Working With the IT Press

EclipseWorld 2008

Alan Zeichick

Editorial Director
SD Times www.sdtimes.com
Eclipse Review www.eclipsereview.com

Co-Founder and EVP, BZ Media
www.bzmedia.com

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Setting expectations

- I'm focused here mainly on commercial companies that don't have professional marcom staff or PR agencies
- These concepts are generic to high-tech publications, not just ours -- but of course, each publication is different
- But these principles really do apply to everyone
- Feel free to talk to me offline about your situation
- And… in the spirit of code reuse, you may have seen *some* of these slides before :)

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You're not the Foundation...

- Your Eclipse news can't just be about Eclipse
  - Your story isn't about Eclipse or about open source software
  - It's about your newsworthy innovation or value to the industry or your customers.
  - "Look, it's for Galileo!" "Look, here's a new plug-in!" "Look, here's a new project!" doesn't cut it

- And watch the Eclipse-o-Babble
  - Don't refer to GEF or TPTP or Ganymede or OSGi
  - Do not expect the reporter to be familiar with Eclipse jargon

- Expect considerable confusion
  - About the Foundation, vs. the IDE, vs projects -- everything
  - If you are talking to the media, you'll need to address this
  - Show how you're serving customers, not the "community"

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Know your journalists

- You should know the top 10 publications in your field
  - Know who their editors and regular reporters/freelancers are
  - Know what that publication publishes, and what they don't
  - Understand their biases and personality quirks
  - Know which reporters cover your beat regularly
  - Know when they've most recently covered you
  - Know the general tone of the writer's coverage
  - Know the tone of the publication's coverage
- You should equally know the top media pundits
  - Journalistic bloggers, editors, and so-on
  - Know who should know you, and make sure they do

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Who writes about you?

- Become friendly and known to key journalists
  - Have you set up press briefings or casual coffees at the most recent conference you attended?
  - EclipseCon?
  - EclipseWorld?
  - LinuxWorld?
  - Software Development Conf.?
  - JavaOne?
- Get to know the journalist
  - Look for opportunities to build a personal/professional relationship
  - Ask what they know about you, about Eclipse, et cetera
  - Be prepared to explain, give background
  - Not all journalists are interested in background chats

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Pitching a story

- As mentioned, know your key publications
- Know what each key publication does
    - Do they cover new products? Product upgrades?
    - Do they do product reviews? Case studies? Customer wins?
    - Do they look for 3rd-party commentary, stories, technical tips?
    - Learn what *they* consider important
- Pitch the reporter *directly*
    - Send personalized pitches to the right editors
    - Don't put announcements on wire services
    - Don't assume that blasting a press release to a list is enough
- Keep at it
    - Everything changes

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Following up after the pitch

- Some journalists like follow-ups, some don't
  - Think of reporters as "customers" – each is different
  - Like customers, they don't want to be "sold"
  - Remember, they don't owe you a story or coverage
  - Writing about YOU isn't their job, and you're not their boss
- Reporters and editors are busy
  - And have more stories than they can publish
  - Sometimes a good idea simply doesn't get taken up due to lack of bandwidth or lack of paper
  - Citing other pubs' coverage hurts, not helps
  - They don't see "listening to vendors" as urgent
- Don't hold a grudge; you can't win 'em all
  - Not every worthy story or interview will get covered. That's reality.

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Be prepared!

- After pitching, get ready for return volley
  - Do you have the new product features list ready?
  - Do you have screen shots? Analyst quotes? Customer names?
  - Can you support a product review on Day 1?
  - Can you deliver the CEO? CTO? Other expert?
- A reporter has a limited attention span
  - With some publications, there's a daily publication cycle
  - If they can't get it written and filed in the next hour, it's toast
- But reporters have loooooong memories
  - If you pitch stories but can't follow through, that'll be recalled next time you pitch a story
  - Remember, they never have a story shortage

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"There's a reporter on line 2"

- Why is the reporter calling you?
  - News about you that you initiated/pitched
  - News about you that you *didn't* initiate
  - News about someone related to you, that you may/may not know about
  - Broader "industry" story for which you may add insight or color
- Listen for cues
  - If the reporter is working on a story, help him/her out
  - If the story isn't about YOU, be part of it anyway
  - And lay the groundwork for future conversations

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When the reporter calls...

- Do your best to make yourself available
  - If the story is about you, it looks bad if you delay
  - And frankly, you may only have an "opportunity" of a few hours
  - If the call is based on your press release, ensure that the "contact" will be available within a few hours
  - If the story isn't about you, either take the call or reschedule for later that day
- Depending on the reporter's time and style, you may not get a second chance
  - This may include future calls on future stories, by the way
  - You need to be come a reliable, trusted source

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Prepare follow-up materials

- Everyone who talks to the press should have:
  - Digital photos of executives and other spokespeople, in high-res (megapixel) TIFF/JPEG and Web-sized GIF formats
  - Native (unaltered and lossless) screen shots of your principal products in compressed TIFF or BMP format
  - High-res and Web-sized box shots of your product packaging
  - Your logo in high-res TIFF, Web GIF and EPS formats
  - A "press kit" with company backgrounder and product briefs on the Web
  - Price lists, customer references, analyst references
- Put these on your intranet and on the Web

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Taking the call

- You have to drive the conversation…

  – …while making the reporter think that he/she is driving it!

- The reporter has a job to do, and story to write…

  – But you have a message to communicate. It's all about *you*

- Lead off by asking what the story's about

  – Ask how much time the reporter would like, so you can budget

- Start with the one-minute about your company

  – Don't ask if it's okay, just do it

  – Make sure it's not too long or too preachy

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Answering questions

- Reporters want information *and* sound bites
  - Make sure the reporter understands what you're saying
  - Try not to be condescending – or overwhelming
  - Some reporters are shy and won't ask for explanations
  - Some are technical and some are not
  - Some are familiar with Eclipse or the market, others aren't
  - And some won't admit they aren't experts
- Be definite, not wishy-washy
  - Don't be pulled into saying things you're not comfortable with
  - Respond to gossip or leading questions with, "I don't really have an opinion about that"
  - Always answer with something. Never say "no comment"
  - Don't violate your NDAs!

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Features/benefits

- ## The Volvo example:
    - Feature: Internal roll-bars and door stiffeners
    - Benefit: Withstands greater impact than cars without these features
    - Consequence: Moms and their kids will have a better chance of walking away from being hit broadside by a bus when picking them up from school

- ## Always put some real-world benefit behind the techno-babble!!!

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More on answering

- Be definite and concrete
  - Don't just say "Eclipse saves money" or "Our tool boosts code quality" or "We believe in open source software." Nobody cares.
  - Tell the story about the customer who saved $100,000 in dev costs and cut time by two months by using your add-in.

- Anecdotes are powerful.
  - Named customers are powerful.
  - Vague statements are worthless to the reporter and his/her story

- Substantiate your claims
  - Market figures or growth estimates should be sourced
  - Independent studies are better than your own numbers -- which are worthless
  - Bonus points if you can provide those studies to the reporter

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Making a good impression

- Try to *sound* like a great source
  - Be intelligent, well-spoken, polite
  - Sound like a visionary expert, rather than a company executive
  - Listen, ask for the reporter's feedback
  - You want to be remembered as a great source for the future
- Make sure your answers answer the questions
  - Make your points, get out your message, of course
  - But answer those darned questions, and don't try to "spin"
- Have PowerPoint or WebEx prepared but
  - Don't force it on a reluctant reporter. It shouldn't be a crutch

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Closing the interview

- Ask, "Did you get everything you need?"
  - Review the list of follow-up items that you promised
  - Remind the reporter that you're available if he/she has more questions.
  - Give the reporter your direct line or e-mail address
  - Ask if the reporter knows when the story's coming out
  - Thank the reporter for his/her time and attention
- Be respectful of the time constraints
  - If it's a 30-minute call, don't use the first 29 running through PowerPoint or talking about your investors or history

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Following up

- Do NOT wait for the reporter to remind you
  - Send it out NOW. The reporter should have it within an hour
  - Be careful about delegating – make sure follow-up happens
- Send along a link to the on-line media resources
  - Or offer, in e-mail, to send out the photos, press kit, etc.
- It is okay to thank the reporter again via e-mail
  - Do NOT ask to review the story or quotes
  - Do NOT praise the reporter for "asking good questions"
  - Do NOT volunteer additional detail on interview questions

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What about reviews?

- Not all publications do them
- And they may not go the way you want
- Reviews can be the best way to get coverage
  - "Worth their weight in gold"
- Time doesn't permit me to go into them, but…
- If you have key publications that do reviews,
  - Talk to the reviews editor. It's generally not the same person as their reporters/news staff
  - Be super-cooperative -- but don't be pushy
  - Feel free to ask me offline about reviews

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What about ads?

- With <u>reputable</u> publications, editorial coverage is NEVER tied to advertising
  - Editors won't write stories to thank advertisers
  - Editors won't write stories to attract advertisers
- Attempting to tie advertising to editorial…
  - …will poison your present and future relationship with the publication's editors and reporters
- Persuade reporters to cover your company and its news….
  - … due to your relevance, not your ad budget
  - Editors aggressively eschew any appearance that their journalistic ethics have been compromised

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Some final do's

- Do remember your relationship with the reporter
- Do listen carefully to the entire question
- Do look at the reporter's eyes if you're in person
- Do be polite and respectful
- Do tell the truth at all time
- Do make sure you're being understood
- Do back up vague claims with examples
- Do watch your use of Eclipse jargon!
- Do make sure to make your four key points
- Do correct mistakes on the spot
- Do be careful about answering loaded questions
- Do be sure to follow up immediately

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Some final don'ts

- Don't fake an answer
- Don't say "no comment"
- Don't invoke your business relationship with the publication
- Don't ever go off the record.
- Don't use the phrase "editorial opportunity"
- Don't speak to fill the silence
- Don't lose your cool or get frustrated with the reporter
- Don't ask to review or edit the story
- Don't expect that every story will be covered
- Don't "dis" your competitors anyone
- Don't answer hypothetical or leading questions
- Don't talk for more than a minute to answer a question

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Thank you

- My contact info:

  Alan Zeichick
  BZ Media LLC

  +1-650-359-4763
  alan@bzmedia.com

  ztrek.blogspot.com

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