

Pitching with Purpose: Macy Smith's Guide to Success in PR

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When Macy Smith started her transfer application to UT Austin, she was filled with both excitement and uncertainty. Leaving behind familiar surroundings at Texas A&M, Macy was ready to immerse herself in the vibrant communications program at UT, filled with innovative professors and driven students. It was there on the 40 acres that Macy not only found her voice, but realized that success is built on genuine relationships and the ability to tell stories that matter.

Today, Macy is a public relations associate at Zilker Media where she leverages strategic communication, relationship-building, and media pitching to help her clients gain visibility while navigating industry challenges and finding fulfillment in securing impactful coverage.

A day in her life in the fast-paced world of PR begins with an inbox full of emails—correspondences from clients, potential media opportunities, and follow-ups on pitches. She prioritizes urgent client needs before diving into the day's new projects. Writing press releases and curating personalized podcast pitches are all in a day's work. Between meetings with clients and team discussions, she constantly fine-tunes her approach to ensure that each client's powerful story reaches the right audience.

She fell in love with PR after the realization that the skills she naturally excelled at—writing, communication, personability—were at the core of the industry. But what keeps her engaged is more than just that; it is the ability to shape narratives and bring her clients' visions to life. “As cheesy as it sounds, I love helping people make their dreams come true,” Macy says.

However, the role does not come without its challenges. Managing client expectations is one of the toughest aspects of the job. Many clients come in with high hopes of instant fame, expecting to go viral overnight and success in major outlets like The New York Times or The Washington Post. Macy's job is to guide them through the strategic process, often beginning with smaller podcast features and gradually building an audience and credibility. “There's no magic secret for going viral overnight,” she explains. “It takes time, persistence, and the right positioning.”

She describes that skill—positioning—as the key to success for PR work. To Macy, PR is not about spinning stories, but uncovering the most compelling elements within a client's journey and

translating that into something the media finds valuable. Whether it is a construction business owner with a unique perspective on sustainability or an event planner with insights into changing industry trends, Macy is an expert at finding the hidden angles that make her clients stand out.

For aspiring PR professionals, Macy offers one crucial piece of advice: network early and often. “Building relationships is everything in this industry,” she says. Whether it is reaching out to alumni, scheduling informational interviews, or attending industry wide events, making connections can open doors to unexpected opportunities.

The most rewarding moments come when her efforts lead to tangible results. Whether it’s securing a dream media placement for a client or seeing their business attract engagement due to increased visibility, Macy thrives on making an impact. “There’s nothing quite like getting that email saying, ‘Yes, we’d love to feature your client,’” she says.

As Macy continues to evolve in an ever-changing industry, one thing remains constant: her commitment to helping others bring their stories to life.

Transcript & Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your role as a PR/communications specialist and what a typical day looks like for you?
 - a. Yeah, absolutely. So I'm currently a public relations associate with Zilker media in Austin, which is a smaller, sort of boutique agency, and I work as a publicist there. And specifically we work with different clients who are in the thought leadership space. And so that could be in a range of different industries. That could be one day I'm working on someone in construction, and another day I'm working on someone who works in event planning and interior design. And so we work with our clients to attempt to get them coverage on different podcasts. And so I'm pitching it to podcasts every single day, telling them about our client, highlighting all of the very best things and most interesting things about our client, and hoping to get them coverage. And so typically, day to day, it looks like I come in, kind of get settled, catch up on emails, respond to any client emails or any requests there, and then I will work on different writing documents, whether that's writing a new press release or creating new pitches, things like that. And then I might have a couple of different client meetings or, you know, internal meetings sprinkled throughout the day, but that's pretty much what it looks like.
2. What inspired you to pursue a career in public relations/communications, and how did you get started in the industry?
 - a. Yeah, I think at its base going into PR was I kind of just realized that all the skills that you needed to have for that were things that I was just automatically, you know, good at in school, like, math was never my thing, science was never my thing, English and writing was always where I excelled. And so just being able to take those skills and things that I'm good at and turn them into a career, I think, is the best thing and smartest thing you can do. But I think what keeps me staying in the PR industry is the fact that I get to build relationships every day, that I get to meet new people and try and, honestly, as cheesy as it sounds like, make their dreams come true, you know, try and build their business and scale their business and give them the publicity that they need, because they meet people who are so talented with, you know, huge career aspirations. And I do my best every day to kind of show the world them and let the world see that
3. Can you share a specific moment in your career that shaped you or made a lasting impact?
 - a. This specific moment that's hard, I would say, probably in College, I think one of the biggest things that shaped my future and kind of sent it into, like, a full 180 is I actually transferred colleges. So my very freshman year, I started at Texas A and M University. And, you know, being there, I kind of realized that it just wasn't for me and and, you know, career wise, it's, of course, it's an engineering focused, and focused school. And there just simply was not, you know, the different activities

and you know, different things for PR and communication students that I was really looking for. A lot of friends who went to UT, Austin, and they were loving it. And so I think transferring to UT was one of the best decisions I ever could have made, because then from there, I was able to build my skill set through, you know, intentional coursework. I was able to get different internships in the city and in Austin, and so I don't think that I would be where I am today if I hadn't transferred. So that was definitely big.

4. What are some of the biggest challenges you face in your job, and how do you handle them?
 - a. Yeah, I would say the biggest challenge that I face on a day to day basis is managing our clients expectations. Because, you know, a lot of times they will come to us hoping that we will make them famous overnight, or we will grow their business overnight and make them millions of dollars. And that's, you know, truthfully, just not realistic and not the case. And so a lot of times we'll have, you know, our initial meetings, and we will kind of break down our plan for them and what we want to do, and, you know, our goals for them. And you know, maybe they're expecting that we, you know, get them into, you know, these huge publications they expect that we'll get them into the New York Times and The Washington Post. And, you know, of course, we have to start small. And, you know, we start with smaller podcasts, and we get their names up and get their name out there. And so, yeah, it's definitely difficult trying to manage their expectations and explain to them that it takes some time and it is a process. There's no magic secret that allows them to blow up overnight.
5. What skills do you think are most essential for someone working in PR or media communications?
 - a. I would say the first thing that comes to my mind is being able to position something. And as much as this sounds like a shady PR tactic, like, you know, covering things up and making things out how you need them to sound. I think it can and should be used for good. And so just being able to take a client who, you know, maybe works in construction and has his own construction business, and maybe it's not, doesn't sound like the most interesting, but being able to really talk to him and peel back the layers and understand what are the core themes here, and the things that he can offer, and insights that he can offer that, you know, the normal person would really be interested in who doesn't probably really care about construction, like, what are, you know, aspects of his job in his life that people might really care about. So being able to, like, dig in deep and understand that, and you have to have a good understanding of kind of the media landscape, and just people in general and what they're interested in, and being able to pull that out and position him in a way that is most appealing and interesting to the public.

6. How has social media and digital marketing changed the PR landscape, and how do you adapt to those changes?
 - a. I would say that traditional PR is definitely evolving. There's a lot less need for fully written press releases. You know, nowadays it's just quick pitches. You know, you're not giving the whole story. You're just trying to attract and get interest. Because, of course, right now we know the media landscape is so oversaturated. There are stories about anyone and everyone and everything and every topic, and so you have to be able to, again, kind of really find what that key beat is and what people are really going to be interested in. And you have to make it short and sweet. People don't want super long press releases. Journalists don't want to read all that they're getting, you know, hundreds and hundreds, maybe 1000s. Some people emails and pitches every single day, and so yeah, just being able to be agile, staying on your feet and keeping up with competitors and what's going on around you, and just being able to, yeah, really just shorten that and keep it on par with industry standards, if that makes sense.
7. What advice would you give to graduating seniors who want to enter the PR or media industry?
 - a. I would say it's the most tangible piece of advice that I would give. Of course, people are going to give advice, you know, find out what you're passionate about and pursue it, and, you know, isolate the companies that you're interested in, and all those things are very true, but tangibly, I think the best thing that you can do is go on LinkedIn research. Find the agencies, or, you know, the companies you're wanting to do in house, find the ones that you are really passionate about and really interested in. Find the alumni who go to your school and who work there and reach out and ask to set up, you know, a one on one, a 30 minute meeting, ask them to pick their brand, about their job. You know, do they like their job? And then at the very end of that call, ask them, you know, what would you recommend for someone like me who, you know, wants to do something similar to you and be at your company and pursue PR and, you know, show how enthusiastic you are about them. And I would just say that that's the best thing you can do. Is building those relationships as early as possible. Is it likely that they will reach out to you and right after your meeting and be like, Hey, we have a job. Probably not, but you're still building relationships, and who knows? You know when that time comes around that they might you know if you want to submit your application, they'll recognize your name, so just doing your best to build relationships as early as possible, I would say, yeah,
8. Are there any common misconceptions about working in PR that you'd like to clear up?
 - a. I would say the biggest misconception is that we are all like evil story spinners, and, you know, we try to, you know, let bad people get away with things. And I just think that's not true. I think a lot of the work that we do is for good and to

help people and to help people who are passionate about what they do and the industry that they're in. And so, yeah, I would just say that people assume that our intentions are always bad or negative or like we're trying to cover things up or or, I think, you know, the biggest thing is that we're trying to deceive the public. And I don't think that that's the truth, so I would say that

9. What's the most rewarding part of your job, and what keeps you motivated?
 - a. I think the most rewarding part of my job is anytime that, you know, I get an email from a journalist saying, like, yes, we'd love to have your client on our podcast, or we'd love to feature him in our article. Just the excitement of getting to know that I get to relay that information back to my client, and that you know, I've just secured more business for him, and potentially life changing business, if you know you're securing it for you know a more well known news outlet. Just being able to drive success for my client. I feel like it is the most rewarding part and getting to see them succeed.