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The 60-Second Pitch, Part One: The Pitch

[By Jeff Cannon]

If you are a business owner, having an article placed in a paper or on the morning news can put you on the map. You have probably also noticed that a week does not go by when you don't look around and see a half-dozen good stories within your own company. From the products and services you sell to the insight you've found while running it, there are lessons you have learned that other businesses would love to benefit from.

The problem is not coming up with ideas to pitch to the press but figuring out how to shape your ideas into a story that reporters and editors will want to publish. What follows is part one of a three-part series designed to help business owners like yourself craft and successfully pitch their ideas to the press and media.

*Part one teaches you the value of a tool we call the **60-Second Pitch**.*

In public relations, the most important lesson to learn is that editors and reporters do not mind being pitched to as long as they are being pitched to by someone who is approaching them with a tight, concise story idea that is relevant to their publication.

Reporters and editors, like anyone, hate to have their time wasted, especially when they are working on deadlines that come more quickly than anyone not in the media can imagine. This happens when people contact them with long, rambling concepts for stories that have not been researched or well thought out-or, even worse, with ideas or stories that are simply not right for their publications or of interest to their readers.

As a producer friend of mine once said, "everyone has ideas. They're a dime a dozen. What is worth real money is the person that can take an idea, do the work they need to do, and make it into something tangible. That person is worth their weight in gold." Which is why we created the **60-Second Pitch**.

The 60-Second Pitch is a tool that ensures your story idea is press worthy, while giving the editors and reporters a pitch that is tight and concise and respects the editor's or reporter's time-which will give you a better chance of actually seeing your story in the news.

The 60-Second Pitch is similar to the "elevator pitch" that almost every entrepreneur is familiar with these days. You know the one: "You have 60 seconds in an elevator with a potential business investor, no presentations, no proposals. How would you sell them on your business?"

For one of our clients, we were pitching to local and regional media for a product in the aftermath of the KFC rat problem that appeared in almost every news outlet in the nation. The pitch went like this:

This is the follow-up to all the stories on New York City's rat problem.

We're working with a company in Long Island who created a rat-resistant garbage bag. I know it sounds crazy, but with the recent rat problems in New York City, I thought this would be a great story. They developed a process that infuses a plastic garbage bag with natural oils, such as eucalyptus, that everything from rats to raccoons hate. Best of all, it's completely harmless to humans.

I know it sounds far-fetched, but the bags have been lab-tested and field-

tested. Where normal bags worked about 50% of the time, these worked 100%. They are already being used by city and state agencies. So they work.

The most incredible thing is they are cutting the city's rats off from their primary food source. With an estimated 70 million rats in New York City, this is the only way experts say we will end the city's rat problem; and that is something I think your readers will be interested in.

I would like to get you some background information on this, but what do you think?

This one took about 45 seconds and got our client placement in both regional press and national media. It took time to research and develop, but it gave the editor that top-level view of the story he wanted, while showing that we had done our homework and that there was a real story behind the headline.

The 60-Second Pitch follows an easy format:

- 1. The Headline or Big Idea:** In one sentence, what is the big idea behind the story? In effect, how would the headline read if it were in print or being read on-air? The key to creating a headline for your story is to encapsulate your entire idea in one sentence.
- 2. The Hook:** What makes your story relevant and will help it jump off

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the page? Is there recent news that makes this more relevant? Is there a recognizable name behind the story? Is there something that will make a reader read the entire story? In our case, we went with the idea of "hometown guys do good." People don't want to read about large corporations creating new products, but they do want to hear about the guy next door doing so.

3. **The Facts:** Provide one or two facts that support your story and that show you have done some homework. You do not want to tell the reporters everything—just enough to let them know there is a real story behind the headline. For a reporter, there is absolutely nothing worse than thinking a story is interesting only to find you have just wasted half a day following dead-end leads. Do your homework and give them a head start. It will give your story that much more of a chance to make it into the media.
4. **Why the Reader Wants to Read It:** Once again, do your homework on the media outlet you are pitching to. Is the newspaper or magazine right for your story? Has it published similar pieces? Would its readers find value in your idea? If so, pitch away. If not, keep the publication's name on file and wait for an idea that fits before you pitch to it.
5. **Ask for the Story:** Tell the people you are pitching to that you have more information, you have data, you have the makings of a story. But do not forget to ask, in a nice way, if they think it's

a good story. What you want to start is a dialogue that tells you what other information they might need to do the story. Are they looking for interviews, for names and places, for statistics and information? The more you can give them, the better. But you have to ask to know what they need in order to turn your idea into a story.

Regardless of what you have seen on television or in the movies, reporters and editors have little time to banter about story ideas. They need to spend their time researching, following leads, and putting together stories that they can report on.

So take the time, do your homework, get your information together, and put it into a **60-Second Pitch**. If you can't do that, your idea is just that—an idea. If you can, then you have the makings of a story. And that is what your business needs.

About the Author:

Jeff Cannon started his professional career in public relations with Burson-Marsteller, working with such clients as Adidas, Wendy's, and the 1988 Olympics before moving to Los Angeles and the film industry. He started a production group to develop and produce documentaries, commercials, and sponsored programming for domestic and international clients.

After selling his company, Jeff returned to the world of advertising by joining EvansGroup, a Los Angeles-based agency, to develop commercials and manage multiple accounts. As the Internet grew in the early 90s, he left to launch the *Los Angeles Times'*

original website and head up its interactive marketing and sales group.



Jeff returned to New York in 1998 after writing a leading online marketing book for McGraw-Hill entitled *Make Your Website Work for You*. After running Marcis Interactive, he joined DraftDigital as Senior Vice President/Director of Interactive Marketing.

After spending more than two years with DraftDigital, doubling the company's size and billings, and building it into the "#14 Interactive Ad Agency in the U.S.," he left to develop TheCannonGroup to leverage his extensive experience in public relations and advertising. He has a growing roster of clients with projects that range from branding and integrated PR/advertising campaigns to the development and launching of new products and businesses.

He has since written a book for McGraw Hill entitled *Leadership Lessons of the Navy SEALs*, which was released in January 2003, and he continues to speak and write on both leadership and marketing.

A native New Yorker, Jeff Cannon earned two degrees from Syracuse University—a B.S. in Accounting and a B.S. in Business Law with minors in mathematics and philosophy.