

# The W2 Communications Guide to the New Cybersecurity Media Environment

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## Introduction

The cybersecurity media landscape continues to change as fast as the technology it covers.

The diversity of technology, mainly the mobility granted through cloud computing, smart devices, the Internet of Things and so much more, has made security integral to life in the digital world. Today, everyone from Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and global financial institutions rely on a [\\$167.1 billion cybersecurity industry](#) to secure information.

Alongside this evolution, cybersecurity has established itself as a valuable beat for media companies. These reporters range from trade publications for cybersecurity professionals to national media outlets aimed at the general population.

As the cybersecurity ecosystem has matured, so has the media that covers it. The old standard of product-based public relations, where a company could tout its latest and greatest innovation to garner attention, no longer exists. Today, we see a shift in how media organizations cover cybersecurity and the types of stories that earn coverage.



Reporters, and their readers, want stories from the front lines. That includes data and research to back up statements, advancements to more significant trends, customer stories and, when possible, original content.

The W2 Communications team of public relations experts works with some of the world's leading cybersecurity firms. For 20 years, we have provided insights and guidance to maximize coverage, promote brand equity and establish our clients as thought leaders. Here, we leverage this experience to provide readers with best practices and actionable guidance to navigate this ecosystem.

## The Changing Shape of Cyber PR

As cybersecurity itself continues to evolve, so should the way you approach public relations and media strategy. Organizations should move away from traditional approaches and shift toward new methods that better align with media demands. We break the two up between traditional outreach and strategic outreach in this chart:

### Traditional Outreach

- Product/technical announcements
- Reliance on brand name/executive resumes
- Event-based promotion

### Strategic Outreach

- Data-driven storytelling
- Proprietary research/insights
- Customer success stories/anecdotes



Leveraging the Traditional Outreach approach, the companies providing these cybersecurity innovations were quick to tout their success. Often, story pitches to cybersecurity reporters focused on the move forward in products and services and how they could change the cyber landscape for the better.

While there was talk of ongoing cybersecurity trends, companies often framed them as technological developments. Companies would use events such as the annual RSA or Black Hat conferences to promote new solutions, product updates or lean on their existing brand name for attention.

The desire for these types of stories has shifted. Readers want stories that show deeper insight into cybersecurity challenges and how trends in connectivity and data needs change this dynamic. Reporters find themselves trying their best to keep up despite working in an under-resourced industry.

Reporters themselves are in crisis. The media companies that employ them largely lack the resources to hire and keep talent for any length of time. According to [Pew Research](#), the number of reporters employed in U.S. newsrooms dropped from 71,000 in 2008 to 31,000 in 2020. The number of reporters working at digital publications did increase during that time from 7,000 to 18,000, but the industry still lost nearly 30,000 jobs.



Up-and-coming reporters may work for these outlets as they launch their careers – typically trading lower pay and long hours for experience and connections – before moving on to another stage of their career. Nearly 70 percent of reporters stay at a company for less than two years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For many reporters, this may be a promotion into a company management position, creating their own venture, or shifting to another career where their skills translate like [corporate communications or consulting](#).

As such, the reporters working today find themselves overworked and in a constant state of stress. Their attention is much more scattered, and only the most exciting stories that also provide the most value to readers will get published.

# How Should Cyber Companies Shift Their Approach?

Since busy reporters focus their time on more valuable stories, cyber companies should make a concerted effort to provide these types of angles. Doing so will help companies earn positive coverage, keep their name in the media and establish valuable relationships with reporters.

Pitching reporters and building a company brand through earned media continues to have a tremendous benefit. Securing these placements, even at large, publicly-traded companies can be complex.

This is especially true in mainstream media publications with different goals than traditional trade publications. While they reach a larger audience, these mainstream publications speak to a general audience who may not be consumers of your services.

These placements often lack the return on investment as engaging with reputable trade publications and cyber reporting with a substantial social media following. A big part of working with this diversity of media is creating tailored pitches that speak on the correct technical level for the publication's audience.

All company leaders must [honestly](#) look at their business and think of the differentiators that can gain media attention. Most companies believe they have things like innovative technology, insightful thought leaders and a great culture. Those are table stakes. You must present evidence that your assets are unique compared to any other company that touts the same.

## Some key things to consider when developing stories for reporters:

- Offer proprietary data that backs company insights or provide additional context to ongoing cybersecurity trends the reporter may cover
- Provide “in-the-wild” anecdotes that explain how a customer faced a challenge and how your firm solved it or your firm’s experience with an ongoing cybersecurity trend
- Ensure all pitches feature valuable insights into time-sensitive stories. Reporters get dozens of pitches per day, and those that stand out offer something the others don’t. To avoid getting overlooked, think about the value your insight delivers to the reporter’s mission
- Are you offering an expert in reaction to breaking news? If so, make sure you can bring a well-thought of fresh perspective instead of just adding an empty quote
- Host a media roundtable to learn more about what specific reporters would like



## Contributed Content

Along with pitches, many publications happily accept submitted content. This provides new insights for their readers without the effort required to research and report an original story. However, that does not mean publications will publish anything that comes their way.

When submitting to a publication, ensure articles explore a timely subject. Write them with a strong point of view and an easy-to-digest, snackable format, such as best practices or even a list. And, perhaps most importantly, ensure the article is not cliché or sales forced. Most publications will not run pieces that turn into an overt sales pitch, so talk to your audience about issues important to you without overselling.

Contributed content should be a time to shine and control your messaging. Provide a unique insight, tell a relevant anecdote and show readers why they should trust you and your company.

## A Better Strategy for Breaking News

When major cybersecurity news breaks, brands have a gut instinct to reach out to reporters to offer insight and perspective immediately. Many see this as an easy opportunity to get earned media and showcase the knowledge of your experts.

Most brands are best positioned to pursue Day 2 stories – the ones that come after the initial breaking news report and aim to offer more analysis and perspective. Companies that can offer a mix of unique qualitative and quantitative insights or unique, firsthand intelligence on Day One of a breaking news cycle are more likely to have successful media engagements. Hastily putting forth generic commentary in the immediate hours after a breaking news event can not only fall flat with reporters, but potentially jeopardize the brand's future credibility with those reporters.

For more information, read our blog, [The Other Rapid Response: How to Maximize Cyber News](#).



## Owned Media



Along with earned media, companies should accompany these efforts alongside owned media. This goes beyond just starting a blog or a newsletter, but structuring owned communications that align with sales goals, product releases and industry events as part of an integrated marketing strategy.

Owned media provides brands an opportunity to tell their story in their own words without the need to tiptoe around a publication's rules. Social media and email distribution lists make it easier for a company to serve as its own media outlet, promoting its message to a specific audience.

Even when earned media has been secured, businesses can use owned media to augment that reporting. It could be expanding on comments made in an earned media piece, providing a link for reporters to embed, tying company products back to trending stories or sharing additional data.

Similar to contributed articles, a company's content should feature a clear point-of-view, be easy to read and offer a call to action. Owned media can also serve as a valuable launch point for earned efforts, providing reporters with research and insights that could spur a longer earned piece or future discussion.

## Social Media

Corporate social media channels are a subset of owned media channels. They enable companies to promote blog content, tout product offerings and showcase earned media coverage. However, they can also serve as a valuable tool in a media relations program.

### Engage with Reporters and Publications

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Use social media channels to praise a reporter's work (even if your company wasn't included), join relevant discussions and otherwise interact with the media. Approach every interaction as a stepping stone to a relationship with a reporter – you don't always have to have a story angle in mind; sometimes an insightful comment can be the genesis of a long-term, productive relationship.

### Share SME Insights

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Twitter, in particular, has served as a great resource for thought leaders to share commentary on relevant industry news. As those insights are shared, corporate social channels can retweet those comments - extending the reach of that commentary beyond their experts' follower base.

### Add to the Story

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Have a unique take on an ongoing trend? Share a relevant article, but add your insights or reaction.




## Conclusion


The cybersecurity needs of companies will only increase as our society moves forward. The more connected we become and rely on data to function in this world, the more security becomes critical to continued prosperity. Despite the importance of this work, the media covering cybersecurity must battle its internal changes that have changed the rules of engagement.

Cybersecurity companies must alter how they approach journalists and the type of information they willingly provide to promote their work. They must also expand their own owned media approach to fill gaps that earned media can no longer fill.



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