



## TIPS FOR WRITING & PLACING OP-ED'S

By: *Barbara K. Mednick*

I found a very insightful article on writing and placing op-ed's in Bulldog Reporter's Daily Dog with tips from Marjorie Pritchard, Op-Ed Page Editor of the Boston Globe (circ. 452,000). Following is a summary of the key points in the article along with a link to the article online.

"PR people sometimes think that we don't want a news hook just because we are 'opinion' pages," says Pritchard. "But timeliness is a missing component in a lot of the unsolicited copy we see. A perfect example of a timely news hook for us, since we're in a huge medical town, would be something like, 'Harvard will today launch an effort to clone human stem cells—and we believe this is wrong.'"

Her point: "It's not enough to have a position for or against something evergreen. Tie it instead to the day's headlines and you'll get our attention. That means that you can't spend weeks writing it or getting it approved. You have to move fast or it's already old news." Pritchard offers these additional tips:

- 1. Localize, localize, localize.** "Op-ed's can end up seeming generic if you look at the topics covered across the country on any given week," Pritchard says. "But what distinguishes what we run from what you see in another city isn't necessarily the topic—it's the local angle or writer that makes it relevant to regional readers. If an editor doesn't see that—unless she's with a national paper—then she's not going to run it."
- 2. Credentials count—so call them out.** "Another thing we look for are experts—people who really know the subject they're addressing. They have to be credible and have credentials," Pritchard says.
- 3. Don't be timid—stake out a real position.** "The best op-ed's come straight out with a very clear position stated up in the first graph or two," Pritchard continues. "They don't try to cover an issue from all sides or back into it. They're either for or against something like the closing of a hospital, for example. A strong position is something we're looking for."
- 4. Avoid promotional copy.** "Obviously, op-ed submissions that are overly promotional or that mention a client like a hospital by name repeatedly aren't going to run," Pritchard says. "Free plugs really stand out and turn editors off."
- 5. Don't pitch — just deliver the piece.** "Phone calls or emails asking if we're interested in X or Y topic by Z person really don't work on the editorial pages," says Pritchard. "It is much better for us to just get an email with a succinct subject line like 'Op-ed about X Topic from Y Group' with the piece pasted right into the body of the email. Attachments are bad news because our spam filters often junk them," she cautions.
- 6. Read published opinion pieces to understand what works.** "The best thing you can do to increase your chances of getting picked up is to read what we print," Pritchard says.

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