

[« back to University News](#) [Tiger Beat Home](#) [About us](#) » [Archive](#) » [Subscribe RSS/XML](#)

May12

[Mike](#)

[More on who we are and what we do: Are we reporters or spinmeisters?](#)

[Last time](#), I explained what we do in University News Services (see [More on who we are and what we do](#)).

Here's the crib sheet: Media relations

This time, I'll expand on who we (collectively) are.

As Silandara recently [wrote](#), most of us previously worked in the media—and, as the adage goes, it stays in your blood. As media-obsessed news junkies, we probably read the newspaper differently than you do. For starters, we *always* read bylines. (Be honest, do you?) Plus, many of us still read newspapers. Everyday. (Do you?)

Silandara correctly noted that I was a radio guy. But I also worked in print media, covering Genesee County for *The Buffalo News*. Media experience, such as my colleagues' and mine, enhances our news judgment (for example, it's of immense value to have been on the receiving end of PR pitches).

William Metz, author of *Newswriting: From Lead to "30"*

(one of the best books on the topic) offers excellent advice to those wanting to break into public relations: "The best preparation . . . is some time spent writing for newspapers. If writers change careers, they almost always move from newspapers to other fields, not the other way around."

My media background perhaps explains why I believe "public relations" doesn't best describe what we do in University News (as explained last time, I prefer "media relations"). PR is often maligned—fairly in some instances—with a negative connotation: "spin." But we don't spin like some PR flacks.

Rather than touting new widgets or earnings per share (as those working in PR positions in the for-profit, corporate world often do), at a university such as RIT, we sit atop a treasure trove of newsworthy stories. And, like "real" reporters with assigned beats, we dig for *real news*.

Case study: I recently wrote a news release announcing results of an RIT-hosted student competition:

[Clarkson University Captures First Place in Regional Concrete Canoe Competition](#)

Why on earth should RIT issue a news release touting a rival university's triumph? Pure and simple, *the results were the news*. Moreover, news media in Potsdam and elsewhere likely identified RIT as the contest host, providing positive visibility for RIT. (Do you think big corporations are as secure in their stature? If you're unsure about the answer, think about Kodak versus Fuji.)

So we're not your typical PR flacks. Or are we? More [next time](#).

-

1. [Silandara Bartl](#)

May13

I used to occasionally use some colorful language to describe my PR/media relations work, but "PR flak" was never one of them (unless I was joking, trying to get a reporter to laugh). Being at a university, like Mike said, there are tons of great stories just waiting to be unearthed that are newsworthy, interesting, and that the media want to know about. Knowing I was providing a useful service and giving people info they wanted (most of the time) was the deal maker for me to go into PR. Sometimes it did feel like I was selling hairbrushes to bald people (to paraphrase Susan G.) – but mostly for those highly technical stories about things like remanufactured wiper blades in toner cartridges that were a brain cruncher to translate into everyday, why-do-I-care terms. Part of the job, I know.

Name (required)

E-mail (required)

Website

Submit Comment

About us

The Tiger Beat takes you behind the scenes with the members of [RIT University News](#)—the news and public relations division of [Rochester Institute of Technology](#). Get the "story behind the story" and an insider's look at who we are and what we do to publicize RIT news.

[more about us »](#)

Recent Comments

- John / Jul 24 [The 'abolishionist' is corrected](#)
- Justin / Jul 17 [RIT goes west](#)
- Jeff / Jul 12 [Shine on, classic beauties!](#)
- Brennan / Jun 24 [Shine on, classic beauties!](#)
- Will / Jun 17 [What to do with all that hardware?](#)
- David / Jun 14 [Shine on, classic beauties!](#)
- Nancy / Jun 13 [Shine on, classic beauties!](#)
- Mike / Jun 2 [Time is running out to ♦talk back♦ to University News](#)
- Ralph / May 30 [Time is running out to ♦talk back♦ to University News](#)
- John / May 19 [Sensationalism trumps accuracy in Channel 10 news story](#)