

Celery AND **INDIEGOGO.**

PR Guide

For Startups
& Crowdfunding Campaigns



Startups and crowdfunded companies care about what they make and how they can sell it, product and promotion. This paper is about promotion, and specifically about PR. When you convince publications that you're newsworthy, that's PR. When you buy ads or create content, that's marketing.

Marketing is something wholly in your control. You decide how to describe yourself, where to promote your content and how much you pay. The outcomes of PR, on the other hand, depend largely on the needs and decisions of journalists, and on your ability to fulfill those needs.

It's the art of taking total strangers and making them aware of you.

Intro to the Media

In this guide, you'll learn how to:

1. Find the reporters who matter
2. Seek warm intros to them, and/or their contact info
3. Learn what they care about, and what you can give
4. Tell and adapt your story
5. Write a damn good pitch

Reporters aren't paid to open your emails. They aren't paid to tell the world you're great. Even if they like your product, they will write the story they please, or the story their editors tell them to write.

Your PR efforts only get you as far as a journalist's ear — after that, the process is out of your hands.

The next thing you need to know about journalism is that reporters and sources need each other — the transaction goes both ways. If you have nothing to give, don't be surprised when you receive nothing.

We'll talk about what they need below. Pay close attention to it if you want them to call you back.

If you've ever read [TechCrunch](#) or [VentureBeat](#), you know they love product launches, fundraisings and deals. They don't cover all launches, seed rounds or acquisitions, but they get the important ones. Going to them with a launch or fundraising, and not just news about partnerships and data, will increase the possibility they'll open your email. That kind of news is their beat.

PandoDaily does deep dives, company analyses and huge investigations. Re/code specializes in scoops about corporate boardrooms. Wired has a soft spot for science angles. Each outlet has a specialty. Tailor your pitch.

If you can actually help reporters do their job and convince them to open your email, you'll probably get coverage. If you can't, your product better be good enough to go viral on its own.

An analogy: News outlets are story factories that employ reporters on a narrative assembly line. To piece their articles together, they need a supply of reliable parts. If you succeed, you'll be one supplier in a chain producing those stories. The field is competitive, and you'll only be paid in prestige.

Other suppliers include PR people and industry sources, primary documents and reporters' own direct experience of events.

Journalists need quotes and facts, characters and trends, angles and intriguing questions, reasons to laugh or become outraged. What parts of a story can you supply?

Example: [Napwell](#) wrote a [great article in Priceconomics](#) based on data it gathered on the science of napping. The piece attracted more than 52,000 hits. Data like that can be a good way to land stories in even more visible publications.

The best introductions put reporters in touch with sources who have the power to make important decisions, sources who possess valuable insight into the beats they cover, or participants who experienced important events the public wants to know about. Every

reporter worth a damn would die to be a fly on the wall when a deal goes down. Talking to eyewitnesses can help journalists at least convey the visceral excitement of being in on the action. So who do you know, and what are they willing and able to talk about?

Interesting ideas would be trends, industry changes, colorful characters, novel companies or products that might have escaped them. Look for what's been under-reported or misrepresented, and fix it by making sure the real story gets told.

Example: Keep an eye out for strange new things. You're an expert, if something strikes you as odd or new, there's probably a story there that journalists would like to know about. But be sure to look at your idea critically. Remember that news has to be relevant and engaging.

So how can you find the right reporters to share all these introductions and ideas with?

If you want press, you should be reading the reporters who cover your industry long before you ask them to write about you. Reporters are inundated with pitches everyday. The ones that fall outside their beat not only get deleted, but they annoy the last people you want to annoy.

Scan the publications important to your sector, compile a list of the reporters covering companies and products like yours, and if you see their email address, copy and paste that into the list, too.

Beyond your personal reading, you can cast a net over all the news with [Google News's API](#) to get the names of every journalist writing about a certain keyword. From there, you can ask Mechanical Turk to find those journalists' emails.

If you're playing a numbers game, you can blast those reporters with a carefully crafted pitch, and a small percentage may actually write it up. But all that doesn't solve your basic problem, which is making sure the reporters who matter open your emails and return your calls.

Here are a few ideas on how to make that happen. The first is to find someone who knows them, and get a warm introduction that leads to a face-to-face meeting. Face-to-face meetings aren't as dry as phone calls, usually last longer, and can lead to something more human than a simple exchange of information. They often lead to long-lasting relationships and a greater likelihood of future coverage.

In the runup to his crowdfunding campaign, one founder made every single conversation a chance to ask for journalist contacts. He didn't let you forget what he needed, and by repeating the request, he got the leads and coverage that helped lead to a successful campaign.

The second way to get reporters to open your email is to help them with their beat. First, you follow the reporter online and on social media; by reading them, you figure out what they're interested in; then you mine your data or personal experience for insights, anecdotes or opinions that might enrich their coverage. When the moment is ripe, press send.

Everything up until this point has been about "push": the art of proposing unsolicited stories to reporters. The flip side of push is "pull": the art of responding to their requests. Unless you know a reporter's tastes very well, push is much harder.

A codified pull framework is [Help a Reporter Out](#) and its free European equivalent, [Media Diplomat](#). HARO is a subscription service that sends you a daily list of queries submitted by reporters. Those reporters will be seeking sources to answer questions about tech, finance, healthcare, human interest, lifestyle, and more.

The Perfect Pitch

If you have to pitch cold, without a pre-existing relationship, here's a few tips on how to do it. Don't start with a pitch, at least not one about yourself. Unless you're Larry Page and you want to give an exclusive interview, it doesn't work. Offer the reporter help instead. Ask them what you can send that they'll care about. A cold email to a gear blog might look like this:

Hi folks -

SHORT INTRO Sorry to bother you! My name's [X] and I work for [Company].

WE KNOW YOUR BEAT We're big fans of the [your publication], **PITCH TOPIC** and we work with a team of designers that makes some pretty cool bike and camera accessories.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND They ran a successful Indiegogo campaign that raised \$1 million, beating their goal by 300%.

CONTACTS You can reach the mastermind behind these projects at [X].

Crafting an engaging pitch that the reporter cares about

Introduce yourself to the reporter, try to get to know them through a meeting or call, and find out what they like to write about. If you ever meet a reporter, that should be the first thing you ask. If you know what they like to write about, then you have an idea of the stories in the pipeline, and that is business intelligence that will help you help reporters.

From there, you can brainstorm on how you might fit into their coverage. Think about the larger trends that affect you and that might interest the reporter. Imagine stories that you yourself might enjoy if you were a reader. Stories that involve fascinating characters who face impossible odds, events that reveal a new vision of the world, exciting changes, revelatory turning points and anecdotes that make you snort coffee through your nose.

The perfect pitch is one that reporters would craft themselves for their editors. It has to show that the subject is important, the actors are interesting, your perspective is new, and all that in plain everyday language. Here's an example pitch that a reporter might share with their editor:

SIMPLE INTRO I'd like to write a story about reality capture. The technology does exactly what it says: it takes a digital snapshot, in 3-D, of things in the world, EVERYDAY REFERENCE just like you might scan a figurine or old doorknob you need to replace. WHAT MAKES THIS DIFFERENT/REFRAMING But doorknobs are small compared to the ambitions of at least one company: to replicate whole cities. BIG PLAYERS THINK THIS IS IMPORTANT This year, Autodesk bought a reality capture startup, Allpoint. GEE WHIZ When the startup's co-founder Seth K. pitches clients, he scans the meeting room and as he says goodbye, he hands them a file — with each chair and tea cup modeled in it. The company's laser-based tech has captured skyscrapers and streetscapes, and they've worked with drive simulators, architects and defense agencies. THE TRUE IMPORT The national security aspects of modeling cities in machine-readable ways are clear. TENSION!!! But what happens if this technology, now being sold to the mass market, falls into the wrong hands? A formerly cumbersome and expensive technique is becoming cheap, portable and practically invisible. A thief or terrorist who can model his target unnoticed, find its weak points and simulate his attack and getaway has an edge. Conversely, in the hands of governments and corporations, the technology poses a greater threat to privacy than Google Street View. SUMMARY This article would look at the repercussions of reality capture becoming ubiquitous.

Remember, reporters' only obligations are to their readers and editors. To keep their jobs, journalists have to write things they think editors will approve and readers will enjoy.

What Do Reporters Want?

In PR, everything should come down to that one question. Luckily, each reader can answer it for herself.

All you have to do is read a newspaper, blog or magazine and notice what excites your attention. What do you care about? What fascinates you? What makes you laugh or shout? Above all, what makes you want to share with others?

Those questions can serve as an optic to view events in real life. You're surrounded by people, products, habits and insights that would be of interest for dozens of reporters. What makes you laugh, gasp, say "Oh really?" and want to spread the word?

All those reactions are what reporters yearn to provoke in their readers. In dry language, news should be a vehicle of valuable intelligence that changes how you view the world. If you can just notice and remember what shocks you, you have a nose for it.

Those moments of surprise have to be condensed into a few sentences as a pitch. Basically, you're feeding the reporter an idea that will be passed up the chain to editors who decide what will be published. In a sense, you're doing a piece of the reporter's work. In return, you may see your name in the media.

For a story to go viral, whether you write it for your blog or place it in a better-known publication, it needs to [excite certain emotions](#). No emotion, no readers. Repeat that to yourself 10 times, whenever you're writing a pitch. No emotion, no readers.

Here are the emotions that go most viral: Awe, anger, anxiety, fear, joy, lust, superiority and surprise if sufficiently provoked, will get readers to share your content — and once that happens, the sky's the limit. Positive feelings win out over negative (think kitty pictures...), and high intensity over low intensity.

Here are a few websites that provide constant lessons in virality:

- [Viralnova](#)
- [Upworthy](#)
- [Buzzfeed](#)
- [Gawker](#) (see the top stories on the upper left)
- [Gawker's Top Posts for 2013](#)
- [The Daily What](#)
- [FailBlog](#)
- [Reddit Home Page](#)
- [Neetzan Zimmerman's](#) Twitter Feed

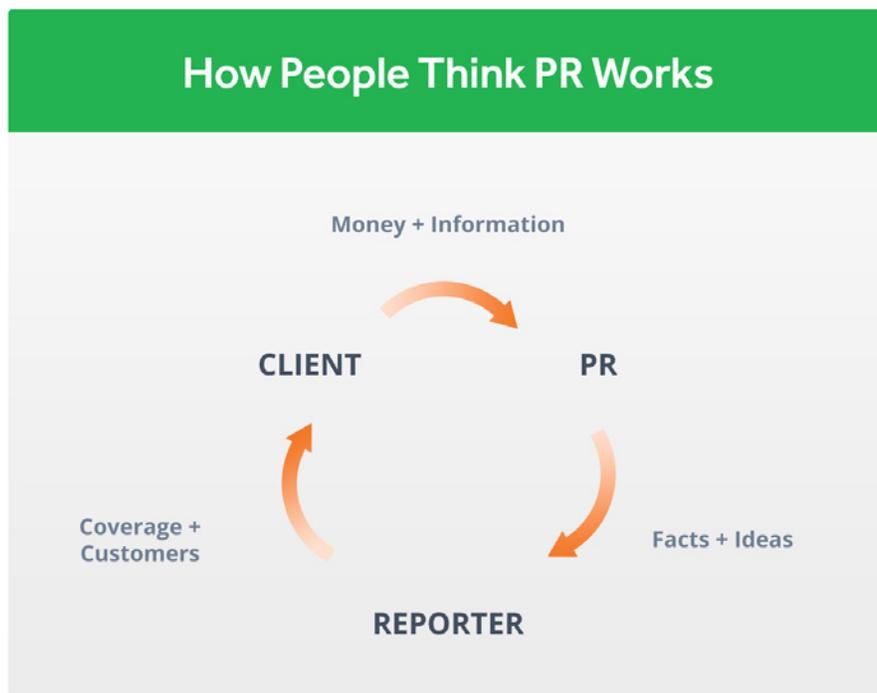
Note the promises of extreme feeling that many headlines contain, and the deliberate absence of vital information that leaves you hanging on that cliff.

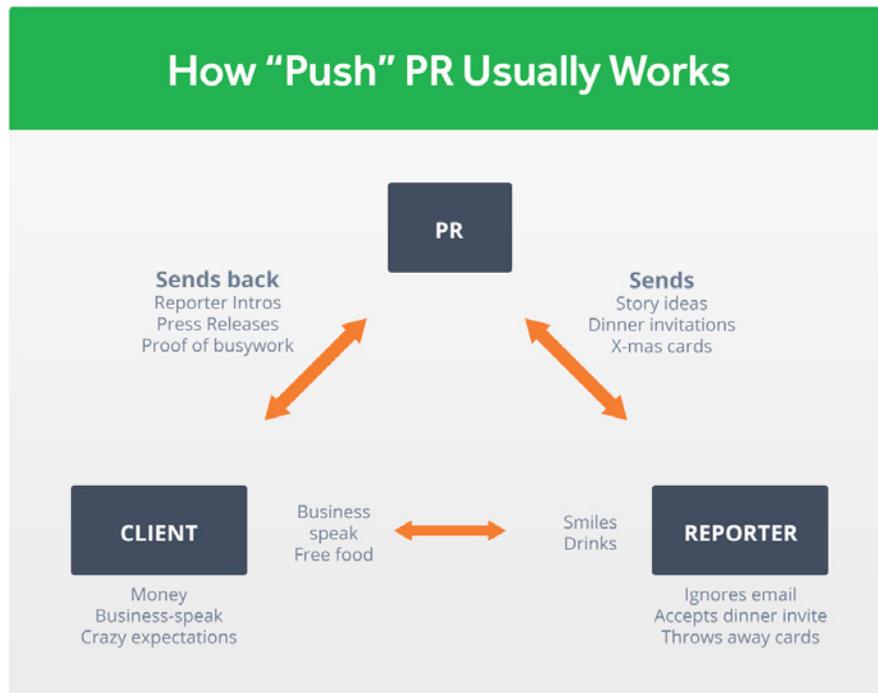
As you reach out to reporters, remember that PR is like dating. While you may have certain ideal journalists whose attention you hope to draw, you will have to work with the reporters who actually respond to you. Don't get hung up about who the best reporters are — go with the ones who are open to a pitch. It will make your life a lot easier, and with luck, articles published on small blogs will gain the attention of journalists at larger ones, until finally the Today Show is calling you.

That's the trickle-up effect. Once you enter the media's narrow band of awareness, they will recycle your story for a while, because another member of their profession has vouched for you. The smallest story will at least prove you exist.

Be Careful Who You Hire

Hiring a PR firm is expensive. Their retainers can range from \$2,000 to \$25,000 per month. A retainer means they'll pick up the phone when you call. Actually putting time into a special project can cost extra, depending on the firm. The two images below illustrate the difference between how clients expect PR to work, and what the industry actually does:





Some PR firms have four or five people reviewing the e-mails sent to a single reporter, who probably thinks he's just writing to one. They are overstaffed. As journalism has become less profitable, and journalists less numerous, the ratio of PR people to reporters has grown. That imbalance puts a strain on the industry and makes your story less likely to get out. Consider your own needs before you decide whether you should hire an agency. Consult with other companies like yours, and get recommendations before you start researching.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Because of a retainer-based fee structure, some external PR firms are incentivized to pursue new clients while neglecting old ones. It's a principal-agent problem.

2. PR firms are in the uncomfortable position of being responsible for events outside their control: the stories that make it into the press. The nature of PR also means it produces uneven returns on investment. The client-PR-reporter relationship is a principal-agent-agent problem, in which the third party doesn't accept the role of agent at all, and rightly so. (If this guide teaches you anything, it is to find ways to make the reporter the principal, and yourself the agent. Doing PR is like opening up a second business, where you treat reporters as your customers.)
3. Asymmetric information. Clients don't know how journalism and PR work, which makes them unable to hold bad actors accountable or properly measure results. Measurement is difficult, and as an industry, PR has yet to be quantified. This guide seeks to correct some of those asymmetries.
4. Many of the big-name PR firms are used to large-company, "enterprise" PR, which means they can expect reporters to come to them with questions about their latest quarterly earnings and strategic turns. They think defensively, because their employers have reputations that reporters will inevitably attack. That's not the position most startups are in. In the beginning, they just want to be recognized. They'd love to be big enough for the press to attack them. So they need to employ very different PR tactics, and be much more useful to reporters. Make sure that if you are looking for an agency, you look for one who is used to working with similar companies.

Those four problems lead to a lot of wheel spinning and busy work as firms attempt to justify their fees in the face of unrealistic expectations. Clients hire them thinking they'll be on the cover of The New York Times in a few months, if they just spend enough money.

Luckily for readers, and sadly for those clients, it just doesn't work that way. Unlike PR firms, if you do your own PR, you don't have to deal with crazy clients because you **are** the crazy client.

The one thing DIY PR will cost you is time, and if you're not smart about it, that time will be wasted.

Kill Press Releases, Kill Jargon

Be cautious about paying someone to write a release, or even writing one yourself. Press releases are a way for multinational corporations to communicate with many journalists at once. They perform better if reporters already think you're important. If they've never heard of you, a press release is unlikely to draw their attention.

Consider an email instead, as you will need to tell journalists a few basic things about yourself, your product and your company. Keep it short. Keep it clear. Keep it grammatical. Try to hold your sentences to 25 words or less. If you have trouble doing those things, use Hemingwayapp, and let it lead you toward the short, simple words.

“In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.”

— A Farewell to Arms

Never use marketing lingo or business jargon with the press. It’s useless to reporters and their readers. They simply don’t care about your vision or mission statement, or whether you revolutionized the handbag. Reporters hear about a dozen revolutions per day. They impress no one, and generally make journalists stop reading. As Churchill said: “The short words are the best, and the old words best of all.”

If you didn’t know a word until you heard it at the startup accelerator, chances are you’ll get as much use out of it now as you did before you knew it existed: Zero. So be very careful with business-speak like “thought leader” — the rest of the world calls them “experts.” Reserve accelerator words for talking with VCs, not the media.

At the end of each sentence, read what you've written and ask yourself: Would a normal human being say that in a conversation with a stranger? If the answer is no, go back and rewrite it.

Caveat: While a press release is not a good way to communicate with reporters or get your message out, they are occasionally useful in search. Press releases that are picked up on newswire sites like Reuters and Marketwatch, which publish some of them without alteration, can rank high on Google, give you decent link juice and provide a little visibility you might have missed otherwise.

Crowdfunding PR

Crowdfunding campaigns are media events par excellence. They're a great excuse to drum up press around the adventure of entrepreneurship, prove the vitality of a local business scene, and stoke hometown pride in a local gal (or guy) done good.

Priming the media with your campaign is one essential piece of a marketing and PR machine you'll perfect over many months. Above all, remember the media need you to do something before they can report it. That action is called a "hook." A crowdfunding campaign is a perfect hook for a story, and perfect hooks don't walk through your door every day. (Once your campaign ends, your next big hook will probably be shipping the product.)

Most startups that have built something really good are surprised when they're ignored. They shouldn't be; it happens all the time. Good products don't come with press magnets inside. They don't sell themselves. You have to sell them, whether you like sales or not.

Startups in search of a market need to [find their customers](#) through crowdfunding and make sure the right people know they exist. When they first begin, they face the deep indifference of the world.

Crowdfunding platforms like Indiegogo give you increased exposure, reducing the chances you'll pass unnoticed. They get people excited about you, for a while. You need to seize that moment and build on it before you're forgotten.

When planning your media outreach, keep a few things in mind: Reporters have many different beats, and your project will probably appeal to several journalists, each for a different reason, while others will have no interest whatsoever. Don't take it personally — it's not their job. A reporter's beat should shape your pitch.

Local newspapers cover local people. Gamer blogs want news about new games. Your location, origins, product and larger cause are all great ways to appeal to specific members of the press.

When you are unknown, you have to do more work. When you are crowdfunding, you have to convince reporters that you'll deliver on your promises. There are lots of disappointed backers out there,

and there have been plenty of scams. The bloom is off the rose, so have a solid game plan on how you'll make and ship your product, and be ready to tell people about it. That means finding individual reporters who might be interested in you, reading their previous articles and understanding how you fit into their coverage. Once you grasp what kind of news those reporters are trying to give their readers, you can try to convince them that you are exactly up their alley for reasons X, Y and Z.

Don't just tell them you need coverage to succeed. Most have heard that before, don't care, and couldn't do anything about it even if they did. Convince them that your project is part of an exciting story. Convince them that their readers would benefit from knowing about you. That's your value prop.

When you actually get press coverage, don't let it go to waste. Before you see your name in print, prepare your website to receive traffic and funnel potential customers toward your call to action. If people visit your site, and leave it without giving you their email address, you have wasted a massive opportunity.

[Mixpanel](#) and other tools allow you to build and test the funnels that take users from your landing page to your call to action; e.g. Sign Up for Free! Test and tighten your funnels before a press blitz — otherwise you're letting customers slip away.

Practical Details

If you are planning to launch your product with a press release, remember these things:

1. You need to get reporters to agree to an embargo before you send them your embargoed press release. If you send them an embargoed press release without warning or agreement, it may very quickly turn into one publication's scoop, and your boondoggle, and that's on you. With reporters you trust, you can relax these rules, but politely remind them of when you'd like it to go out. The day before the announcement goes public, you'll probably be giving interviews, so set some time aside.
2. Many tech reporters are on such a tight schedule that they require 7-10 days warning to make time for your story. Even if you don't give them all the details, let them know something's coming in the form of a three-line e-mail: "Hey, we're going to announce our seed round a week from Tuesday. Some pretty big investors. I've seen you covering our sector and thought you might be interested. We do etc. etc." Well scheduled announcements get covered, last-minute ones get ignored.
3. When you're crowdfunding or fundraising with VCs, you want a steady drum beat of coverage, which means thinking up a lot of angles, pitching them to different blogs, and trying to set up stories well in advance. One reason Misfit Shine knocked their [Indiegogo campaign](#) out of the park, raising more than eight times their \$100,000 goal, is because they were getting

hits in the press about every three days throughout the campaign. Here's a [good list of article types](#) for when you're brainstorming about news angles. As freelance journalists say: No ideas, no money.

4. Sometimes, none of this applies. When [Urb-e](#) crashed CES last year, they were swarmed by journalists from blogs like The Verge and TechCrunch. That one guerrilla marketing stunt put them on the map, and led to nationwide coverage, including a spot on the Today show. A cool, physical product that fits into everyday life can take you a long way in PR.

Story Telling

All stories are like accordions. The same one can be long or short. Even the briefest marketing tales share basic elements with the Great American Novel.

What's more, every business needs to be telling at least two stories. The first is the story of your customers, their struggle and how your product helps them. The second is the story of you, how you discovered the problem, managed to solve it and built a business.

Both stories make the point that whatever you produced is a good and useful thing, and they do that by describing the people it helps and the problematic situations it resolves. The point of a story comes at the end. Leading up to it, you draw your characters, describe their

relevant motivations, make them sympathetic to your audience (which hopefully includes a few more potential customers), and relate how they fought to reach their goal and won.

For example, the first version of Google's story might be: "There was an enormous amount of information piling up chaotically online. We labeled and organized it so people could find what they're looking for."

Another version might be: "In the mid-1990s, most search engines were selling the top spots on their search pages to the highest bidder. That left an opening for a rival more focused on the users." Reams have been written about storytelling in creative writing departments across America. While not all of them know it, startup founders and crowdfunding project creators have a special relationship with one of writing's great lessons.

Good stories are compelling because they follow [characters who change](#): flawed humans who nevertheless strive to succeed, and realize their mistakes. They have something to struggle against — a dragon in this case. They confront obstacles, overcome repeated failure until they persevere and are transformed in the process. Here's a diagram of the classic narrative arc, which is just one possible story line:



Bad stories are the ones where everybody's happy and successful all the time, where there is no dragon to struggle against, and nobody ever screws up. Those are the stories large corporations often tell, and that's one reason why their spin is so ineffectual.

The story of struggle is one you've probably lived already. You're the protagonist; building the business is your crucible; succeeding in the face of apathy and antagonism should be your story's finale. Tell it, because it's a tale readers and reporters are hungry for.

Recommended Reading

- [The Startup Owner's Manual](#), Bob Dorf and Steve Blank
- [Ogilvy on Advertising](#), David Ogilvy
- [Writing That Works](#), Kenneth Roman and Joel Raphaelson
- [Trust Me, I'm Lying](#), Ryan Holiday
- [Preparing for Launch](#)
- [17 Tips for Getting Bloggers to Write About You](#)
- [12 Things Not to Do When Pitching a Story to Mashable](#)
- [Getting Real](#): The smarter, faster, easier way to build a successful web application (See Chapter 13: Promotion)
- [PR Tips For Startups](#): How To Get And Keep The Media Attention
- [The Essential Guide to Crowdfunding](#)
- [21 Call to Action Examples and 3 Rules for Effective CTAs](#)
- [7 Steps to Do-It-Yourself PR](#)
- [Confessions of an ex-tech journalist](#)
- [How to pitch the \[tech\] press](#)

For more tips and insights on crowdfunding, visit the [Indiegogo blog](#). To learn more about working with Celery and Indiegogo, head over to [Celery](#) or Indiegogo [InDemand](#).

Celery

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