



# EXHIBITOR ACADEMY, JUNE 2017

## COMMUNICATING WITH MEDIA

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### INCREASING YOUR MEDIA EXPOSURE AT SHOT

A guide to improving marketing strategies before, during and after the show.

#### **Note**

*The following article recaps a panel discussion held during the SHOT Show Exhibitor Academy, June 2017, called "Increasing Your Media Exposure at SHOT."*

by Brad Fitzpatrick, Sportsman & Outdoor Writer

The SHOT Show drew more than 64,000 attendees last year, and it acted as the launching pad for thousands of new products related to the shooting, hunting and outdoor industry. That's good news for the industry as a whole, but with so many new products, so many booths, multiple floors, and innumerable private events and luncheons, how do you ensure that your product is receiving the most media attention possible?

The answer is relatively simple: have a plan in place well in advance of the show to maximize your media exposure. As a member of the outdoor media, I'm always very excited to find products that I believe will interest readers, but it's simply impossible to see each new item at every booth over the span of four days. And I'm not alone; there are thousands of other members of the media on site — bloggers, online content developers, writers and members of the television media are also cruising the show floor in search of products to cover. This provides exhibitors with a fantastic opportunity to get the word out about the items they are marketing — but you have to develop a strategy to bring the most media into your booth and to provide them with the content they need to cover your products effectively.

### PLAN AHEAD FOR THE SHOT SHOW

Begin your SHOT Show preparation by developing a thorough understanding of the media outlets that cover your products. By knowing which media members write about your products, you can develop a short list of the individuals who offer you the best chance of getting coverage because the outlets for which they provide content — be it radio, television, web or print — are most in line with the products you are selling. For instance, if you produce duck calls, it's of little value to you to reach out to media members who write strictly about tactical and law enforcement products. Conversely, if you sell concealed carry holsters, approaching content developers who write about upland bird hunting is likely not worth your time. By knowing the key media members you need to contact — and more specifically, the audience for which they provide content — you stand the best chance of getting coverage. Keeping tabs on the channels consumers use to get information about items they might want to purchase is the first step toward success.

What if you don't have the type of budget to hire an outside media consultant in booth or to spend a great deal of money advertising? Then you'll want to assign someone in your company (and maybe that's you) the task of ferreting out media members who offer you the best chance of coverage (NSSF can assist you with this). And by understanding how products like yours get covered in the press, you'll be better equipped to provide media members the tools they need to write about your products. For instance, the country's largest hunting-related publications rarely run full, multi-page features on single items (such as a backpack or a holster) — but such items might be perfect for a sidebar in a larger article or in a roundup of related products.

Developing a relationship with the media is key, which means you'll need to start contacting media members directly. If you do that well in advance of the show (aim for the October to early December time frame), you'll stand a better chance of gaining media attention. Some of your contact efforts will fall short, but you may be able to line up a few meetings at the show that will provide the type of exposure you need.

Understand too that you may not get one-on-one meetings with all (or even very many) of the media members you contact. That's okay. During your initial contact with media members, offer multiple options for relaying information about your product. Make time to develop a good media website, including press releases with high-resolution images (specifically for print – the larger and more detailed the image files, the better). Ask media members to stop by your booth. Offer to send samples for use during hunting season. Encourage media members to try your product at Media Day. Ask for feedback about a new item. The more personalized the message, the better, but I understand that reaching out to media members one by one is time consuming. The benefit, though, is that you will begin to forge those all-important relationships that pay dividends during the show and in the months and years that follow.

It's also important to train every person who will be representing your product in your booth how to handle media requests before the show begins. Even a 10-minute conversation is well worth your time. You don't want to miss an opportunity to present your products to a media representative who has only a few minutes when stopping by your booth. **Each member of your booth team should know how media assets such as images, press releases and products can be delivered to media members.**

Thanks to the Internet, the methods by which media members (and consumers) learn about your products are wide-ranging. The more media members you can communicate with prior to the show, the better your odds of receiving exposure. Magazines, books, radio programs, blogs, websites, forums, online video channels and television programs all reach your audience.

## ONSITE INSIGHTS

If you've already been to the SHOT Show, there's no need to tell you that it is expansive and that you will make contact with hundreds of individuals. You will receive all types of requests and engage in a wide variety of conversations. Some visitors to your booth will be distributors, while others will own small gun stores and will be looking to stock their shelves with new products. A few individuals may be seeking sponsorship, and some will simply want to chat about your product. You will also meet members of the media who are looking for products to cover.

Although I can't advise you on how to handle all those requests, I do have some insight into what media members want. Many will request a basic rundown of your products, and that's relatively simple. Others will want to record a short video clip, so have people on hand who can talk about your products. The main item you'll need to provide, though, is a media kit.

Many companies provide a flash drive to media members prior to the show or on the show floor, and as long as you have the essential "ingredients" in your press kit – contact info, press releases, MSRPs, specifications and photos of the product – you will have equipped the media with most of the information required to cover your product. Should you add older SKUs to your media kit? Doing so won't hurt (if you have the time), but please separate new products from older ones. No media member wants to cover a "new" product from SHOT that's actually five years old. The more streamlined the media kit, the more likely I am to use it not only in my coverage of new items but also in future articles. Alternatively, a well-thought-out online media kit is a great option. Sometimes I write stories while at a hunting camp, and I rarely have media flash drives on hand in such situations. The more intuitive the online media kit, the better.

Again, I want to emphasize the importance of making each person in your booth responsible for delivering press kits to the media. **I decide within the first 30 seconds of meeting someone in your booth whether your products will be easy or difficult to cover. If I speak with an individual in your booth who happily provides me with a media kit or a pathway to find one online, then I'm far more likely to cover your product. By contrast, if that individual doesn't know where to find a press kit, abandons me to look for someone who knows how to handle media or asks me to come back when the marketing team is free, then I am less likely to cover the items you sell.** Time is very limited for media members at SHOT Show, so any effort you can make to streamline the process for them will prove beneficial.

It's also helpful to know some basic media jargon, especially when dealing with writers. If a "gun writer" approaches you in the booth, you should feel free to ask what publication they write for and whether they are freelance (writing for a number of outlets), on contract, or a full-time writer or editor for the magazine. This shouldn't be an interrogation but rather a simple conversation that provides you with valuable feedback regarding that media member. You should also ask about any assignments that writer currently has. Certain articles will be assigned before the show; such articles already have space set aside in the magazine. Other pieces are written "on spec," which means that the writer will write the piece and try to sell it later. I typically have a half-dozen assignments at the start of the show – new shotguns, new concealed carry gear, optics,

and generally a “Hot from SHOT” piece or two that I’m writing — but I always see products that I know would make a great sidebar or work in a large roundup piece later. If a writer doesn’t understand these basic concepts or shies away when you ask these questions, they may not be able to provide the type of content you need. But you should always maintain a positive attitude and professional manner; I was once a largely unknown freelancer roaming the halls of SHOT Show for story ideas, and many of the companies that worked with me ended up with coverage.

## **AFTER THE SHOW**

Once you’ve arrived back home, don’t forget about the media contacts you’ve made. It takes a few days to decompress after a jam-packed four-day stint in Las Vegas, but it’s a good idea to start following up with writers once the dust settles. Ask about coverage for your products — did the writer have any questions about the press kit? Did they find an outlet for that story you discussed? Are they still interested in working on a project later in the year? The days and weeks following SHOT Show are hectic, and all full-time media members are working frantically to cover a wide range of products. But it never hurts to take the time to reach out, even if it’s only to remind media members of the great products they saw in your booth. Such outreach helps forge those relationships that are so important — and helps keep your product on the mind of media members after the show. And once the SHOT dust settles, there’s usually a period when most of the major rollouts have been covered. By March, media members are beginning to catch up and are starting to look for items that they didn’t cover initially. For that reason, I suggest another follow-up a few weeks or a couple months after the show has ended.

Last, consider what happens if you do receive a great deal of coverage and orders suddenly start pouring in for your new product. That’s a good problem to have, but are you prepared to increase your production 10-fold? Do you have a plan in place to provide customers with what they want if your product is suddenly a bestseller?

The hints and tips listed here translate to a lot of work for you, but that work may pay big dividends down the line. By making your product available to the media and developing working relationships, you’re stacking the odds of gaining exposure in your favor.



### **ABOUT THE WRITER:**

Brad Fitzpatrick is a full-time outdoor writer based in southern Ohio. He is the author of more than 400 articles that have appeared in dozens of regional, national and international publications. He is also the author of five books on hunting, shooting, history and biology. Brad’s writings and photographs have won multiple awards, including the Great Lakes Outdoor Writers Best of Best Award and the Professional Outdoor Media Association’s Pinnacle Award for Conservation.