

10 Ways 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-person industry trade shows – which bring reporters, government customers and your senior executives together in one place – can be the perfect opportunity for press coverage. Even virtual and hybrid industry conferences present opportunities to connect with participating media.

However, reporters have demanding schedules during these events. Industry leaders and companies compete for the limited time and attention reporters have to write the compelling stories their publishers and readers expect. This can leave contractors disappointed by limited coverage of their big news.

How, then, can contractors best connect with the media around major trade shows?

Boscobel surveyed reporters, interviewed event organizers and analyzed our work with dozens of government contractors to find out. Here are our top 10 best practices for connecting with reporters for your next trade show.

BEST PRACTICES

#1: PUT YOURSELF IN REPORTERS' SHOES

Before reaching out to reporters, imagine what it must be like to do their jobs. No longer are reporters and photographers full-time media company employees, supported by a newsroom team. Many reporters are freelancers paid by the story or photo.¹ 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.

At major trade events, the number of companies eager to secure media coverage far outnumber the reporters in attendance. At AFCEA's WEST 2022 conference, for example, there were 480 exhibitors and roughly 40 reporters. Considering the thousands of government leaders and contractor executives at large events, it's clearly a challenge for contractors to capture reporters' time and attention during the show.

Reporters may conduct
5+ interviews
to write
1-2 articles

Most reporters aim to write one or two articles a day during trade shows, 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. Reporters must sift through the activities, interviews and news to determine what to write about each day.

The numbers vary, of course, depending on the publication, topics and deadlines. They also vary by conference type. During the global pandemic, some industry conferences experienced a dramatic increase in media participation. The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, for example, had five times the number of reporters attending their virtual conference compared to their in-person conference one year before.³ When virtual participation was the only option, many reporters attended multiple events in a week.

Though many believe that virtual and hybrid events will outlast the pandemic, government personnel strongly prefer in-person events over webinars and virtual meetings.⁴ Time will tell what event formats will succeed in the next few years. Regardless, it's clear that the media are tightly scheduled for the events they do attend.

For your next trade show, do everything you can to respect reporters' time and job responsibilities, so they're able to make time when you have important news to share.

#2 BE SURE YOUR NEWS IS NEWSWORTHY

It is tempting to issue a press release every time your company attends 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, mergers or acquisitions or other significant milestones that may impact the industry. Reporters may have hundreds – or even thousands – of stories unfolding at any one time. Unless you have new information, your story won't take priority.

As one reporter bluntly advises, "Don't try to sell me a garbage story. If you have no news, you have no news."²

When deciding whether to issue a press release at a trade show, let the news (not the trade show) be the deciding factor. Ideally, your

organization has a policy and process to evaluate your news and decide the best way to share it. If your news doesn't meet your press release criteria, skip the release. A web news post, social media and/or a newsletter could all help get the word out to your community, instead.

#3 UPDATE YOUR ONLINE NEWSROOM

To support future media interviews with your executives and subject matter experts, be sure your online newsroom is up-to-date.

70% of the reporters we surveyed say they check company websites when preparing for interviews. They are most interested in finding²:

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

Include interviews, podcasts, bylined articles and social media posts that share your company and spokesperson perspectives. To bring the information to life, include easy-to-download company logos, spokesperson photos, product photos and artwork that you'd like the press to have. As a best practice, include web (72 dpi) and print (300 dpi) files for each.¹

The more prepared reporters are for your executive interview, the more time they will have to ask the deeper questions about your news.

#4 TARGET YOUR REPORTERS

Every government industry reporter has a news beat – a set of topics and areas of focus that they cover. Some are business reporters. Others exclusively focus on the defense industry. Or aerospace. Or health care. Many reporters cultivate a deep expertise in cybersecurity, satellite communications, robotics, data and analytics, artificial intelligence and/or a combination of these and other services and solutions in the government contracting world.

That means some reporters are closely monitoring what's happening in your market or the kinds of services and solutions you offer. It also means that others will have no interest in your news.

70%
*of reporters
check website
press rooms
when preparing
for interviews.*

When reaching out to the media, the last thing you want to do is annoy the very people whose job it is to present you and your story to the market. As one defense reporter admonished, "Getting press releases for products or news that's irrelevant for your publication is irritating."²

Understand the coverage priority of each media professional. Be sure that your team, or your public relations firm, is reaching out *only* to those reporters who are writing about stories like yours.



#5 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 wade through jargon or hunt for basic information to move forward.

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.

Email subject lines matter for pitches, too. PR trainer, coach and speaker Michael Smart evaluated more than 5 million pitches and found that the most successful subject lines were 6-8 words long, or about 64 characters.⁵ That may seem long, but journalists appear to prefer longer, relevant subject lines to shorter ones with less information. Your PR agency should be experimenting with subject line content and length – as well as email content and length – to learn what works best for your target journalists.

#6 REACH OUT EARLY – VERY EARLY

Most reporters *do* check media pitches and press releases for story ideas. For years, it was customary for companies to reach out to targeted reporters about a week before a big trade show to share their news. Now, we recommend reaching out earlier.

Of course, every company wants to get their story out during the week of the event. By the time the show starts, though, most reporters are

Best pitch subject lines?
6-8 words
Or
64 characters

56%
of reporters want
pitches

4 weeks
before the show.

fully booked with appointments and sessions they'll attend. "It's insanely competitive for you and hectic for us," cautioned one reporter.² "Please talk to us beforehand!"

When we asked reporters when they would like to receive the pitch, a surprising 56% said they wanted the news *four weeks* before the show starts—or earlier! International reporters preferred an even longer lead time. None wanted to receive a pitch the same week as a big trade event.²

#7 CONSIDER A PRESS BRIEFING

When you have big, timely news – and an excellent spokesperson – consider scheduling a press briefing at the trade show.

About half of reporters will attend scheduled press briefings during trade events. "Get to the point quickly," one reporter urged.² Typically, the media expect briefings to be no more than 30 minutes long – including access to senior company executives for questions.

Resist the urge to schedule briefings if you only have a general overview of current capabilities or developments that have been previously discussed. That move would be, at best, a waste of time for all involved. Worse, reporters who show up expecting hard news could lose respect for the company.

#8 BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

For reporters, the big trade shows – AUSA, Sea-Air-Space, Space Symposium, AFA and others with more than 5,000 attendees – don't simply last the two-to-three days of the event. Journalists are working weeks in advance and at least a week after to get their stories out.

During the event, many reporters' schedules are packed with senior industry leaders making news. It's often difficult to spare time for professional interviews during the show.

So, some reporters will want to talk to your executives in advance and have their stories ready to drop during the show. Others will make time for an in-person executive interview if your news is timely and compelling. And some will want to experience the show – the keynotes, the press briefings, the "buzz" of the on-site conversations – to understand context for your news. Those journalists will want to conduct interviews once the show concludes.

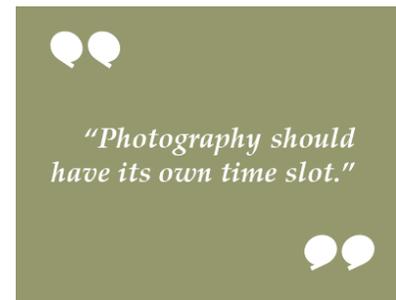
These variations are true whether the event is in person, a hybrid or virtual. Whatever the format, reporters are closely managing their schedules and deadlines.

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.

#9 PROVIDE ORIGINAL PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS

For press releases, media advisories, interviews and press briefings, the media want accessible photos, charts, imagery or graphics they can use to support the story.

From time to time, the press will send a photographer to the show to capture high quality, original photos. One photojournalist reminded² us to allow enough time to get the good shot. “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.”



#10: BUILD RELATIONSHIPS NOW, FOR NEXT YEAR'S EVENT

Public relations is about relationships. It really is a two-way street. Putting yourself in reporters' shoes is one good step toward making their job easier. Even better is building relationships with individual reporters that cover what you do.

Michael Smart advises,⁶ “Know what they look like ... and follow them on social.” If you can picture the reporter who's covering your beat, it will be easier to connect. If you're following them on social, that's a chance to understand their perspectives, see what captures their interest, read what they write and to connect on topics that you both care about.

A good PR agency will collaborate with you to identify and introduce you to important reporters. Background conversations with your executives can be a win-win. You'll get to understand the reporter's

interests, needs and preferences. Over time, they may see your executives and spokespersons as “go to” resources for future stories.

Start developing those relationships now. By next year’s big trade show, you may just have the relationship and understanding you need to connect – if, of course, you have 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 deserves.

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ABOUT BOSCOBEL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

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

A Woman-Owned Small Business, Boscobel is a full-service public relations and marketing firm exclusively serving government contractors, with specialty practices in M&A communications and pre-RFP marketing. Our clients specialize in aerospace, artificial intelligence, big data and analytics, cybersecurity, engineering, enterprise IT, health care IT, mobility, satellite technology and more.

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

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