

Media Relations: How To Get A Busy Editor's Attention

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Format Of This Presentation

- 10 stories that worked
 - How I discovered these stories
 - Why they worked
 - George Clooney
- Ways to get a journalist's attention so your stories will be told

- Q&A

10 Stories That Worked, In No Particular Order

Many of them, you'll see, are about pit bulls. One involves George Clooney.



1. Sydney The Pit Bull Princess Gets The Royal Treatment At Animal Shelter After Being Neglected

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/30/princess-pit-bull_n_5232916.html



How I Found Out About This Story

This story is about a pit bull named Sydney, who'd been really let down by her people before landing in a Delaware shelter.

The shelter workers felt terrible for this dog, who had gotten very depressed, and wanted to cheer her up. They used their own money, and own time, to build her a princess room at the shelter. They made her a pink bed, painted her nails pink and made her feel very special and loved.

A friend of someone involved with this story emailed me out of the blue to tell me about Sydney. Obviously, I loved it.

Why This Story Worked

- **Photos:** There were terrific photos of Sydney being a princess. These photos weren't professionally taken or anything like that. They were just sweet snapshots that showed Sydney in her princess room.
 - **Sincerity:** The people at this shelter hadn't made Sydney her princess room in order to get publicity. They did it in order to make Sydney feel better. That sincerity was very moving.
 - **Exclusivity:** I was the first reporter approached with the story. Every journalist likes being first.
 - **Opportunity to help:** I knew publicity from a story could help get Sydney into a home.
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2. This Landlord Will ONLY Rent To People With Big Dogs (Especially Pit Bulls)

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/05/dog-rental-jacksonville_n_5452122.ht](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/05/dog-rental-jacksonville_n_5452122.html)

DOG FRIENDLY RENTAL



Idyllic Mandarin neighborhood
3 bedroom 2 Bath
Completely renovated
Fenced yard
Approx 1900 Sq. Ft

How I Found Out About This Story

Facebook. I found out about this story on Facebook. You should post a *lot* on Facebook.

This story is about a landlord who will only rent to tenants who have big dogs, and who especially favors pit bulls. The landlord in question is a dog rescuer, who at some point along the way became my Facebook friend.

A couple of years ago, she posted to Facebook that she and her husband were looking for new tenants for their rental in Florida -- and that the tenants must have pits. I got that tingly feeling there was a terrific little story here, and reached out for more information.

Why This Story Worked

- **Funny:** As you know, the problems families face when looking for pit-friendly housing are awful. This story, however, allowed those issues to be discussed in a whimsical, funny way.
 - **Solutions:** This story offered a way that individuals can make a difference. It might spark some other landlords to follow a similar path. (And in fact, I wrote another story about another pit-loving landlord a couple of years later: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/landlord-rent-to-tenants-with-pit-bulls_us_56016630e4b0fde8b0cfbdda_
 - **Exclusivity:** No really, journalists want to be first. It's *very* important to us.
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3. Here's The Glaring Truth Everyone Missed About The Viral Dog In A Bath Video

<http://barkpost.com/dog-a-bath-video/>



How I Found Out About This Story

This is a story about Rudy, a horribly abused dog who'd been taken in by a New York rescue group specializing in serious medical cases.

I first wrote about Rudy in 2015. I'd somehow come across a video of him in his bath, and reached out to the rescue group caring for him -- they were eager to be part of a story.

Rudy died about six months after that story came out. Then the video of his bath resurfaced. I saw it shared everywhere, but no one seemed to know his backstory -- or that he had died. So I reached out to his rescue group again, for this very sad follow up.

Why This Story Worked

- **Video:** The video was just perfect. It showed a really tender moment -- a tiny pit bull being bathed in a sink, while eating biscuits -- that was surprisingly gripping, even without the backstory.
 - **Compelling story:** The story about why Rudy was in that bath was so sad, and so hopeful, at the same time.
 - **Behind-the-scenes information about a viral video:** People were so moved by Rudy's video. Most people didn't know the true story of Rudy's life and death.
 - **Exclusivity:** The video itself had been shared a lot, but no one else had shared Rudy's actual story.
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4. Hunky Men Pose With Cute Pups For Animal Rights, And Thankfully Do It Shirtless

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/07/hunks-and-hounds-calendar_n_5947914.html



How I Found Out About This Story

This story is about a charity calendar, for a rescue group called Louie's Legacy. Someone I know posted about it to Facebook.

I had an *inkling* my readers might enjoy knowing about the calendar and its models, and reached out to the rescue group and the photographer for more information.

Why This Story Worked

- Really? You need to ask?

5. Try Not To Cry When You Watch These Dogs Get Freed From Their Chains

<http://barkpost.com/good/try-not-to-cry-dogs-freed-from-chains-video/>



How I Found Out About This Story

This is a story about two dogs, Oreo and Mama, who got off their chains thanks to the Coalition to Unchain Dogs, a nonprofit in North Carolina.

The hook for the story is a video about Oreo and Mama, and their person -- an elderly woman who doesn't have much money, but loves her dogs very much - and how the Coalition helped all of them.

Lori Hensley, the group's operations director, and I had been talking for a while about various story possibilities. She emailed me one day, to show me the video -- and it was so good that I knew I could base a story on it.

Why This Story Worked

- **Video:** The story might have worked without a video. But the video itself was so good that it made it easy to build a story around.
 - **Great organization:** I am always looking for ways to draw attention to groups doing fantastic, important work. Sometimes I can write a story about the group itself -- often it's more effective, and more efficient, to build a story around one particular dog, or one particular rescue.
 - **Highlights important issues:** We all know how important outreach is -- bringing pet food, vet care, and more to folks who need some help. A lot of readers are new to thinking about that side of animal welfare. I love the opportunity to share stories that get them thinking about outreach.
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6. We Borrowed a Shelter Dog to Go Hiking. You Can — And Totally Should — Too

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arin-greenwood/shelter-dog-hiking_b_6041240.html



How I Found Out About This Story

I'd gotten to know the people running a shelter in Northern Virginia that was doing fantastic work. I was living in DC at the time -- not too far from them -- and they'd reached out to to invite me to tour the shelter and find out more about the creative ways they were saving more and more animals.

It was either on that trip, or later when we were chatting for one of the many stories I wound up writing about the Fairfax County Animal Shelter, I heard about how the shelter was encouraging folks to come take dogs out on day trips.

I had to try it out for myself.

Why This Story Worked

- **AMAZING program:** The top reason this story worked, is because it is such an exciting program. I've since written about a shelter in Hawaii that lets people take dogs out hiking and an app to let people borrow shelter dogs for hikes. Each time, the stories have done really well -- I think readers are thrilled at this idea. (I certainly am!)
 - **Get out of the office:** This won't help if you live far from me. But I love getting away from the computer. Please, invite me out for a visit.
 - **Spreading good ideas:** I heard from a lot of shelters and rescues after this story came out that they were going to start something similar.
 - **Exclusivity:** I hate to sound like a broken record, but...
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7. Cat Hiking Is A Real Thing. A Real, Wonderful Thing That You Can Experience

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/03/cat-hiking_n_6093380.html



How I Found Out About This Story

I was lucky enough to come out to Best Friends' Utah sanctuary a couple of years ago on a press tour. Bliss. Utter bliss.

While I was there, enjoying *everything*, media relations manager Barbara Williamson happened to mention offhandedly that the sanctuary's cats regularly get harnessed up and taken out walking.

My trip was too short to take the cats out myself. (Boo.) But as soon as I got back to work, I did some interviews, gathered photos from Barbara, and wrote this story.

Why This Story Worked

- **Cats:** People love stories about cats being treated like or acting like dogs. It's a fact.
 - **Quirky and fun:** The idea that cats get taken out for hikes is just delightful in every way. That they do it in this most stunning environment is icing on the cake.
 - **Spreading good ideas about cats:** I jumped at the chance to highlight a program that is both utterly wonderful, and also makes life better for shelter pets. Hopefully, other shelters and rescues will try it out, too.
 - **Photos:** Good photos are an essential part of a story like this. Thankfully, Best Friends had plenty for me to choose from.
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8. Shelter's Longest Resident Celebrates His Last Day Alone In A Kennel

<http://barkpost.com/shelter-pup-cries-all-day/>



How I Found Out About This Story

Juice was a Maryland shelter's longest-term resident. He'd been doing great in the shelter for a long time, then he started getting very depressed.

A staff member brought Juice home for a sleepover. He loved it. But the next day, when she brought him back to the shelter, Juice was even more unhappy.

The shelter made a heartbreaking video of Juice crying all day. They sent it to me, and asked if I could write a story, to try to get Juice into a home.

The story went viral, and not much later, Juice got adopted.

Why This Story Worked

- **Video:** I don't think this story would have worked without the video. Seeing and hearing Juice cry was heartbreaking, and crucial.
 - **Shelter staff's investment:** The shelter put emotional resources into Juice; they put time resources into making his video. The person from the shelter who reached out to me was so clearly invested in Juice's happiness. It made me -- and my readers -- invested in his happiness.
 - **Exclusivity:** His story hadn't been reported yet.
 - **Hope:** There was a way to help.
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9. George And Amal Clooney Adopted A Very Lucky Shelter Dog Named Millie

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/george-clooney-dog_us_563169efe4b0c66bae5af984



How I Found Out About This Story

Last year, a California shelter emailed out of the blue to tell me George and Amal Clooney had just adopted an older cocker spaniel, and did I want the story first.

Yes! Very much!!

Why This Story Worked

- **George Clooney:** George Clooney has a huge amount of goodwill. Stories about him doing good things, like an adopting an older dog, just reinforce how much of a mensch he is. Jon Stewart is another animal-loving famous person who readers adore in that way. It doesn't work for all celebrities.
 - **Older dog getting adopted:** Stories about people doing good things for older dogs tend to resonate a lot with readers.
 - **Photos:** The shelter got some terrific candid photos of George and Amal with their dogs.
 - **Exclusivity:** I'd have done this story even if I wasn't first. But I loved being first.
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10. Arizona Has Become The 20th State To Ban Discrimination Against Pit Bulls

<http://barkpost.com/arizona-bans-breed-specific-legislation-pit-bulls/>



How I Found Out About This Story

I pay close attention to where breed specific legislation is being scrapped and introduced.

Fun fact: My brother Lee is a lawyer with Best Friends who works on pit bull issues, so we also have a lot of family conversations on this topic. Our parents, as I've said a lot, are quite perplexed, but also proud (I think), at these parallel career tracks. Even if it means that when we're all together, it's all pit bulls, pit bulls, pit bulls.

Why This Story Worked

- **Exciting news:** This is a big deal, another state getting rid of breed bans!
 - **Builds momentum:** I think a story like this one helps spread the idea that BSL is on its way out. It's not just Arizona getting rid of it -- it's activating folks in other states as well, to let their lawmakers know they want what Arizona has.
 - **Readers care and I care:** I've written about breed specific legislation, and other discrimination against pits, many, many times now. Based on the reactions, and traffic, I know my readers care a lot about these stories -- and so do I.
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So How Can You Get Your Stories Told?

There's no magic formula for getting my, or any other journalist's, attention. But here are some strategies and tips:

- **Develop relationships:** Tell me about your work. Show me your shelter. Let's be Facebook friends, and chat on the phone sometimes. Story ideas often come from an offhand remark, or a Facebook post.
 - **Take pictures:** Lots of them. They don't have to be professional. Videos, too. A snippet of video, a moving snapshot -- those can be the hooks for a story.
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- **George Clooney:** I can't emphasize this enough. If he's at your shelter, PLEASE TELL ME!



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- **But really:** Every journalist has a different sensibility, so what works for me might not work for BuzzFeed, or your local paper. (Except Clooney.)

I am writing for people who love animals but might or might not be personally involved with animal rescue or sheltering. There's got to be a part of the story -- Clooney, a photo, an important issue, etc -- to grab these readers.

- **Being serious:** I'm a former lawyer and write a lot about law and policy affecting animals, too. Tell me if there's some legal or policy matter in your state I should know about.
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- **Work with me:** I can't always write the story you want written, because there isn't time, because I don't think my editor will want me to write it, for any number of reasons. Sometimes, if we talk for a while, we can come up with another story -- or an angle -- that I can write.
 - **Think small:** Some of my favorite stories are tiny and charming. A kitten obsessed with dogs. A little boy and his pet duck, who do everything together. A woman who makes pajamas for pit bulls, because she lives in Canada and her dogs are always cold. The shelter's princess room. I love these stories best of all. (Sorry, George.)
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- **Be reliable:** It doesn't happen often, but occasionally I will find out that someone is a little loose with the facts. That puts my reputation on the line, along with the publications I write for. Don't do that.
 - **Answer your email and phone please:** We are all busy! Trust me, I know. But if you want me to write about your shelter, rescue, and animals, I have to be able to reach you -- usually on deadline.
 - **Tell me what you're doing:** The only way I know about your innovative adoption program, or the law you're pushing for, or the dog who needs a home, is if you tell me. Don't be shy!
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- **Shirtless men holding puppies:** Just being realistic here.



In Conclusion

I try to write stories that help make the world more compassionate for animals, and am always looking for new story ideas. You are doing the work I want to know about.

Please feel free to reach out: arin@barkbox.com, aringreenwood@gmail.com. I'm on Facebook and Twitter, too: <https://www.facebook.com/aringreenwood>, @arin_twit.

And remember: If George Clooney comes to your shelter, you are now legally obligated to let me know, before any other journalist. That goes for Jon Stewart, too.