

How to Win with GovCon Reporters at Trade Shows

WHITE PAPER



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INTRODUCTION

For government contractors, visibility in the media is essential to promoting your brand, raising awareness of key company milestones and reinforcing your thought leadership in the industry. Industry trade shows – which bring reporters, government customers and your senior executives together in one place – can present the perfect opportunity for press coverage. However, reporters have demanding schedules at these events, with limited time and attention to write and submit the compelling stories their publishers and readers expect of them. This can often leave contractors disappointed by limited coverage on their big news.

How, then, can contractors best connect with the media around major trade shows? To find out, Boscobel conducted a survey of reporters who attended AUSA 2019, the Association of the United States Army's Annual Meeting. It's the largest land power exposition and professional development forum in North America, with more than 32,000 attendees from nearly 100 countries.

This year's event¹ featured close to 700 exhibiting companies and almost 250 reporters writing over 300 news articles that specifically mentioned the AUSA Annual Meeting. Reporters, then, are outnumbered nearly three to one, making it a challenge for contractors to secure media coverage. Even more challenging, there are thousands of Government and Contractor executives, outnumbering reporters even more!

Based on 27 survey responses from aerospace, defense and government media professionals, here are nine best practices for connecting with reporters for your next trade show.

BEST PRACTICES

#1 TARGET YOUR REPORTERS

Different government industry reporters have different news beats, topics and areas of focus that they cover. Some are business reporters. Others write exclusively about the defense industry. There are excellent reporters who know a lot about cybersecurity, aerospace, satellite communications, robotics, data and analytics, artificial intelligence and nearly every other service and solution in the

government contracting world.

So, not every reporter will be interested in your news. Be sure that your team, or your public relations firm, is reaching out only to those reporters who are writing about stories like yours.

As one survey participant urged, “Understand the coverage priority of each media professional. Some outlets will want, say, cyberwarfare only. Others will want small arms only. Getting press releases for products/news irrelevant for your publication is irritating.”



#2 REACH OUT EARLY – VERY EARLY

Nearly 60% of the AUSA 2019 reporters we heard from check media pitches and press releases for story ideas. About two-thirds received their first media pitch three or four weeks in advance of the event.

When asked when they would *like* to receive the pitch, 56% said four (or more) weeks before the show starts. International reporters preferred an even longer lead time.

None of our reporters wanted to receive a pitch the same week as AUSA. One said, “Don’t contact me during the week with your pitch. I’m already booked by then.” Another explains, “Everyone wants to get their story out during AUSA. It’s insanely competitive for you and hectic for us. Please talk to us beforehand!”

#3 BE SURE YOUR NEWS IS NEWSWORTHY

It is tempting to issue a press release when your company is attending a big trade event. However, not all news warrants a press release. A smaller contract win, a simple enhancement to an existing product or a local industry award are all milestones to celebrate, but they are not hard “news” to most reporters.

Reporters want to know about new technologies, big contract wins, successful pilots or other significant milestones that may impact the industry. One reporter explained, “We have a thousand stories going on at the same time; unless it’s new information, it probably won’t take priority.” Another offered this helpful, blunt advice, “Don’t try to

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sell me a garbage story. If you have no news, you have no news.”

Ideally, your organization will have an internal policy and process to evaluate the need for a press release. If your news doesn't meet your criteria, skip the release. Social media, a blog post and/or a newsletter can all help to promote the news to your community.

#4 CRAFT A CLEAR, COMPELLING PITCH

For busy, deadline-driven reporters, every moment counts. They are eager to learn of noteworthy news and conduct interviews to collect facts before writing a great story. What they don't want is to have to wade through jargon or hunt for basic information to move forward.

“Make your pitch as easy as possible for a journalist to navigate,” advises one reporter. Another pleads, “Please keep pitches as short and specific as possible. Less jargon, more specifics.”



Be sure your public relations team is crafting clear, concise pitches. Connect the dots on why your news is relevant to the publication. Highlight product information and booth details, if relevant. Make it clear which executives are available for interviews. And include the name, direct phone number and email address of your press contact.

#5 BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

For reporters, AUSA is not simply a three-day event. They are working weeks in advance and at least a week after to get their stories. Many will want to talk to your executives and write their stories well in advance of the event.

As one reporter explains, “During AUSA, the schedule is too packed with senior Army leaders making news. It's very difficult to spare time for anything else.” Another said, “AUSA is a day too short to conduct professional interviews



at the show.”

For others, it’s not that clear cut. “For some news items, it’s good to have an interview or two done so when the news drops at AUSA, the story is ready to go. For others, hearing context and more information during AUSA and then having the interview immediately afterwards is beneficial.”

That means government contractors should be flexible about when their executives are available to talk to reporters. Be prepared to offer sensitive news under embargo to trusted media contacts; journalists understand and respect the need to hold off publishing news until a specific date and time.

#6 UPDATE YOUR ONLINE NEWSROOM

To support future media interviews with your executives and subject matter experts, start preparing now by making sure your online newsroom is up-to-date. 70% of the reporters we surveyed say they check company websites when preparing for interviews.

When they get there, they are most interested in finding:

- Media/press contact information (81%)
- Company capabilities (48%)
- Executive biographies (40%)
- Contract vehicles (26%)

#7 CONSIDER A PRESS BRIEFING

When you have big, timely news – and an excellent spokesperson – consider scheduling a press briefing. At AUSA 2019, 48% of reporters attended scheduled company press briefings.

Reporters expect briefings to be about 30 minutes long, including access to senior company executives for questions. “Get to the point quickly,” one reporter urges. Another offers a reminder about news value by urging, “Schedule briefings only if there is actual news to be presented, rather than general overviews of current capabilities or developments that have been discussed previously.”

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#8 PROVIDE ORIGINAL PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS

Survey participants, agree, “We MUST have images!” For press releases, media advisories, interviews and press briefings, the press want accessible photos, charts, imagery or graphics they can use to support the story. “Have good high-resolution photos available for print media, as well as online,” emphasizes one reporter.

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From time to time, the media will send a photographer to the show to capture high quality, original photos. A photojournalist reminds us to allow enough time to get the good shot. “I will say that, in general, public relations people vastly underestimate the time it takes to create a compelling portrait to go along with an interview...Photography should have its own time slot.”

9: PUT YOURSELF IN REPORTERS’ SHOES

No longer are reporters and photographers full-time media company employees, supported by a newsroom team. Many are freelancers paid by the story or photo². They are responsible for the research, the interviews, follow-up and, often, a photo or graphic for the story. In our 24/7 digital news cycle, it takes tremendous time and effort to find the stories, get them right and hit the deadlines.

For reporters attending AUSA and other major trade shows, that crunch is amplified. The majority (63%) of the media we heard from attended all three days of AUSA 2019. One quarter attended the first day, only. Most reporters are aiming to write one or two articles a day, based on five (or more) interviews each day! This means, for every story written, there can be three or four interviews that do NOT yield any press coverage. OK, that’s a startling stat, but remember, you are still building relationships!

The numbers vary, of course, depending on the publication, topics and deadlines. It’s clear, though, that these professionals are tightly scheduled. One reporter hinted at the intensity around getting stories

Reporters conduct up to 5+ interviews to write 1-2 articles a day.

published by saying they preferred to book, “three to four interviews [daily]. I aim for two stories a day.”

Before reaching out to reporters, imagine what it must be like to do their jobs. You’ll be inspired to do everything you can to respect their time, so they may make time for you when you have important news to share.

CONCLUSION

For best results getting media coverage at your next trade show, start with reporters in mind. If you have noteworthy news to share, prepare your website, your pitch and your team. Then, reach out four weeks in advance and be flexible with timing for interviews. By being respectful of reporters’ time and needs, you’re putting your company in the best position possible to get the media coverage your company deserve.

SOURCES CITED

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² Bosc, Joyce. "How to Make Your Website Reporter-Friendly." *Boscobel Marketing Communications*, June 2018. <https://www.boscobel.com/how-to-make-your-website-reporter-friendly/>

ABOUT BOSCOBEL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

As a government contractor, your reputation precedes you, whether that's through the press, advertising, content or social media. Since opening our doors in 1978, Boscobel has differentiated our clients with industry-first, innovative solutions that elevate profiles and establish brands.

Boscobel is a certified Woman-Owned Small Business providing full-service digital and traditional communications support for the government contracting and commercial markets. Our clients specialize in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, engineering, big data, enterprise IT, mobility, health care IT and more. Boscobel offers both modular and integrated programs, including M&A communications, content marketing, capture support, recruitment and social media.

Our team of passionate, senior professionals make your story resonate and bring innovation to government contractors and commercial companies that, likewise, bring innovation to their customers.

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