

Identifying Real vs. Fake Media Outlets

— GUIDE —

Everything you need to know to identify which media outlets are legitimate and which are fake, so you can focus on the ones that create real impact.

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While every website, podcast, and newsletter could be considered a media outlet in the technical sense, not every media outlet will have an impact when it comes to public relations.

There are the big national media outlets that everyone recognizes, like Entrepreneur, Fox Business, and Fast Company, and there are countless other high quality media outlets with sizable and engaged audiences that don't have quite as much brand recognition as these titans of the media world, but are still every bit as legitimate and useful. Unfortunately, there are also even more other media outlets that look legit on the surface, but no one has heard of them and they have no audience—and because of that, they're useless.

The whole point of earning publicity is to benefit from the social proof it provides, and the only way to do that is to get featured in legitimate publications that your prospects already recognize.

So in this guide, I'm going to walk you through exactly how to determine whether a media outlet is worth your time and effort to try getting featured in.

Evaluate the content

Look at the articles and videos published at a media outlet and compare it to what you'd expect to see at a large, well respected national media outlet.

Does it seem to present an honest and authentic perspective? Is there a substantial amount of well written and engaging content? Here's a big one—Is there lots of legitimately useful content, or is it mostly just a bunch of features endlessly praising brands, either people or companies, with little to no real substance? That's often the biggest giveaway.

There are countless publications that exist solely to publish nothing but glowing stories about brands for a fee. There's no real editorial oversight, and they will publish literally anything for anyone as long as they're willing to pay the fee. These are the epitome of "fake it 'till you make it," and they will absolutely hurt your brand.

Many in the entrepreneurial world are familiar with at least some of these publications, so when they see you bragging about being featured there, you'll lose credibility with them even if they never directly call you out. But the bigger part of this equation is that journalists can spot these a mile away, and if they see you bragging about being featured there, your chances

of getting featured in legitimate media outlets will plummet like Maverick when he flew through Iceman's jet wash in Top Gun.

And we all saw how that played out, so steer very clear of these unless you want to do the public relations equivalent of swimming in the ocean screaming your wing man's name.

Research the journalists

Who is publishing the articles at the media outlet in question? If the author is just listed as "Admin" or "Staff" or something of that nature, you should be skeptical. Real media outlets tend to publish articles under the name of the person who wrote the article about 99.999% of the time.

But even if there is a name, that doesn't mean that the outlet is legitimate. If you've never heard of that journalist before, search their name online. Do you come up with nothing, or do you see signs that this is a real person, including social media profiles, professional profiles, like Muckrack, and even articles at other outlets?

If you can't find a reasonable online presence, that should be a huge red flag akin to a white windowless van parked at the playground all day. So avoid any outlet that exhibits these signs.

Check traffic stats

Another way to determine if a media outlet is legitimate is to check its traffic stats.

A legitimate media outlet publishes lots of useful content that its audience loves, so its articles often get shared on social media by readers and linked to by other outlets, in addition to the SEO, email, and advertising the outlet does to drive people to that content. Because of this, they tend to get a substantial amount of traffic.

Fake media outlets, on the other hand, exist solely to publish useless content that only the person being featured in cares about, so not surprisingly, they also tend to get very little traffic. That's because the only people sharing these articles are the ones who were "featured," and the media outlet doesn't do anything to promote the content because visitors wouldn't stick around anyway since it's useless.

This makes traffic a very effective indicator of the legitimacy of a media outlet.

But how do we check traffic stats for a website? Obviously, no media outlet is going to give you access to their website analytics—especially the fake outlets I warned you about, so you'll need another way to get this data.

Fortunately, there are several tools used by digital marketers that can provide a rough estimate of a

website's traffic. It's worth noting that these can often be incorrect, and sometimes by a significant amount, but even in those cases they can still provide relatively useful information.

You can use the free version of any of the following tools for this research, but keep in mind you'll only be able to perform a few searches per day unless you upgrade to a paid account.

- Ahrefs
- SEMrush
- Similarweb
- SpyFu

There's no black and white rule as to how many monthly visitors a media outlet should get in order to be considered legitimate, but I would generally focus on outlets with more than 10,000 monthly visitors at a bare minimum.

Bottom line—A media outlet with little traffic is kind of like the young college kids with no real experience or achievements who are convinced they know how to fix the world. Traffic is an indicator of impact and if a media outlet can't create any impact for its own website, it won't be able to create any for you either.

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