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## Telling the b-to-b product story

Craig McGuire - 26 Oct 2006 11:18

### Not every tech story is a Google. **Craig McGuire** finds out how to place b-to-b

When Porter Novelli signed Scalable Software in August 2005, the Houston-based compliance solutions maker was not exactly a media darling.

Despite starting with a client with no customers, no name recognition, and a paltry monthly PR budget of \$8,000, PN has since scored mentions in *The New York Times*, *eWeek*, *Government Computer News*, *InfoWorld*, *Red Herring*, *Compliance Week*, and, most recently, July hits in *CSO* magazine and *Bank Technology News*.

But PN didn't hose the media with releases on Scalable's products.

"The press are much tougher due to a highly competitive space," says Sandy Skees, a PN partner. "[At first,] our main objective was educating the press that IT compliance was even an issue worth covering."

Luckily, Scalable offers leaders with more to talk about than its Command Center product. Before being tapped as VP of compliance solutions, Chrisan Herrod led deployment of information security programs at the Securities and Exchange Commission. Colleen Murphy, now director of compliance solutions delivery, was a senior executive at the Internal Revenue Service.

That Herrod and Murphy inject references to Command Center into interviews is fortunate for Scalable. But, it's not why the journalists call, nor is it how PN pitches them.

Unlike consumer technology, b-to-b appeals to a far smaller audience and is usually more complicated, meaning coverage by fewer outlets staffed with fewer journalists.

As an associate editor at TechWeb, Laurie Sullivan each day must file a minimum of two multiple-sourced articles, two briefs, and post to her popular blog.

"What I don't like is when a PR person gets on the phone and starts rambling before even asking me if I have time to speak," Sullivan says. When she is available, Sullivan prefers pitches that are concise, identify innovation, and tap trends.

"During an interview, if the PR rep sees the reporter struggling to get the information out of the source, jump in and loosen things up," Sullivan suggests.

As a specialist journalist, Sullivan appreciates the reciprocal value of PR relationships, such as the one she has with David Chatham, an account director at Capstrat.

In a September 8 TechWeb piece titled "Video game analytics track players' behavior,"

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Sullivan led with Capstrat client Emergent Game Technologies to explore the "Orwellian" overtones of "analytics software that will let video game developers and publishers glean information on peoples' behavioral patterns as they play."

"[Sullivan] called me about another story she was working on," Chatham says. "I passed along a source and used the opportunity to discuss Emergent. It's trite, but media relations is all about relationships."

However, when every pitch starts to look the same, differentiation becomes critical.

"A tactic suggested by our agency, Praco, that helped drive traffic to our Web site was to include client names and ticker symbols in our PR Newswire releases," says Melissa Burkett, VP of marketing, for Colorado Springs, CO-based network security provider Innerwall. "This helped associate Innerwall with high-profile clients and partners... as well as increase our 'Google factor.'"

Finally, digging in and gaining a fundamental understanding of what the technology really means is essential.

"Don't focus on name recognition; focus on the ultimate value to the end user," says John Berard, MD at Zeno Group. "Identify who your product matters to, and get inside that person's head."

The agency is employing such tactics as it test drives a pitch for InSync, a company that deploys fully compatible sensor-driven business network software. Zeno's pitch extends beyond describing InSync's products and explores the innovation that has made it possible to more clearly see and create value in the movement of goods along its entire value chain.

It's a complicated story to tell, so "break free of the classic 'features and functionality' mindset," Berard says, "and start talking about the business and social benefits. Start talking about the possibilities."

#### Technique Tips

##### DO

Home in on an emerging trend where the client has relevance  
Position your client's qualified professionals as legitimate sources  
Have a new statistic, third-party references, and plenty of client testimony ready

##### DON'T

Limit your pitch to a launch or client win  
Assume journalists understand the technology. Provide tools and references  
Just focus on the features and functionality, but ask yourself why your client is relevant

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