

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------------|----------------|--------------|------------|------|----------|
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| Healthcare | Technology | Media | Consumer | Public Affairs | Financial | Crisis Comms | | | |

You are here: US > Search > [Media distribution, the healthy way](#)

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[Back to Results](#)
[RSS](#)

Media distribution, the healthy way

Craig McGuire - 21 Nov 2005 00:00

Newswires tailor their services to meet the needs of various sectors, but healthcare may benefit the most, given its size. [Craig McGuire](#) details some targeted offerings

It's no news that the life sciences are generating an enormous amount of copy these days. After all, we're living longer, living better, and spending more money than ever to prolong and improve our quality of life.

From consumer healthcare magazines to biotech industry trade journals to RSS feeds, the number and types of media outlets available today are unprecedented, and can be daunting. To help with this, newswire companies over the years have developed a raft of services to take a client through every stage of the communications process.

As a PR associate for Brandon Advertising, Thomas Whitehead recently developed a press release distributed on Business Wire for Greenway Medical Technologies - a healthcare IT company specializing in ambulatory software - announcing participation in a panel before a congressional subcommittee.

In addition to distribution, Whitehead leveraged Business Wire's NewsTrak service that follows the coverage of online publications. He paid an additional fee to see who looked at the release and for how long. Though not able to track by name, he did receive information on what city, state, and industry viewers hailed from.

As a result, Whitehead found that several competitors reviewed the release; he also received one inquiry about investment opportunities, and got five unsolicited media requests, including one from *USA Today*.

"The reason why this service is particularly effective, not just for this story, but for healthcare IT in general, is because this industry is still in its infancy," Whitehead says. "No one has written or covered it in detail until now. You are not sure who is discussing it and who is not. Healthcare IT has medical, financial, technical, and global components that make it a versatile subject."

To make the most of these services, the companies that offer them suggest you first sit down with a representative who can explain how the services can be applied. In these discussions, it's important to ask about topics such as photos, screen grabs, and multimedia opportunities. PR pros can also find out whether more recent technologies, such as RSS feeds and podcasts, would be appropriate.

During these discussions, request statistics and thorough explanations of jargon, as well as case studies and client references. Most companies will then offer a trial to familiarize potential subscribers with how the services work.

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Sarak Skerik, VP of distribution services at PR Newswire, notes that the company reaches health-focused journalists at more than 4,000 mainstream news outlets across the US, as well as distribution to a variety of healthcare industry trade lists.

Customers wishing to put a finer point on the distribution of their news may select from 56 different healthcare "micro-lists" that offer niche distribution in narrow categories such as endocrinology, clinical trials, women's health, and pediatrics. Designed to work in conjunction with newswire distribution, the micro-lists offer one-to-one distribution to individual journalists who have asked to receive subject-specific news.

Business Wire, working in conjunction with a strategic media partner (Mary Ann Liebert, publisher of *Genetic Engineering News* and other journals), has a number of distribution options. "Our BioSciences Corridor targets news distribution to the top 11 US biotechnology markets in the country," says Frank Yetter, a Business Wire VP who oversees its life sciences offerings. In addition, BioWire National reaches newspapers and broadcast outlets in all 50 states.

Both BioSciences Corridor and BioWire National include distribution to financial analysts that cover the industry, as well as trade publications, online services and databases, and financial disclosure media.

"We're always upgrading our trade lists to include new publications and delete those that have ceased publication, and we aggressively seek new categories to include," Yetter says.

At Market Wire, multiple services are packaged into a single offering known as EasyPR, which works for all PR pros in all markets. It includes news release distribution, event calendars, white papers, press kits, photo galleries, corporate fact sheets, self-publishing tools, and blast fax/e-mail services.

For its clients in the healthcare industry, US Newswire offers its USN NewsClips News Monitoring Service, a system that tracks news coverage (print, broadcast, and online) by client-defined keywords, and gives them context of what health topics are getting the most coverage, how their organization compares to others on common health issues, and breakdowns of coverage.

US Newswire also offers a broad range of services, including Health Wire, which supplies health and medical reporters with press releases and media advisories. It also promotes experts available for interview on topical health issues. Avian flu has been a hot topic of late, says Brian Taylor, US Newswire VP, marketing communications.

On the broadcast side, Medialink's Medialink Health Services offers targeted placement, such as its "In the Know" series, a short-form program that is set up to reach specific audiences with guaranteed placement.

"There are significant guidelines when it comes to the promotion of prescription pharmaceuticals, and the appropriate delivery of those messages ensures that everyone in the chain of production is protected," says Andrew Schmertz, senior producer, Medialink. "Our expertise in this area helps us deliver sensitive healthcare news and information that is both beneficial to consumers and compliant with FDA and FTC regulations."

While these services are useful, it's worth noting that they are most valuable when used to support and not supplant your campaign strategies, says Pauline Mayer, president of PTM Healthcare Marketing in Smithtown, NY, who recently utilized PR Newswire, Eureka Alert, and PR Web to publicize a global vascular surgery symposium.

"They are, in fact, doing their job by mass distributing releases to their list of journalists," Mayer says. "[But] we do much better speaking with media contacts directly. Speaking with a reporter allows one to develop an ongoing relationship. Journalists get bombarded with so many health/medical-related press releases, and I am convinced that they just can't read every one."

Technique tips

Do get a subscription and learn how to use the many types of services available

Do sit down with a knowledgeable sales pro, and ask him or her to fully explain the services to you

Do ask for a trial to test drive a service

Don't settle on any one service until you've looked at them all. Each one has a particular specialty and affiliation

Don't rely solely on a release to publicize your cause, but follow up and press the press

Don't get lost in the jargon. Ask to have everything explained

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