

TURNING  
**EMAILS**  
I N T O  
**PRESS**

**GETTING AND KEEPING  
JOURNALISTS' ATTENTION**



BY DANN BERG

## Introduction

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The following is an excerpt from my upcoming book *Turning Emails into Press: Getting and Keeping Journalists' Attention*.



The full version, available late 2014, 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/>

## The Importance of **MARKETING**

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Creating a new product is only half the battle — it's then up to you to get your app or website into the hands of the people who need it. Getting significant amounts of press is an important part of that effort.

But when we're in Marketing Mode, it can be easy to forget that the person we're pitching to is a real person. We'll send out generic emails to massive email lists and wonder why no one writes back.

Instead, pitching a journalist is like applying for a job. You can't expect a positive response if you write one version of your resume and send it to a long list of employers. The same logic applies for soliciting press. If you want a journalist to take notice, you need to tailor your pitch directly to your recipient.

A good marketing strategy does more than simply increase your response rate — it allows you to take control of the entire marketing process. With this book, you'll be able to create a countdown to your launch date, with specific milestones to check off as you inch closer to release.

If you're a developer, imagine trying to fix bugs in your software without a proper way to track your progress. If you haven't developed a specific marketing strategy, you're squishing bugs in the dark. The methods outlined in this book will provide the structure you need for an effective marketing strategy — you just need to plug in your own individual pieces.

When your marketing strategy is properly planned out, you'll feel like everything is in autopilot. You'll be able to look at your calendar to see exactly what you need to be doing, and you'll be able to stay on track for a successful launch.

This book will show you who you need to be contacting and what you should be telling them. I'll also show you the best way to track all your correspondence to help keep yourself organized. I'll reveal the exact systems that you should put in place every time you want to launch a new feature or service, and how to take advantage of any press about your competitors.

It's time for your product to enter the world with a bang, not a whimper.

# Embargos

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*Note: The following is an excerpt from the chapter on embargos.*

An embargo date is where you set a specific day and time that journalists will be allowed to publish information about your product or service. If you provide a journalist with information under embargo, there's an agreement that the information you provide will only be shared within that news organization and not discussed with *anyone* else.

Having an embargo date can be advantageous for both marketer and publication. As someone seeking press, an embargo date allows you to keep important news under wraps until one giant news event that you control. It also allows you to talk to a much larger number of publications, since you won't already be "old news" once the first journalist publishes a story.

For press publications, embargo dates can be extremely useful. It helps ensure that one of your competitors can't break the news before you, thus reaping the rewards of first-publisher traffic and search engine juice. It also gives journalists time to craft a perfect story and find a way to make their coverage unique.

One of the main reasons that people have trouble getting press for their startup is that they're *no longer news anymore*. If you've already launched and you have luck getting press on a few small blogs, don't expect any of the big companies to take notice when you try to pitch them. A new product launch is news. The fact that you exists *isn't* news.

An embargo date helps with this, because you can carefully court all your favorite publications for press without worrying about trying to get press after it's already too late.

## Best Laid Plans

Despite all the pros, you'll still find marketers that hate setting embargo dates. If one single publication breaks the embargo — a very real possibility — it can throw off your entire launch strategy and piss off other publications.

When I was at *The Verge*, we got an email from Microsoft's marketing department months before the launch of the Xbox One. They invited us to come try the new Xbox Fitness program and interview one of the personal trainers involved with the program. Everything about the meeting, even the fact that the meeting existed, was under embargo until a date close to the Xbox One's launch.

I went to the event with a coworker on the video team. We shot a lot of great content, including footage of people actually using Xbox Fitness and has a great question and answer session with a trainer using the program to extend her brand. Thanks to the embargo date, we had plenty of time to put together a nice video piece and companion story without worrying about being late to the game.

But things don't always work as planned. A few weeks later, I was at my desk working on a smartphone review when I got an urgent message over our interoffice chat system. It was a link to a page on Microsoft's official website, which clearly showed all the fitness program we had seen under embargo. I quickly shot a confused email to my Microsoft press contact, asking for clarification and whether the embargo still stood. After sending the email I check the website again. It's been taken down — it obviously went live as a mistake.

This sort of situation puts everyone in a bind. As a press publication, we had an obligation to our readers to post an article about the leaked webpage, but were still bound by the embargo agreement to omit anything discussed in the meeting.

I received an email back from our press contact, who said that the embargo still stood and that there had been a technical error with the website. Due to the mistake, they were lifting the embargo early, however, and I could post my article the following morning.

This little kerfuffle negatively impacted both us and Microsoft. I spent the rest of my day working writing a deeper look at Xbox Fitness — even though I would have rather spent much more time putting together a piece with accompanying video. Microsoft, in turn, got much of the coverage it wanted but much of it was rushed due to the surprise embargo date lift.

## When Embargos are Broken

So what's keeping a journalist from breaking an embargo? The simplest answer is journalistic integrity. It's the same reason that "off the record" actually means "off the record."

This means that if you want to take advantage of the benefits of an embargo date, you should make sure that you're pitching publications who take journalism seriously. Established publications are a lot less likely to break an embargo than a college kid with his own Wordpress install, but anything can still happen and you should always be prepared for an accidental embargo breach.

Another reason why journalists don't break embargos is because they'll most likely get left out of future

scoops. Getting left off the PR list of bigger companies can have dire consequences from publications, who will no longer be their reader's go-to source of news. But the same logic also applies to the little guys, too.

If a journalist is writing about you, it's because they find what you're doing interesting. If you're doing something interesting now, you'll probably be doing something interesting in the future, too. They don't want to burn any bridges.

Even so, it's always best to plan for worst-case scenario. As soon as you hear that one person has broken your embargo, it's important to reach out to all the other publications that you've pitched and let them know that the embargo has been lifted. If you're still not quite ready for an actual launch at that point, it's important to have an emergency landing page that you can quickly publish so that you can still benefit from the influx in traffic.

Sometimes embargos are broken because of genuine accidents. There can be glitches with a website's post scheduling system, or a writer can mistakenly put in AM instead of PM. It's up to you to figure out how to respond and if you watch to trust the publication again.

## Thank you for reading

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Embargo dates are just one facet of crafting an effective pitch. If you're interested in learning more right now, 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/>

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

**-Dann**