



## **How to Pitch a Journalist**

Outreach to journalists is critical to getting coverage of your court in news media outlets. This is why the ability to craft a brief, engaging, and timely pitch is such an important tool.

A pitch is a short, personalized message to a journalist that outlines the value of a story and explains why it should be published.

When brainstorming a pitch idea, think about how it will provide journalists with news, stories, or ideas that are unique and valuable to their readers. Then follow the steps below.

### **1. Do your research**

Journalists respond to stories that are within their beat, or area of coverage. For example, you wouldn't want to pitch a story on an event in your courthouse to the local sports reporter.

Select journalists writing for publications that your target audience reads. Then, narrow it down further to the journalists that have written stories in the subject area your pitch relates to.

Personalize the pitch if you can (e.g., I saw you covered XYZ last week...) and add a sentence about who you are.

### **2. Develop a news hook**

A "hook" is that critical piece of newsworthy information that will capture the attention and interest of both the news media and their audiences. Types of hooks can include:

- **Timeliness**, or a message tied to an event or a season.
- **Impact**, or a message about how the news will impact their audience.
- **Prominence**, or incorporating prominent members of the community into the pitch (like judges!).
- **Proximity**, or news happening in the area the news outlet covers.
- **Magnitude**, or how many people, businesses, courts, etc. will be impacted by the news.
- **Conflict**, or including a challenge that is being faced and hopefully addressed.
- **Oddity**, or incorporating unusual news or unexpected twists.

### **3. Keep it short**

Journalists get a ton of emails. So keep your pitch short and tell the journalist what they need to know in as few words as possible.

Provide a brief synopsis of the story and what you're offering (e.g., I'm offering an interview with a local judge on...) in around 150 words. If the topic warrants additional explanation, try to stay under 400 words.

Be clear on your objectives and don't be promotional. Build out your hook throughout the pitch by providing additional information to support your main idea.

Tailor the pitch to the medium. For example, you may send a different pitch to a local radio station than you would to a newspaper. Review coverage across mediums to see what might resonate best with the journalists.

#### **4. Draft an eye-catching subject line**

A journalist isn't going to read your pitch unless they open the email. So a compelling subject line is key. Be upfront and to the point. Indicate that it's a pitch and what you're pitching.

For example: PITCH: Interview with Chief Judge Gorman on COVID-19 protocols in Peoria County Courthouse

#### **5. Proofread**

Journalists are professionally trained writers, so don't turn them off with bad grammar. Proofread the pitch several times before sending it.

Also, be sure you've addressed the email to the right person and have spelled the journalist's name correctly.

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If you don't hear back from a journalist, give them a day or two and then follow up. Be brief in your follow-up email or call. Ask them if they have had a chance to look at your offer but don't be pushy. It's important to respect their time and workload.

#### **Questions?**

If you have questions or are looking for a media list for your circuit, please contact the Illinois Supreme Court's Communications Department at [Communications@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:Communications@IllinoisCourts.gov).