Building relationships with your local media takes time. But handled properly, outreach to reporters and other members of the news media is a proactive strategy that represents time well spent. Media coverage of your community bank’s efforts, products and services will educate customers and local residents, promote your business, and position you as a responsible business leader within the community. ICBA offers the following tips on how to reach out, communicate and establish mutually beneficial relationships with the media.

1. **Identify the appropriate contact.** Reporters are frequently assigned "beats" or areas of coverage. News distribution services provide searchable databases with reporter contact information, but you can also track these individuals yourself by following relevant media outlets (print, broadcast or online). Social media forums (e.g., Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn) can also help you identify reporter’s beats and connect with them.

2. **Do your research.** After you identify the reporters you want to reach out to, it’s critical to research their media outlet. It’s important to ensure that the publication is the appropriate fit for your pitch and that the reporter knows you understand why his or her readers or viewers will identify with the story. It all comes down to the reader finding value in what you have to offer. Also, reporters appreciate when you take the time to read their work. Taking your time to understand how your story fits into the broader narrative of the publication and what the reporter covers is critical to your media relations success.

3. **Craft your pitch.** Organize your thoughts by thinking about the purpose of your call and deciding how to craft your pitch. What messages do you want to convey? What can you offer the publication’s readers? How is your story unique? Whenever possible, make it local!

4. **Respect their time.** When you connect, introduce yourself, explain the reason for your call and concisely communicate your message. If the reporter is on deadline and doesn’t have time to discuss a story idea or topic, ask if there’s a more convenient time to reconnect.

5. **Be clear and stay on message.** Talk plainly and provide specific examples and anecdotes, when possible. Remember to stick to your key messages. If the reporter doesn't ask questions that prompt your messages, volunteer them.

6. **Be a resource.** Provide other local sources and experts to help educate reporters on newsworthy or complex issues. Use your unique perspective to put the news in context. Be helpful and responsive and follow up with important developments.

7. **Follow the news.** You expect reporters to follow and know your business, and they expect you to do the same. This is especially important before any outreach and helps identify any breaking news that may alter their schedule. Familiarize yourself with the reporter’s body of work. It’ll provide a frame of reference for the reporter’s reporting style and will help you avoid pitching a stale angle.