



---

## **Engage-Serve-Represent**

### **July 24<sup>th</sup> Marketing Panel Discussion**

**Panelists: Carla Waldemar, Freelance Writer**

**Maureen McCarthy, Star Tribune**

**Patricia Effenberger, Pioneer Press**

**Moderator: Trisha Volpe, KARE 11**

#### **Introductions**

Trisha Volpe is a TV news reporter who recently ran a story on the Lake Street Ambassadors. She's also done other local stories about graffiti clean-up and police officers learning Spanish, along with the more negative pieces about crimes committed.

Patricia Effenberger is on the Pioneer Press editorial board. She is also a spokesperson for the paper, handles public relations issues, works with community partners, and was formerly a reporter.

Maureen McCarthy is the team leader for Minneapolis news at the Star Tribune. The Star Tribune has shifted its focus to emphasize local news more. Some features relevant to Lake Street are the food and business features.

Carla Waldemar has done freelance work for many local magazines. If you have an idea, she may very well want to work with you but she'll need specifics, which the panel will discuss more later.

**Questions: A pre-existing relationship with someone in the media can be key to a successful story pitch. How does someone go about building that relationship?**

### **What does the media look for in a story?**

Patricia: For relationships, start with being a consumer. Look for the stories that are being produced in print, radio, and TV. See who covers what, and what angles interest them. That will help you know how to tailor your ideas and who to send them to.

For what the media looks for, suggesting interesting individuals is a big plus. Also, stories that relate to what is going on now, such as the rising price of gas or anything that's in the news lately.

Maureen: It's a mistake to say to media people "this is a good thing, it deserves recognition." They may well agree with you, but they need more. Their goal is to tell a good story. Also, it's the community's expectation that people in the media know more than they actually do. They need input from community members to guide them. An interesting person in an interesting situation is something they always look for in a story.

Trisha: A test she uses at KARE 11 is for three adjectives: is it compelling, is it meaningful, and does it provide perspective. A good story has to have meaning for a larger audience.

Carla: As a freelance writer, she often looks for appeal to specific demographics, and stories that are attractive to a niche audience. People should also remember that with monthly magazines, deadlines are farther out. She probably can't use something if it's pitched to her just a week before the event is taking place.

### **More on building relationships**

Maureen: Mass faxes and press releases are not likely to be very effective. The Star Tribune gets something like 500 a day and they all go to the assignment desk, where they pass over many just for lack of time. It is better to seek out an individual reporter, and e-mail them with ideas once that relationship is established.

Joyce Wisdom: A good example of this was at the beginning of the 21 Hop + Shop campaign. Metro Transit sent out press releases about it, but nobody picked them up. When Lake Street Council did its own media work, that's what got some media attention, because it was a more personal connection.

**Question from Mark Simon from Roberts Shoes:** He's been in this community for 26 years. Back then there was a lot of bad news coming from here, but there were also people fighting the good fight who did not get so much attention. Now that there is some positive coverage, how do business owners help to maintain it?

Patricia: Keep pitching stories, and look for ways to tell your stories that you haven't tried before. Think about avenues like writing op-ed pieces and letters to the editor.

Maureen: Newsrooms get conditioned to the positive vs. negative stories framework. They are sensitive to it, because they don't want to be accused of always being negative. However, that isn't how they think of themselves. Their mindset is that they need to tell a good story, so that is the way to pitch ideas to them. Emphasize the immediacy of your pitch and the surprise factor in it, as these are key things news people look for.

Carla: Agrees that surprise is everything. As a freelance writer, she has no motivation to do any negative pieces, and she will always be interested in well-crafted ideas.

Trisha: An important consideration is the changing taste of the audience. Those in the media can have a hard time figuring out the changing tastes themselves, but they will do their best to respond.

Carla: When sending out an idea, don't hit a lot of different media outlets all at once. Take the first one that shows interest in the story. Nobody wants to be the second media outlet to get to a story.

Maureen: Try your best contact first; tell them that they get first shot but that you'll go elsewhere if they pass it up. At the Star Tribune, good first contacts would be Steve Brandt, or business columnist Neil St. Anthony.

Patricia: In her experience, the best way to do a pitch is to send an e-mail about it, then follow up with a phone call to that person. Respect the need for exclusivity.

Trisha: Pay attention to who is covering what; direct your ideas to those who have shown the most interest in similar things.

Carla: Even if your pitch doesn't work out right at that moment, things may turn up later, so don't be discouraged. She has gotten pitches where her deadline was too close at the time, but was able to use them at a later time.

**Question from Don Blyly from Uncle Hugo's Bookstore:** In the past, he's sent out press releases about Uncle Hugo's 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> anniversaries and not gotten coverage. He saw recently that Electric Fetus got coverage in the Star Tribune for its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What could he do to get covered for his next anniversary milestone?

Maureen: Electric Fetus got attention because it's a record store celebrating 40 years at a time when record stores are going out of business. It had a bigger context, and tapped into a broader theme.

Patricia: There could be a similar angle for Uncle Hugo's as an independent bookstore, another market that has had struggles. Angle could be what has Uncle Hugo's done to be successful in changing times?

Carla: Look for local niches that are interested in your specific kind of business. Look to the full range of media, including monthlies.

**Question: How are blogs going into the market? How can they be used productively?**

Patricia: At the Pioneer Press and other news outlets, they're used as another entry point for telling stories. Something may start out as a short entry on a reporter's blog and turn into a full story later.

Maureen: For those hoping to attract media attention, having a blog by itself won't do a lot of good. News staff don't always have a lot of time to be surfing around on blogs.

Trisha: If you have a blog, you'll have to ask yourself how you'll get someone to read it. The Internet is another avenue now for telling stories. KARE has stories on the Web that won't necessarily ever be on TV.

Maureen: The Web has meant newspapers feel more in competition with TV to get to a story first, and get it on their website. The Star Tribune is looking into more use of video to post on their site. One place reporters look online for local news is the Minneapolis Issues Forum, <http://forums.e-democracy.org/groups/mpls>.

**Question: How much lead time do you typically want for a story?**

Maureen: In the news department, 1 to 2 weeks is the standard. For a features column, about a month.

Trisha: TV has a short attention span, and resources are down, with maybe 5 reporters working during any one day. This is where an individual relationship is important.

Carla: Magazines think longer term. Anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 months might be needed, depending on the magazine and the story. She is working on coverage for the fall right now.

**Question from Joyce Krook with Allina:** National Night Out is coming up next month, with many different events going on across the city at the same time. How does the media decide which neighborhood to cover?

Maureen: They haven't gotten pitches from communities. With no pitches, the default they've used is which neighborhood has experienced the most crime, as that adds something to the story.

Trisha: You can ask yourself, has the neighborhood done something interesting in recent months that the media doesn't know about? Then make that a part of your pitch.

Patricia: Newsrooms are looking for something fresh for these sorts of yearly events that they always cover.

**Question: How does someone effectively connect with a newsroom?**

Patricia: Tailor your pitch to the medium you're pitching to. For example, for TV, make it visual.

Maureen: Newspapers also think about visuals, photographs add more attention to stories. Tell them what they will see, and don't make it staged just for the camera.

Carla: Invite a reporter to come at his or her convenience. Try to avoid giving just one specific time that a reporter may find unappealing or inconvenient.

**Question: What avenues of publicity are available to businesses?**

Patricia: Think about community partnerships. Ask, who do you want to reach, and where are those people? Consider opportunities at local schools, churches, and events. Libraries have lots of low-cost resources. The networking resources of organizations like the Lake Street Council can be vital.

Joyce Wisdom: The 3<sup>rd</sup> marketing panel will be business-to-business, with business owners on the panel sharing their success stories with others. When

you do get good coverage, let LSC know about it, and put it on your own website. Give reprints to customers and advertisers.

Carla: Partner with other businesses. An example is Jungle Theater offering coupons to JP's American Bistro. Or several restaurants combining resources to offer a taste of Lake Street.

**Question: What's the difference between PR and advertising?**

Patricia: With advertising, you have complete control, but you do have to pay for it. With media relations and PR, you won't have to pay money and it can be a good way to get your name out there, but you'll have less control over the final product. In both cases, ask yourself afterwards what your return on investment is. Did you get more traffic, higher revenues?

**Question from Carl Pressman from Press Gold Payroll:** His company tried to contact and develop relationships with reporters, but they had no success. Eventually they hired a PR person, who was successful at getting some stories in local publications, but it was expensive to do so. What can they do to get press without hiring someone for PR?

Trisha: She would personally want to hear from a business owner more than a PR person, who she would be expecting to get spin from. It depends who you're trying to contact.

Patricia: A standard PR rule is that if you're successful 1 out of every 10 story pitches, that's a good track record. Don't get discouraged, keep trying.

**Question: How can a business owner use PR to support a crisis situation?**

Patricia: Have a crisis communication plan for the business. Have someone who would be the spokesperson.

Maureen: Have somebody who can say something right away. What do you want people to know? Probably that you're doing the best you can and are working to fix the situation. Do not lie or it will become a bigger story when the lie is discovered.

Carla: When you are caught in a larger negative situation, like street construction, make a joke of it; use it to your advantage.

Joyce Wisdom: Examples on Lake Street were Ingebretsen's sign "Lutefisk still available during construction"; Northern Sun advertising a "follow the orange cones sale", Blue Moon had construction-related postcards.

Don Blyly: Uncle Hugo's dealt with an unexpected encounter with the fire department, police and reporters one Christmas when a burglar got stuck in his chimney trying to break in. His advice is to be cooperative, helpful, and available for interviews from any news organization that arrives.

### **Final remarks on building media relationships**

Carla: In her experience, businesses don't always return calls. When that happens, she goes to the ones who do. Future stories can be damaged by not returning calls, as the reporter will doubt the business's cooperation for any other stories. Always follow-up with a thank you to those who do positive stories about you.

Patricia: Be respectful of reporter's deadlines. When calling a reporter, it's a good idea to ask if this is a good time for them to talk. Relationships are a two-way street.

Joyce Wisdom: If a reporter contacts you at a time where the right person isn't available to answer a question, be sure to get the reporter's name and contact info. Now you have a new contact and the start of a relationship.