TURNING
EMAILS
INTO
PRESS

GETTING AND KEEPING
JOURNALISTS' ATTENTION

PR EMAIL CASE STUDIES

BY DANN BERG

Introduction

Here are five real pitch emails that I received while working at *The Verge*. I removed any identifying information, but otherwise left each email completely in tact. Every email in this document can use some improvement, but — as you'll see — some are definitely more effective than others. All opinions expressed in these case studies completely mine and are in no way representative of any of my employers, past or present.

After each email, I give a full analysis of each pitch email. I talk about what I like and what I don't like, or what could have been done differently to catch my attention.

However, I don't want you to reach each pitch email and then jump directly into my analysis. Instead, I want you to stop after finishing each email and do two things:

1. Ask yourself if you are personally interested in the product. Don't confuse this with asking yourself if you'd use the product. Ask yourself if the *pitch email makes the product interesting*. Try to pinpoint which sentences capture your attention and which sentences you skipped over.

2. Can you figure out why you feel the way you do?

After you answer these two questions, you can continue on to my analysis.

Further Reading

If you find this information useful, you may be interested in my upcoming book *Turning Emails into Press: Getting and Keeping Journalists' Attention*, coming late 2014.

It exposes exactly how the press world works, showing you exactly what you need to do to get your product or service to stand out. I delve into the psychology of a journalist, which will help you highlight the most useful information about your product and greatly increase your email response rates.

The book is a product of both my personal experiences, as a staff writer for *Laptop Magazine* and the Reviews Editor at *The Verge*, as well as dozens of interviews with technology journalists. Each writer shares exactly what they're thinking when they're checking their email, and exactly what you need to do to catch their attention.

Why share this information with you? Because it helps everyone involved. Knowing how to craft a proper pitch doesn't just help entrepreneurs get higher response rates. It also helps journalists manage their email inboxes and find winning products to cover. When a pitch is well written, a journalist can immediately know if it's relevant, or can pass the information along to a coworker who covers that specific beat.

The full book covers:

- Finding relevant publications
- Researching specific authors
- Using press about the competition to your advantage
- What to include in a cold pitch email
- Properly utilizing embargo dates
- Elements of a successful pitch email
- Using social networks to interact with journalists
- Gaining favor with writers
- How to avoid insulting journalists
- And more

If you want to know when the book launches, sign up for my newsletter at:
http://novicenolonger.com/turning-emails-into-press

Case Study ONE

Subject: Meeting Request: CEO of [Company Name] for first look at upcoming products

Hi Dann,

October will be a very exciting month for [Company Name]! They are going to launch 2 brand new fitness apps (that are very different from their current ones) and a new piece of proprietary hardware that is unlike anything they currently offer.

Would you be interested in meeting with [Name], CEO of [Company Name], on October 7th or 8th in NYC to get a first look at the products?

What sets [Company Name] apart from all other fitness apps is that they have total control of the process – from designing the apps to developing the hardware to creating the website that pulls it all together – and users can track their digital fitness lifestyles entirely within the [Company Name] ecosystem.

Please let me know your interest.
Thanks,
[Contact Name]

Analysis

This is one of the better pitch emails. The subject immediately explains what's being offered: a meeting with the CEO. Not just any meeting, but a discussion of *upcoming products*. This type of offer is a good approach if you already have an established product or brand and want to get press for some the new stuff you're about to release.

In the body of the email, the writer gets immediately to the important information: there are **two new apps** about to be released. Depending on the company, that's a big deal. And it's not just software, the company is also planning to release hardware. I would have liked more details about the hardware — "unlike anything they currently offer" doesn't say much — but it's at least intriguing.

Then, separated into a new paragraph all by itself, is a direct call-to-action: schedule a time with the CEO. It can't be missed.

Finally, the email ends with a brief paragraph describing the company. Notice how the company overview is conversational and easy to read. This isn't an official press release, but an email to a real person. The tone should be conversational.

The email ends with — and this is really important — another call to action. The phrase "please let me know your interest," tells your reader the exact next steps they should take.

Case Study TWO

Subject: [Company Name], Transforming the World of Hydration with One Smart Bottle

Hey Dann,

Reaching out to share a new product, **under embargo until 11AM Wednesday, September 25th**.

[Company Name] is swapping out the traditional water bottle with [Product Name, link to website], the smart bottle and app that works directly with your phone to keep you hydrated. "Drink Up," said no smartphone ever before.

[Company Name] eliminates the guess work and provides a concierge-like service to tell you when it's time to hydrate and exactly how much water to consume. By collecting a variety of data (weight, age, temperature, humidity, activity level, health status, etc) for each individual, [Company Name] determines exactly what it takes to stay hydrated. The smart bottle's LED lights and app's phone notifications will alert you when it's time to drink up.

[Two images of the product]

[Company Name] will go live Wednesday @ 11AM on [Crowdfunding Site]. Please let me know if this is something you would be interested in featuring. Any feedback is appreciated. Thanks!

Best,

[Contact Name]

Analysis

This email totally had me hooked...but there's one tiny detail at the end that spoiled it. Did you spot it?

This is an interesting concept and the news is under embargo so I have time to formulate the best coverage. I'm also familiar with the popularity of recent products like the [HAPIfork](#), so other products in this new "smart eating" category are immediately intriguing.

The email clearly states what the product is (both a water bottle and app) and what it's trying to accomplish. The copy is clear and conversational. There are even images of the product included in the email, so I can see that it's a nice, well designed product.

There's only one problem: **this email lied to me**. Up until the very last paragraph, I thought this was a new product announcement. **IT'S NOT.** This is a *product concept* announcement. This isn't a real product, it might never even be funded. There's a good chance this smart water bottle will never see the light of day.

Unless you're a large and well-established company, putting a project on a crowdfunding site is not news. Instead, wait to send your pitch emails until you've seen 24-48 hours of explosive funding (you've gone viral) or you get successfully funded.

There are exceptions to this rule, but they are few and far between. If you're not sure if you're an exception, you're not.

Case Study THREE

Subject: Cool new iPad accessory is an innovative handle/stand/storage all in one

Hi Dan,

I see your site does a solid job covering technology and has a concentration on tablets/iPads. Excellent. Do you know [Product Name] For iPad yet? It is the cool new iPad accessory. [Product Name] For iPad is a versatile stand, an ergonomic handle and has convenient storage... all in one sleek, sturdy, easy to use product! **This is the intersection of form meets function.**

- ☻ [Product Name]'s rotating handle conforms to you for a secure grip for all hand sizes; so comfortable.

- ☻ [Product Name]'s adjustable stand provides you personal style and usage; perfect for video and gaming.

- ☻ [Product Name] is a place to keep your iPad wires/adapters/etc; never misplace them again.

Since the handle *is* the stand *and* the storage, it is quite unique! You really need to see it to get the full picture.

[Inline image 1]

Currently, [Product Name] is looking for strategic partnerships, affiliates, <u>product reviews</u> and/or <u>promotional coverage</u>. We are always open to considering conceptual ideas about how we can best work together. If you would please let us know your thoughts and how you would like to get involved it would be greatly appreciated!

Of course, if you have any questions - please just ask. We look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you in advance,

[Contact Name]

Analysis

The very first thing I notice with this email is, of course, my misspelled name. Dann, with two N's, was not only listed on *The Verge* masthead, but also *in the email this pitch was sent to*. I know it's a little unusual to have two N's, but getting my name right is a small thing that can have a huge impact on how I perceive the rest of the email.

Regarding the actual content of the email, I admit that I feel a little bad for someone trying to pitch a product like this. Even the coolest iPad stands are just iPad stands, and that can be a tough sell to journalists.

Notice, too, how much a product like this relies on pictures. Without the product images, do you have an idea of what this looks like in your head? No? Me either, I just had to go back to the original email and check.

One part that really stands out is that the company is "looking for strategic partnerships, affiliates, product reviews and/or promotional coverage." If you're writing to a journalist, then you're *obviously* looking for coverage. But you're also asking me for a "strategic partnership" or to be an "affiliate?" That's weird. I'm a journalist. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.

I wonder if this person ever checked our website to even see if we covered products like this.

Case Study FOUR

Subject: A simple low-technical solution to a common Hi-Tech problem!

Dann,

I write to you in the name of those afflicted by the poor habit of using the smartphone in the cup holder! Ok, so maybe a bit of a blatant cry for attention. But I imagine you get a whole lot of these pitches. The reality is that it's hard to make something so simple very sexy! Yet, everyone who takes a moment to review it …suddenly gets it!

The solution is called [Product Name]… a new tool that makes Smartphone-based navigation, and all around use in a car, safer and easier for drivers. No… it's not hi-tech. It's rather low tech that supports hi-tech. But we are hoping it might be something of interest to your readers!!

It's as simple as simple can be! [Product Name] is a phone mount that rests on a car dashboard angled so that the driver can see their phone. Basically, you lie [Product Name] flat on the dashboard, and it props the phone up at a right angle so you can see it from the driver's seat. This means no more dangerous turning away from the road to check the number of your next exit. Instead, [Product Name] places the phone at the perfect angle so that you can see your directions.

Ok! So the obvious question is why [Product Name] vs anything else! Well, it is different from all other car accessories on the market because:

- ☻ Phone is propped up: Other car accessories allow you to place the phone on your dashboard without suction cups, but they lay it down flat. This means you can't see and use your map apps to direct you to the destination. Basically no use to you when driving!

- ☻ Phone-agnostic: Works with just about every phone and car.

- ☻ No suction cup!!!! No popping off at unexpected times and flying across the car. [Product Name] lies flat, and stays put. Easy to place and remove

- ☻ Take it with you. It's flexible! You can roll it up and shove it your briefcase, purse or pocket (assuming you wearing cargo pants)

[continued on next page]

We would love for you to try out a [Product Name] and tell us what you think. If you are interested, just email me at [Email Address] and we will send samples.

Currently Available on Amazon: [Amazon Link] and [Company Website]!

We are happy to set up a time to talk with you and share some additional information about how the idea came about and where we plan to take it.

Thanks for your time,

Best,

[Name]

[Official press release attached, with picture of product]

Analysis

This is another example of a product that's going to have a hard time finding coverage. The person who wrote the email knows this as well — that's why the sell is so *long*.

This exact email was CC'ed to all three people on my team. As you might be able to tell from the generic copy, it was probably sent to *so many other people* as well.

The one thing that this email has going for it are bullet points. In certain cases, bullet points can be very effective. It serves to highlight important information and really draws the eye. I might skim a few paragraphs, but my eyes will always check the bullet points.

Case Study FIVE

Subject: M-Commerce Leader [Company Name] launches in the UK

Dear Sir or Madam,

[Company Name], one of the world's leading mobile commerce companies, is entering the UK market now.

We provide the most advanced mobile solutions including mobile websites, native iPhone, iPad and Android applications and the full scope of relevant mobile tools, e.g. QR-Code shopping, push notifications (...). Currently, we are cooperation with over 5200 merchants in Germany, the USA, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, e.g. LUSH (iPhone, Android App).

Beneath you find our press relaese (sic) concerning our launch in the UK.

If you have further questions or need more detailed information don't hesitate to contact me.

We're looking forward to hearing from you.

[Official Press Release]

Analysis

You can probably guess what I'm going to say about the first line. "Sir or Madam?" You pulled my email address from somewhere — you couldn't even take the time to include my name? Or even check my gender?

That greeting sets the reader up to read a generic pitch. If you start your email with "sir or madam," you're immediately creating an uphill battle to fight.

I get *what* the company is doing (entering the UK) but I don't know *what that really means* or *why it's important*. Also, what does "entering the UK" really mean? Why weren't you there before? Why are you there now?

Notice that the main paragraph in this email is dense and confusing. Lists, parentheticals, ellipses inside parentheticals — this is flat out bad writing. And with spell check being coded into almost every possible text field, why on earth is there such a blatant typo?

Attached to this email was a lengthy press release that was written like an official press release. Which is to say: dense and uninteresting.

By simply making a few changes — using my name, explaining the importance of this announcement, editing a little bit — this pitch email would be exponentially better.

Thank you for reading

If you're interested in learning the basic principles behind pitching to the press, check out my article **Pitching Journalists: 5 Things Your Competitors Aren't Doing**:

http://novicenolonger.com/pitching-journalists-things-your-competitors-arent-doing/

You can also check out my podcast episode with Dan Seifert, Reviews Editor at *The Verge*. We talk about the best ways to get noticed by journalists and he shares the *one common marketing tactic* that comes off as insulting:

http://novicenolonger.com/getting-the-verge-to-take-notice-dan-seifert/

If you'd like to know when the full book launches, just give me your email address:

http://novicenolonger.com/turning-emails-into-press/

Thank you for reading, and good luck with your pitches!

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-**Dann**