

RAGAN'S

# Media Relations Report

SAMPLE

## Wine experts in the Midwest?

*Personal pitch to "Supermarket Guru" lands national radio placement*

"I'm sold on the benefits of breaking out of the cookie-cutter pitch," Alex Parker, assistant account executive at Chicago's [Arment Dietrich PR](#), says of his recent national radio placement for a client. While cookie-cutter pitches often have their place in day-to-day PR (much as everyone would like to write original pitches all the time), Parker's experience tells you why the targeted pitch really does work.

**Background:** Arment Dietrich's new client, the [International Wine Institute](#), was getting ready to launch last September and wanted to make a big media splash. The Institute is a Chicago-based nonprofit, founded by wine industry professionals, chefs and journalists to "demystify" wine and make it easier for novices to enjoy the stuff. The institute provides classes and stages special events, and offers memberships to people interested in learning more about wine.

"The Institute was largely unknown to the public and the media, except for the few journalists who are on the board," Parker explains. He and his colleagues wanted national coverage for the institute's kickoff event, a big outdoor party and wine tasting held in early September in Chicago's Grant Park. However, Parker and the PR team thought they might have a tough time landing national coverage for a Chicago event, and for an organization based in the Windy City.

**News peg:** "We wanted a big splash for the kickoff, so we pitched media all over the country, including New York and San Francisco, two cultural centers where wine resonates," says Parker. But that approach didn't gain much traction: "We got a decent response from [The Wall Street Journal](#), but nothing came of it," Parker relates. "The biggest complaint we heard was that the institute was based in Chicago, and the national media didn't know why their readers would care. Despite our best efforts to make our Chicago-based organization relevant in Manhattan, it wasn't really working."

The team also had a challenge getting hometown coverage with the desired audience, Parker says. "We were trying to appeal to suburbanites," says Parker of the institute's mix of classes and events. "But the suburban papers didn't want to cover an event that was taking place in Chicago."

Parker and his colleagues even tried health-related pitches, touting the benefits of regular doses of good wines, but those pitches didn't hit the mark either.

**The pitch:** In a previous PR job, Parker had successfully pitched a General Mills product to Phil Lempert, the *Today Show's* so-called "[Supermarket Guru](#)" and host of a syndicated radio show, *Shopping Smart*. In August, prior to the kickoff event, Parker decided to create a pitch about the institute for Lempert, although he wasn't at all sure it would fly. His angle, he decided, would be lessons from the institute on buying wine at the market.

"It seemed a stretch that a local story would be relevant to viewers of *Today* or listeners of Phil's show," Parker acknowledges. Nevertheless, he e-mailed Lempert and stressed the availability of institute experts to help people make the best wine buys at the supermarket. Parker also threw in the fact that "wine has overtaken beer as Americans' alcoholic beverage of choice."

However, the idea grabbed Lempert right off the bat, and he responded to Parker's e-mail the next day asking for more background on the institute. That gave Parker the foot in the door to stress the appropriateness of the story for Lempert's audience. People who join the institute, he told Lempert in a follow-up e-mail, "will gain some great knowledge from some of the wine industry's top people, enhancing their lifestyles. They'll learn about health benefits, food pairings, why wines taste the way they do and more. This is important given the popularity of wine today and the fact that many people, especially new wine drinkers, know very little about it."

Lempert responded to say he'd think about the pitch. Parker then received an e-mail from Kathy Nisivoccia, Lempert's producer, asking to book an institute official for an upcoming segment on Lempert's radio show, syndicated nationally by the WOR Radio Network.

**Result:** Monica Collins, the institute's founder and president, was booked for a 10-minute segment on Sept. 3, just a few days before the kickoff event. The interview with Lempert ended up running for almost 30 minutes, and it was also featured on Lempert's [Web site](#).

"It was very exciting for everyone involved to have that kind of national exposure," Parker says. It certainly must have made his bosses at Arment Dietrich happy"Parker had only been at the agency a few weeks when he nailed the placement.