

# ProductNewsChannel.com

*Making New Products News!*

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## How to Write a Great Pitch Letter

### What is it?

A brief letter, almost never longer than one page, written to accompany press releases, media advisories or full press kits.

### How is it used?

Pitch letters serve one purpose -- to pique the journalist's interest in your story. They needn't tell the whole story. Rather, they are "teasers" for the meat of your story angle.

### What's it look like?

Regular business letter formatting is fine:

**What should I put in my pitch letter?** The best way to learn how to write great pitch letters is to look at some. In this section, I'll excerpt some letters we used at Stoller & Bard to pitch various stories. Before long, you'll get the feel for the kind of style needed to write successful pitch letters.

**Start off with your best shot.** In the first sentence, try to give the reporter something that will make him say either "Gee, I never knew that" or "That's an interesting angle for a story". Or better yet try to get him to say both things! Don't mess around with formalities, and don't bury your angle in hype. Here's an example of a pitch letter we used to promote "the world's largest game of Pictionary":

September 24, 2009

Mr. Joe Smith  
Features Editor  
The Daily Herald  
Anytown, OH 44444

Dear Joe:

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On November 19, during halftime of the California-Stanford game, 80,000 people will make history.

They'll be helping to establish a New World Record by participating in the largest participatory game in -- a monumental round of Pictionary, led by the Stanford Marching Band.

The band will use formations to create pictures of words and phrases. The crowd will then have the chance to guess the word, by cheering at the appropriate choice read aloud by the public address announcer.

Rob Angel, the man who began the Pictionary craze, will be in town for the record-setting attempt. In just five years, Rob's risen from waiter to millionaire. One of the most successful game inventors in history, he's now a celebrity in his own right (he was recently featured on the cover of USA Weekend as part of their "Young Millionaires" issue).

Rob will be available to discuss the "Mega-Pictionary" game, and his role as inventor of America's favorite game on Thursday, November 17 or Friday, November 18.

I'll be in touch soon to discuss a possible interview. Look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Bill Stoller  
Media Director

Straight to point and no nonsense. Just the way a reporter wants it.

Here's another example -- one that fits the "Gee, I didn't know that" category. It's to promote the national winner of a contest sponsored by one of our clients:

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September 24, 2009

Mr. Joe Smith  
Features Editor  
The Daily Herald  
Anytown, OH 44444

Dear Joe:

A miracle has bloomed and is now being harvested in the heart of the South Bronx.

What used to be a trash-filled vacant lot covered with used hypodermic needles and crack vials is now a spectacular 2 1/2-acre working farm. Every day, under the watchful eye of Garden Director and seasoned gardener Jack O'Connor, dozens of neighborhood youngsters come to tend their garden plots, sing songs, hear poetry and learn about nature. Jack has only one rule of thumb: Before the fun starts, the day's schoolwork must be completed. And so, in a corner of the garden, under the colored leaves of autumn, the children diligently complete their homework before caring for Taqwa as the growing season comes to a close.

The Taqwa Community Farm is a place of beauty and joy, powered by the hard work, dedication and vision of the people of the Highbridge section of the Bronx. For their remarkable achievement, Jack O'Connor and the young people of the South Bronx who have helped build The Taqwa Community Farm have been honored as the 1998 National Winners of the John Deere Kids Seeds of Hope Award. A program created to recognize young people who are bringing nature's beauty to urban landscapes, John Deere Kids Seeds of Hope has honored 25 community gardens across the nation as 1998 Regional Winners.

Sincerely,

Bill Stoller

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## Target your pitch

Even if you have only one version of a press release, you can still target your pitch to a particular media outlet by crafting a specific pitch letter. The purpose of the pitch letter in this case -- to frame the story in a way that makes it clear to the journalist that it fits in with that media outlet's approach.

Here's a letter we wrote to *The Paul Harvey Show* to pitch the story behind one of our clients, a board game company called The Games Gang. It resulted in a story on Mr. Harvey's show -- one of the biggest publicity hits you can get.

Notice that it's written in a structure and style similar to what you might hear on *The Paul Harvey Show*. We also played up the "senior" status of the Games Gang members, as senior citizens make up a significant portion of their listenership.

Here's the letter:

September 24, 2009

Mr. George Flanagan  
Producer  
The "Paul Harvey" Show  
Anytown, OH 44444

Dear George,

In June, 1986, a group of veteran toy sales people (average age: 60) were told there was no more room for them at the company they'd served for more than 30 years.

They didn't slip quietly into retirement, however. Instead, they set out to prove the toy industry wrong -- to show that experience and common sense are the keys to success.

They've done it.

The company they formed, The Games Gang, has taken the games industry by storm. They've beaten the odds by creating one of the most successful games in American history -- Pictionary -- and following it up with another hit, Balderdash. Today, 10 million games later, the "Over The

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Hill Gang" is at the top of the game heap, having surpassed their larger -- and younger -- rivals.

We think your listeners and readers, especially those who feel as if their best days are behind them, will find the story of The Games Gang a real inspiration. We hope you agree.

I'll be in touch soon.

Sincerely,

Bill Stoller

## **Show how your story relates to the reporter's audience**

Did you catch this line in the Paul Harvey pitch letter?

We think your listeners and readers, especially those who feel as if their best days are behind them, will find the story of The Games Gang a real inspiration.

That's the line that probably put the story over the top. We took what was essentially a corporate story and demonstrated that it could have meaning to a wide group of listeners - - even those who don't play board games or care about entrepreneurs.

Try to find a bigger theme in your story, especially one that fits with the mission of the media outlet you're pitching.

## **Follow up your phone or e-mail pitches with a strong letter**

A good use of a pitch letter is to remind a reporter of a conversation you may have already had. Let's say you call up or e-mail a journalist, pitch your story and she says "Send up some information". That's pretty typical. Most people would then send the press release, perhaps with a little note attached that says something like "As you requested". But Publicity Insiders aren't most people. Savvy publicists craft a pitch letter that reminds the reporter of your previous contact and strongly re-phrases the pitch. Reporters are busy, and chances are, she's already forgotten the previous conversation. You're doing her a huge favor by resetting the story -- and you're taking yet another opportunity to push your chances of getting a hit over the top. Here's an example of a pitch letter that was sent to a radio producer:

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Ms. Joe Smith  
Features Editor  
The Daily Herald  
Anytown, OH 44444

Dear Joe:

It was good speaking with you on Tuesday. As we briefly discussed, Pictionary inventor Rob Angel has just completed a national promotion in which he asked consumers to send him an artifact associated with the 1980's. Their reward: a copy of the new version of the classic board game which includes many new "90's" words and deletes many outdated "80's" words and phrases.

The response has been tremendous, and now Rob is available to discuss, in a lighthearted way, the "significance" of his findings. The enclosed release will tell you a bit more about the type of 80's items he received, and about the one item that, based on sheer volume, simply must be declared "The Ultimate Symbol of the 80's".

Rob can also discuss his remarkable experiences in creating Pictionary. As you may or may not be aware, he was a struggling 24 year old waiter when he first came up with the idea for the game and began selling it out of his trunk. Today, Pictionary is one of America's all-time favorite games.

I'm certain your listeners will thoroughly enjoy Rob. He's funny, quick and an experienced interview subject.

I'll be in touch again soon to discuss a possible interview. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call.

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Sincerely,

Bill Stoller

Oh yeah, we used another trick of the trade in that letter. Did you catch it?

We made a big deal about the one item that was the Ultimate Symbol of the 80's...but we didn't tell what it was in the letter. For that, the producer had to read the enclosed press release! Pretty sneaky, eh? (By the way, it was, of course, the once-ubiquitous Yellow Power Tie.)

Pitch letters are wonderful and often underused tools. Just keep them short, get to the point, try to show how your story can appeal to a wide audience and, where appropriate, have a little fun, and you'll be pitching like a pro!