

Tips for Making Pitches

Your pitch essentially is your nut graph. You are stating exactly what your story is about and why it's worth doing. You should clearly answer why readers should care about the story and why now. Use as many details, facts and specifics as you can.

We expect you to do pre-reporting so that you can develop a solid pitch that will result in a story that can be completed by the deadline. The pre-reporting should include contacting sources to gather background information.

Some pitch examples from the ABC On Campus bureau:

Immigrants and H1N1:

When it comes to dispersing information about swine flu, a few Nebraska communities with huge immigrant populations are facing challenges in terms of language and culture. One city of about 5,000 says half of its population is immigrants, many who came from Central America with a deep skepticism of vaccines. Another city has a many immigrants from Somalia and the Sudan, and the health department simply can't accommodate the dozens of languages that are spoken in the area. Overall, it's a challenge to emphasize that if you're sick you need to stay home. Many immigrants work at meatpacking plants and are worried they would lose their jobs if they did.

Medical-legal partnerships:

If you're battling cancer, the last person you usually want to deal with is a lawyer. But at the University of Nebraska-Medical Center, a lawyer helps cancer patients draw up wills, figure out custody arrangements for their kids if they die, deal with insurance companies, and take care of other legal headaches -- all for free and at their bedside.

It's done through a partnership between the Med Center and Legal Aid of Nebraska. The program started in July and is among more than 80 other legal-medical partnerships in the U.S. Nationally, these programs helped 10,000 patients last year. At a time when health care is on everyone's minds, these partnerships help ease patients' legal worries and let them focus on getting better.

Pet ministries:

We think there's story in the growing demand for pet ministries among traditional churches. One church in Lincoln has a program that treats pets like members of the congregation. They can be blessed, and ministers will come to their births, funerals and pray for them in hard times. It may sound cutesy, but church officials and pet owners treat the practice as a true, spiritual experience. We'll profile the church, it's animal ministers, interview owners who've had their pets blessed and of course, catch the blessing in action. At the last mass blessing, animal ministers blessed more than 50 creatures, from a dog to a gerbil, snakes to camels.

Marching bands at risk:

Imagine – Friday night high school football games with no marching band. That's the trend across the country. Economic and budget pressures are forcing more high schools to shut down bands. All the national high school associations we've talked to – as well as our own music college here at the university -- confirm this, though none have solid numbers. In any case, we'll profile a small town high school band fighting for its survival. -- We're thinking a package, plus text story for dot.com.

Hot air balloonist:

We have a 66-year-old hot air balloonist near Lincoln who holds world records and -- in his free time -- takes people up with him for special occasions. On his own, he's flown a 23-hour flight in 10-below temperatures, breaking his own world record for that size of balloon. When he takes passengers up, his goal is to find people who deserve a memorable experience. This week, he took up a couple for a marriage proposal and also took up a soldier who wanted to do something special for his wife before he deployed to Iraq. Elicia went up with them on that flight. We think a profile of the balloonist would make a package with some visual punch."

