

Virtual Suicide

Internet technology has exponentially increased the quantity of media outlets that compete for our attention. Web kiosks, Internet newsletters, and streaming audio/video applications deliver news in real-time at any time. Keeping track of these new outlets is a nightmare for publicists. Which are the newest? Which are the hottest? Who's on the staff this week?

Fortunately, the technology that creates these problems also resolves them. The Internet has segmented information providers into millions of specialized niches and simultaneously provided a tool to reach as many of these providers as you want in a single instant—email.

Has it really been less than 10 years since email became part of our everyday business lives? How did the business world ever achieve timely communication without it? The fax machine was a step forward, but email was a giant leap in speed, economy, and ease-of-use.

The email address is the most effective way to target the online media. Even if you can't find the name of the Producer, Chat coordinator, or Webmaster, their areas of responsibility are typically outlined by their address. Sending an email press release with your story pitch will elicit a response from the person behind the title, and that gets the information (name, phone number, etc.) that cements the relationship.

Email addresses are equally important for pitching traditional print and broadcast media outlets. Giving journalists the gist of a story idea in two or three succinct paragraphs is preferable to mailing large packages of materials or telephone calls that interrupt their day. Email is also an efficient way to pique the interest of freelance journalists. Give them the story idea, follow-up with a press kit or phone call, and let their relationships with major media outlets work for you.



But the email address is only the alpha, not the omega. If you blast email news releases indiscriminately to every journalist on your list, you are committing virtual suicide. Technology to filter out unwanted email—or spam—is continually improving. Irritating journalists by sending them a pitch concerning a subject they do not cover can prevent you from getting your information to journalists who do cover that subject area.

For example, the email of every staff person at *Variety* has the domain name of the publishing company—cahners.com—as part of the address. If the Cahner's Network Administrator receives a complaint about your email from a journalist at *Variety*, that admin can push a button and cut you off from contacting *any* of Cahner's media holdings, such as *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal*, and hundreds of others. No one using an email address containing your company's domain name will ever be able to get through to any email accounts at Cahner's ever again. That's virtual suicide.

That's why it's important to have an accurate profile of journalists and the stories they cover. Knowing what type of news the media outlet covers isn't specific enough. You must keep track of the types of stories specific journalists, talk show producers, or columnists have done before. Tailoring your pitch to that knowledge greatly increases the likelihood your email will draw a reply, while reducing the likelihood that reply will be a complaint, or "flame." Media contacts are human beings with personal interests that seep into their work; if you can crack that code, you can create a productive publicity pipeline that will yield coverage for years to come.



Patron Saint Productions has such a database, and it's my job to keep it clean, specific, and up-to-date. Our database contains email addresses

for more than 22,000 media contacts. Most of these addresses are personal rather than generic, such as "info@" or "letters@." For each contact, we collect descriptions of the publication, along with categories and sub-categories showing the types of stories in which each journalist is interested.

We have over 2,000 profiles of online media contacts and freelancers—media contacts who are grossly underrepresented in Bacon's and other commercial databases. We make daily additions, deletions, and changes to our list to provide the most accurate profiles possible.

Beginning in February, Patron Saint Productions will start selling, not an email news release service, but this database of contacts itself. If you use it wisely, you will be rewarded with greater media coverage of your books, authors, and operations, at substantial savings over more traditional mail and phone media relations. If you abuse the database, you will be forever locked out of the in-boxes of thousands of journalists. It's my job to help you use these contacts wisely. If you're interested in purchasing our databases or support services, just drop me an email and we'll talk.

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