

EXPERT MARKETING

How Duke University doubled their media hits by showcasing faculty

Peter Evans,
Co-Founder, CEO, ExpertFile

In the latest issue of CASE Currents, Steve Hartsoe, a Senior Editor at Duke University and former Editor for the Associated Press, shares some powerful strategies for working with experts on campus. This article is a must read for any organization looking to build reputation through more focused media relations.

Now you might be thinking that Duke is an already renowned university with an extensive network of media contacts so this stuff is easy for them. Not true. Doubling your media hits isn't easy for any organization. Duke made some major improvements that set them up as a go-to destination for journalists to find credible, relevant sources. However, even implementing just a few of their ideas could drive some big results for your organization - without having to blow out the size of your marketing team or budget.

Spoiler alert. The Duke strategy centers on being more strategic and collaborating better with faculty experts. The best practices that the Duke media relations team employed should inspire any organization that wants to generate more coverage. Whether you are looking for media visibility to help drive student enrolment, alumni giving, or corporate partnerships, there are valuable lessons to be found in this article. For the full article check out the January/February issue of CASE Currents at www.case.org. Please note you will need a subscription to view.

So what's going on at Duke that's driving all this media coverage? To examine this further, our ExpertFile team weighs in below with 10 Major Rules of Expert Marketing for Schools and summarizes some insider tips they shared from their experience.

Rule #1: Organize a Team to Help Focus on Expert Marketing

As with most initiatives, it's vitally important to get the support of senior people in the organization when developing an increased focus on faculty experts. Gaining the support of a group of progressive deans within the school as well as notable faculty can be critical. Appoint a specialized team that can help you establish media visibility as a priority for your school. Build your case for an expert marketing program and ask for their support in developing your plan, then set up some regular meetings and make this team visible on the campus. It will help you develop a sense of collaboration and continuity.

Insiders Tip: Duke built a "rapid response team" within their media relations department that had a clearly defined meeting schedule. They met twice a week and kept meetings to just 30 minutes in length. These regular check-ins helped identify breaking news opportunities and inspired a sense of priority and established momentum.

Rule #2: Strategize with your Experts

It's amazing how many colleges and universities' media relations departments we talk with that are disconnected from the interesting research conducted by their faculty. Ironically, it's this research, as well the academic interests and passions of your faculty that feed the most engaging stories you can tell to the media. Make sure you have a good understanding of current and upcoming research that you can pitch. You should also identify what publications and books are being planned by faculty and see how you can collaborate with them.

Insiders Tip: Duke invested the time to meet personally with faculty members to get a deeper understanding of their research and identify relevant topics that could be pitched to the media. They also invited some faculty to media meetings to brainstorm on potential news stories. It's this kind of contact that helped make faculty more responsive to media opportunities and respond to deadlines.



Rule #3: “Opt-In” your Experts for Different Types of Contributions

It’s becoming more understood by faculty that media coverage can be a very good thing for their career and their organization. However, be careful of one size fits all approaches in recruiting faculty to contribute their expertise. Contribution from faculty comes in different forms. Faculty can be engaged in a broad spectrum of activities that run from broadcast TV interviews, blogging, and even helping speak at recruiting or alumni events. It’s good practice to create a master checklist of possible engagement types and to take an inventory of what your faculty experts may want to opt-in for. Having this inventory allows you to better plan for content development projects and also ensures that faculty clearly understand the duties that are expected of them in a media relations capacity.

Insiders Tip: Duke’s media team recruited their experts for a range of contributions based on the level of interest and comfort level of faculty. And they made it clear that agreeing to be a media source meant responding promptly to incoming media inquiries.

Rule #4: Provide Media Training and Support

While every campus has its faculty “rockstars”, who can rise to the challenge of any breaking news opportunity, many experts on the campus can benefit from some form of media training. It’s critical to your media strategy’s success that you provide the experts with support and opportunities to practice their speaking skills in front of a camera. If you expect more experts to step up to the podium, it’s important to make the investment. However, make sure you design these programs to be engaging and don’t overwhelm your faculty by making them too exhaustive. Often they can be coordinated over lunch or in the early morning before classes start and can be focused on key areas such as: public speaking, blogging tips, video training, and social networking guidelines. Get a sense of where your key gaps are among faculty before you dive in. Also remember these sessions can provide valuable opportunities to shoot video interviews, B-Roll clips and even headshots that can be used to provide media assets for your website, alumni magazine and other properties.

Insiders Tip: Duke invests in media training for its faculty experts and administrators offering a two and a half hour media training workshop each year to participating faculty, covering interview techniques via phone, video and social media.

Rule #5: Meet Journalists on Their Terms

Reporters appreciate media relations contacts that help them get their job done. Operating under tighter breaking news cycles they have less time to discover and research experts. In today’s competitive media market what sells papers or builds ratings is often what gets covered. You have to focus your experts on helping journalists tell stories that matter to all those “eyeballs”. The best media relations professionals understand the value in building relationships with journalists. These connections are often essential in establishing your organization as a relevant, trusted source of expert commentary. Given the importance of these relationships, we’re also seeing the renewed popularity of industry conferences hosted by organizations such as the MAKI Network (www.thembasite.com) and Wynne Events - BAM Conference (www.wynneevents.com). These events give schools a unique opportunity to listen to and meet journalists from major news networks. ExpertFile sponsored both MAKI and Wynne events this past year, and we were impressed by the roster of global media attending.

Insiders Tip: While Duke still distributes the requisite daily news on campus events and other university happenings, they don’t get mired in all of this content. They also focus a great deal of their activities on expert content that positions their university as a go-to source that is both credible and relevant to a variety of media audiences.

“... focus your experts on helping journalists tell stories that matter to all those “eyeballs”.



Rule #6: Create Once, Publish Everywhere

At one time we just had to focus on creating a news site. That's now expanded to a multi- screen environment that requires we thread content into sites that are being accessed from desktops, mobile devices and even digital signage that is often scattered throughout the campus. Sit down with your digital team and map out how to distribute media across multiple channels such as social networks, news-feeds, homepages, faculty sites, as well as faculty profiles in your expert center or speakers bureau. Many schools still don't have the "responsive" capability to push their news content out to mobile users.

Insiders Tip: Duke applies a "create once publish everywhere" model to ensure that time-crunched journalists can easily connect with their expert commentary, whether they access the website's desktop or mobile versions, or through a wide range of social channels.

Rule #7: Get Your Expert Quotes Ready for the Real-Time News Cycle

Organizing a system with your faculty to publish pre-approved expert quotes on your website can pay huge dividends, as news outlets have fewer reporters covering more territory. Many of our clients tell us they are seeing less experienced reporters who have much less time to research and interact with media departments. Having pre-approved quotes ready to go makes it much simpler for media, making you much more attractive to them. This pre-planning can minimize the strain on faculty experts during class hours. An added bonus is that it also minimizes misquotes.

Insiders Tip: Duke University aims to provide daily quotes on its website by midday as part of its "news tips" section. While these quotes generally take less than one hour to produce, they have proven most effective. Almost all of their news tips have been used by the media since they started producing them in June 2014.

Rule #8: Promote your Core Areas of Expertise First

With so much going on throughout the campus there are a lot of opportunities to promote a diverse range of topics to the media. However, it's really important to identify the core topics where you have expert commentary in demand. The best media relations people have established their school as go-to sources for select topics. You should also stake your claim. What groundbreaking research can you find on the campus that relates to key news events? Think about what reporters need to communicate to their audiences. Do you have faculty who are credible, approachable and engaging on these topics? Invest the time with your team to develop a master topics list and tune this list regularly based on upcoming faculty contributions and news cycle developments.

Insiders Tip: Duke University identified a number of key factors that contribute to the media take-up rate such as the degree of media interest in a story; the relative supply of experts available to media and timing considerations. While it's impossible to control all these variables, They learned, based on trial and error, that concentrating on core topics where they have an academic focus such as politics, law and the environment generated more coverage.

"The best media relations people have established their school as go-to sources for select topics"



Rule #9: Focus your Editorial Calendar on Key Event Anniversaries

It is important to get the mix right when looking for media opportunities. While it will always be to your advantage to leverage breaking news if you can mobilize your faculty experts, there is also a predefined editorial flow to the news across a calendar of special and recurring events. It's crucial that you get some of these major opportunities on the calendar and develop a campaign to enlist faculty experts. For example, Black History Month and the Super Bowl are both annual recurring events happening in February. It's good to map these along with other special events that are periodically staged or non-recurring such as a G8 Summit or the upcoming papal visit to the US. If you can mobilize your experts to provide value for media who need to start researching these events well in advance you increase your chances of coverage.

Insiders Tip: The Duke University media relations team actively monitors upcoming anniversaries and other timely events that reporters are likely to write about. Events that have the potential to generate stories that Duke can leverage with their experts are reviewed by the communications team in twice weekly scrum meetings.

Rule #10: Leverage Tools such as Twitter to Grow your Media Contacts

Much of the success you will have with faculty experts hinges on your ability to take your message to the market. So it's important to focus on grooming and growing your media contacts. Besides buying access to media lists from vendors such as Cision (www.cision.com), PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com), Marketwired (www.marketwired.com) and Meltwater (www.meltwater.com), don't forget about Twitter. It provides a huge opportunity to build a list of influencers and key opinion leaders. Using a simple topic and hashtag searches on Twitter, you can begin to map various clusters of people who are following specific news beats that may be relevant to your institution. Remember that media outlets tend to follow other media outlets for story angles and media sources. Having a well organized list of people that have interacted with you in the past is a large part of distributing your news faster to a larger audience. It's important to do Twitter searches to research specific reporters you want to pitch to see where their interests lie.

Insiders Tip: Duke University refines its media lists continually using Twitter. It looks at the social graph of reporters who make use its online news tips to identify other journalists to add to their database.

About ExpertFile

ExpertFile is the world's first expert marketing platform built for organizations. Our publishing, search optimization (SEO), lead generation and analytics features, coupled with our unique online marketplace, helps experts connect to business prospects, media and conferences. Our clients include market leaders such as Cleveland Clinic, Constant Contact, Perseus Books Group, the Canadian Public Relations Society and the University of Guelph.

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