In other words, you must have a plan and your card ready before rolling the dice.

If you do not have information that is worthy or interesting to anyone, do not waste journalists' time "trying your luck". **As for this, there is no luck, it's simply done well or not done at all**. You do not paint a great artwork because of being lucky, but because you work really hard. Well, the exact same thing happens with press releases. If you do not work it out, absolutely nothing happens.

If there is no love at first sight, there is no love

It’s unlikely that a journalist can afford to spend more than a minute reading your content. In fact a quick glance may be all your email might receive before it is discarded.

There are no second chances for a press release. So, **if it does not work at *first sight*, it means that your *affair* will not work**. The same thing happens with art: if a painting does not impact us, the likelihood is you won't even bother to pick up the magnifying glass at all.

Tips

Be specific and get to the point



Content must be rigorous, specific and direct. No padding or wandering. Precise, meticulous and with no chance of misunderstandings. I want to make this very clear because in our sector it seems that artists try very hard not to be understood in order to look more educated. If you do so, you're going to sound like a moron, and they'll get away you'll lose your audience.

Seriously, **nobody will believe that you are more educated just because you write cryptically**. Professional writers will see through you. It's ridiculous and they won't buy it.

Writing cryptically pretending to be educated is shabby, paltry, cocky and, worst of all, spoils your main goal, which is none other than clear communication. So go shooing all those birds off your head before they leave your brain like a chicken coop.

Do not try to be brilliant. Do not insist on being an expert. No poetic pretensions. Do not look for the applause. Do not try to impress the journalist with fireworks. Stick to writing a press release in the most efficient, clear, brief and relevant way possible.

Be empathetic with the journalist



Put yourself in the shoes of a journalist working under pressure, with impossible deadlines and with several bosses demanding results yesterday. **A journalist's work is hard and more stressful than you might imagine**, and a little humanity and honesty on your part will greatly help the professional relationship work.

If you understand this and you make it easier, solving the most immediate problems, journalists will feel that working with you is easy and you will increase the likelihood of future collaboration.

Be polite



Maybe some time you even get to know the journalist in person, but your relationship is built mostly through emails and phone calls. So always be polite and write correctly.

I insist, this is essential: **WRITE PROPERLY**.

Another obvious advice, very related to the lack of respect: read the emails you receive carefully and until the very end. You would be stunned if you knew how many people do not do that. Really, it's weird... many people do not read!

Be reasonable



You can’t expect your information always to be published, do not take it as a personal offense. It is what it is. It usually depends on many variables that are beyond your control and the journalist's control.

…Urgent news, sponsors demanding things, unexpected calls, etc. Do not look for guilty parties where only circumstances can fit. So, whether the news is published or not, a "good morning", a "please" and at least a "thank you" should appear within each of your emails.

And for Pete’s sake, do not mess your head up. When something you sent is not published, it is due to anything but a conspiracy against you. Behave as an adult and do not imagine any nonsense like "the government is censoring artists at the media", or such things. If you think like that, it means you have two very big problems:

I. You’re immature and you have no idea how all this works. You need to get in touch with reality as soon as possible.

II. You have a huge ego with a huge need for approval, and a huge desire for the government executive to spend the afternoon thinking about you. But that’s just not going to happen because you're not that important. Get off your throne and accept that your press release is simply garbage.

You need a good bait

Do provide good quality content

Double check your texts. Always. Carefully analyze all the information until the content is clear. The way to introduce yourself is with a gleaming and proper press release, appealing and correct.

If you are a provider of good stories, of relevant and quality content, with good headlines, new approaches, stimulating ideas and good images, bit by bit you'll build a trustworthy relationship where both parties will benefit. If you only provide irrelevant information, just thinking of your own interest, you will not get anything at all.

I told you before but I'll tell you again: write properly. You can't ask for respect by writing badly. And if you're not strong in it, entrust this work to a professional before you dig your own grave by writing a flawed press release. The price for doing things right is around 80€. I hope this doesn't sound expensive, because it is not.

Baits

Writing an average press release should not take more than two or three hours, but if you want a press release with a good punch, it takes a little longer. You'll have to work it out and look for a good bait.

Here are some examples of baits which work especially well:

I. Relevance

A good exhibition can be newsworthy if it is, in some way, relevant. Dates and the name of the gallery are perfectly irrelevant. On the other hand, the story behind the exhibition can be extremely interesting if you communicate it well.

If you have nothing to explain other than the fact that you want a lot of visitors and sales, you will only get to appear in the media by paying.

II. Dramatized information

High-impact specific data transmits accuracy, interest and truthfulness to readers. An interesting analysis or study is always a good excuse to talk about something deeper. Asymmetric information works especially well, that is, when the data show a great contrast or imbalance.

For example: The headline "Only 3% of artists get to live off their art" can be an excuse for the promotion of the artist's next exhibition.

Get it?

III. Anniversaries

Link your press release to an event on the calendar. Do it well and do not force it, there's a lot to choose from: world day of poetry, the international day of the asteroids, etc. You have a day for any trifle you can think of. There's always a good excuse in the calendar for talking about art, or for setting a link to your exhibition's theme.

For example, recently the MEAM has achieved a very good impact linking the exhibition "Mujeres artistas hoy" (*Women artists today*) to International Women's Day.

IV. Up to date

If your release is related to current events and trends, you have an advantage. Some artists have used hot news for promoting exhibitions that report a problem or raise funds for financing a solution.

You need to build trust

Pull your socks up

A journalist who does not know you will hardly knock on your door, so most of the time you'll have to take the first step and make it easy for them. Take the initiative, **introduce yourself and let them know that you are at their disposal**.

I. No communication without trust

Earning and maintaining the trust of journalists has everything to do with being aware of their needs and being able to offer solutions in the most efficient way possible. A journalist who trusts you will call on you when information or material is needed on a specific topic. Become their provider.

Trust and security are the basis of any relationship between people, whether personal or professional. If you get along well with a journalist, your emails will not go unnoticed. That's obvious. **Being nice will work better for you than anything else you do**.

So, briefly, in order to gain confidence you should provide good stories, and the journalist will come to like you. *Easy peasy*.

Another thing that a journalist —and any other person in the world— will greatly appreciate is your efficiency. If you

are competent, your reputation in the media will be excellent. Competence is scarce, so if you are a person with this ability, abuse it mercilessly.

II. Do appreciate journalist's time

If journalists realizes that you truly appreciate their work and respect their time, half the work is done. If you are efficient, patient, empathetic and a provider of good stories, you will not go unnoticed and soon you will gain their trust.

After entering a journalist's *inner circle*, it will be much easier to expand your contacts and improve your skills in this sector.. In fact, all sectors work in a very similar way.

If you do that, you will have more chances to appear in the media than 99% of other artists. And I'm not exaggerating at all with the percentage.

III. Address the journalist by name

Do not send press releases blindly, in a generic way and without knowing whom you are addressing. A personalised approach is more likely to get published. So the most reasonable way to have more opportunities is to address a single person.

Knowing who the journalist is, the media he works at and how he works is the key to letting him know that you have *done your homework* to reach him, and only him. That creates a good first impression and is more likely to precipitate reciprocity. In addition, you transmit a powerful message to the journalist: that you care about his work and his opinion, and that is why you have chosen him and not any other. That’s a good starting point.

Whatever you write must be written exclusively for that journalist. **Show him that you're not just another annoying artist**, that you really follow his work and like how he does it. That way he will not think you're only the typical selfish, egocentric and grateful artist who only contacts the press when it suits.

Believe it or not, that description corresponds to the vast majority of artists. So, if you are not just another annoying artist, you have a great competitive advantage.

Are you?

IV. Do not become a pain in the ass

If you have already contacted the journalist, stay calm. Journalists work under pressure and have very little time. Do not even think about calling anxiously a few hours later, or the next day, and ask for explanations. Be patient and respect timing.

Maybe they can’t publish it, but take it easy. Do not harass but behave instead like an adult. If after a reasonable time you do not receive any response, you can send a reminder asking if more information is needed. But nothing more. **If journalists need something else from you, they will let you know**. Probably your stuff is not an imminent priority and you should accept it with good sportsmanship. Remember it's never personal.

V. Do not lie

Never cheat a journalist. If you make that mistake, you will never be trusted again, the word will spread and your name start to stink in all newsrooms. Once the trust is broken there is no glue to repair it. Simply, it’s broken.

Being dishonest is never worth it.

Oh, and don't distort facts or manipulate in your favor. If there's no bait, look for any spark. There is always a hidden bait, find it, but **do not tweak the information in order to falsely sneak something in**.

VI. Do fulfill your promises

Never let down a journalist. If you say you will send material on Monday, do it on Sunday night. Do not leave journalists waiting because they do not have the time.

If you can afford it, the ideal thing is exceeding the expectation by offering something better and faster than you promised. This, in marketing, is called overcoming the expectation. If you cultivate the habit of doing things this way, I give you my word that your opportunities will multiply.

VII. Be stubborn and learn

It will take some effort to get published, do not give up. You will make mistakes, but that is part of your learning if you detect them and repair them. Persist, learn. If they do not pay attention to you, try to change your focus and, above all, be very analytical.

A rejection is a result, valuable information about how you should not do things next time. Try to proceed in another way and you will get different results. Work again on your press release and improve it. Just by following half of the advice I give you here, I'm sure you can improve it a lot.

VIII. Do study some copywriting

Another thing that you should do sooner or later is to study the basics of copywriting. I anticipate that not only will it be useful for working with the media, it is an extremely useful tool in itself. Having an understanding of copywriting will help you to better reach from your website the people you are interested in, better structure catalogs, better design stimulating invitations, etc.

If you do not have any time or urge to learn it on your own, I advise you to hire the services of a copywriter so that, at least, you can design the texts of your website. The difference in the impact can be huge.

Channels

Channel types

There are many communication channels to contact a journalist, but not all work equally well. The best one is email because it’s less aggressive than a phone call and you can attach many resources (documents, links, photographs, etc.).

I see the telephone as a more suitable channel for following up once you have captured the journalist's attention, but it’s too invasive for proposing a story. I would not recommend it, but if you're good at phone calls and you know what you're doing, try it.

For me, though, using *WhatsApp* for tracking works very well. It is immediate and messages are more likely to be answered than emails, and quicker. Also, the way of speaking is usually more informal and personal, which helps a lot.

Social media are informal channels that, in theory, convey little professionalism. As a rule, avoid communication through social media. However, I have had good experiences using social media for a first contact, although I have always redirected communication to email or *WhatsApp*. Once again, if you know what you’re doing and you’re sure about it, try it.

Virtual press room

If you want to have a good competitive advantage, complement your press release with a virtual press room. It's a tool for connecting to the media that consists of a space where you store all the information and resources, ready to download: notes, photographs, videos, audios, etc.

Imagine that the journalist must choose between two stories, yours and another artist's. The stories are similar and equally relevant, but the other artist has set up a virtual press room with all materials easily accessible, best quality and everything properly arranged. Who would you choose? ...Yes, I would too.

The most important thing is it being organised: This is the way we make things easy for the journalist. An organised and easily accessible place to get all the material from. Your virtual press room should be impeccable, structured and clean. You are the host, and you have to sort the information and organize it in a logical way.

Keep it up to date: This is not something you work on one day and then forget about. You must update it in the same way that you update your portfolio and your CV. Every time there is news you will have to dedicate a couple of hours to prepare all the material and put it in your press room. A couple of hours means two 'House of Cards' chapters, so let's not make a drama out of this.

Choose a platform you feel comfortable with: My favorite ones are Amazon Web Services, Dropbox and Google Drive, but there are dozens of options.

A journalist should see these 5 folders at a glance

I. Press releases

Having all your press releases in one place, journalists will be able to access all your material immediately. It is the cleanest and most efficient way to relate to the media.

II. Graphic material

Be practical, tidy and selective with the material. Do not set a folder with 500 photographs, it is better to offer the best ten ones. Or less. **Give them only the good stuff and remove all *padding***.

Include all your logos, anagrams and personal stamps. I also recommend adding your scanned signature, newspapers love to include artists' signature within their stories.

Set several formats and image sizes for their different applications. For example, I always set three sizes (thumbnail, medium size for web and large size for printing), and three formats (jpg, tiff and png).

III. Statement

Talk about your artistic identity, your philosophy, your mission. It's a place where the journalist comes to address doubts about your art and your mission as an artist. This means that you should not create more doubts by playing fancy with an incomprehensible text. We've talked about it before: **simplicity and honesty always win**.

IV. Additional and complementary material (optional)

Links – It never hurts to have a sheet with links that complement the information from reliable external sources. This is especially useful when in your story you mention a literary, mythological or historical reference that needs some clarification.

Terms glossary – You can't expect all journalists to know as much as you do about art, so make it easy if you use technical terminology in your content.

F.A.Q. (Frequent Asked Questions) – Basically it is a compilation of the most common questions that a journalist may have on the subject of the press release.

V. *Clipping*

Having precedents in the media is a social test that reinforces your professionalism, positioning and credibility. So in this folder you will put your previous appearances in media, interviews, etc. It also includes your social networks and any link that exists to add value to your personal brand.

Always remember that everything that means no addition, means a subtraction.

Set all the material as if it were a newspaper library where you can consult old media appearances. These will serve as extra documentation about you.

In my case, for example, you will see that, for convenience, I have done it as a section in my blog. However, there are many ways to do it. The only condition is clarity and ease.



Well, I think that's enough for today. Hopefully, these tips will help you in having a better relationship with the media. Because we're not going to stop being good professionals because we're artists, right?

Thanks for reading this guide ;)

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