

We'll tell you what they want – what they really, really want – and a few things they don't.

# What Transportation Journalists **Want**

How PR Pros Can Engage Them  
Better—Survey Reveals Industry  
Media Trends and Best Practices

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**Stratacomm**

# Introduction

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**Do you ever wish you could get inside the heads of the journalists you're pitching about your transportation-related issue?**

To figure out what **content** they want?

What **format** they want it in?

What do they **need** to do their jobs – and where your **angle** fits in?

**We did just that. We ASKED them.**

# Introduction

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Transportation expands beyond a single beat to include reporters covering technology, infrastructure, politics and beyond. We wanted a fresh look at the evolving transportation media landscape direct from the perspective of those covering it.

We asked **nearly 1,700** media covering transportation, (both exclusively as well as those covering it along with other beats):

What are the **current and anticipated** future roles of social channels in transportation reporting?

What elements make a story **more shareable**?

How will content likely **change** in the next five years?

We Asked  
Nearly

**1,700**

Journalists

# Introduction

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## We also wanted a better understanding of our journalist friends.

Where do they get the **information** they need?

What **kind of content** is most valuable?

How is their success **measured**?

**How often** can we call them with a story idea before they block our phone number?

Using Stratacomm's **in-house research, planning and strategy department**, Stratacomm fielded a poll exclusively of journalists covering the transportation sector.

While this audience is very niche, we gathered enough responses through our exclusive media database for statistically significant findings. We also asked open-ended questions to understand this journalistic audience more deeply.

## Following is a summary of our findings.

Within these data and responses lies the **roadmap** for successfully engaging with our journalist colleagues to tell intriguing stories in today's media landscape and tomorrow's.

# Insights

## The Media Landscape: Where We Are and Where We're Going

### IT'S NOT A SECRET

The media landscape has changed dramatically since the start of the millennium and continues to evolve at an astounding pace. Traditional advertising on or in television, radio, print and out-of-home outlets is now combined with or increasingly replaced by digital options as audiences spend more and more time online.

Ads on display, streaming video and music, native content, email, paid social channels and search skyrocketed in the past decade. Further, the lines between owned, paid and earned media blurred, as elements like influencer marketing and consumer-driven social media discussions increasingly affect brand perceptions and bottom lines.

The disproportionate number of marketing professionals to journalists combined with the decline in the number of journalists in the past few years means that competition is tight for earned media attention.

### But there is hope.

Despite the continually evolving media space, journalists still place a high value on **good old-fashioned relationships** with trusted sources for ideas and content that's relevant to them.

# Insights

## Social Media Trends

### NOW

Where do transportation journalists go for information when covering a story?

Many turn to social media:



YouTube

Notably, **YouTube is the leading social network journalists use to research a story or inspire a story idea**, with 62% of respondents listing it as a resource.

It's also notable that **20% of our survey participants indicated they do not use any social media channels but prefer to get information from their own sources** – including trusted contacts and manufacturers or other websites.

When reporting on a company, only a slight majority of respondents:

**54%** “always” or “sometimes” reference that company’s own social media channels

**46%** “rarely” or “never” do



# Insights

## Social Media Trends

### FUTURE

What social networks do these journalists think will be most helpful to them in five years? **The same ones they currently use**, in roughly the same proportion. However, 12% of survey participants said they wouldn't know, mainly because they don't use social media to support storytelling currently.

The bottom line? Putting the many marketing merits of social media aside, **social media is not a primary source for generating media stories for transportation journalists – except to a degree for video content**. And it isn't likely to become one in the foreseeable future. It takes hard work and time – but establishing yourself as a trusted resource of credible, newsworthy information is your best bet for story placement.

**You can't beat a trusted, mutually beneficial relationship.**

It Takes  
**Hard Work  
& Time**

# Insights

## Content Trends

### NOW

**Transportation journalists publish anywhere from 1-12 pieces of content in an average week**, with 40% publishing between 1-3 pieces of content and 21% publishing upwards of 11 pieces of content.

The most common content formats are long-form narratives of over 500 words (73% of respondents) and short-form narratives of 500 words or fewer (63% of respondents).

**But writing stories isn't enough.**

**Today's journalists are multimedia multitaskers.**

**54%** publish social media text for their outlet (e.g., tweets)

**51%** post social media pictures or stories (e.g., Facebook and Instagram posts)

**Additionally,**

**50%** of journalists are responsible for producing video content

**32%** produce audio/podcast content



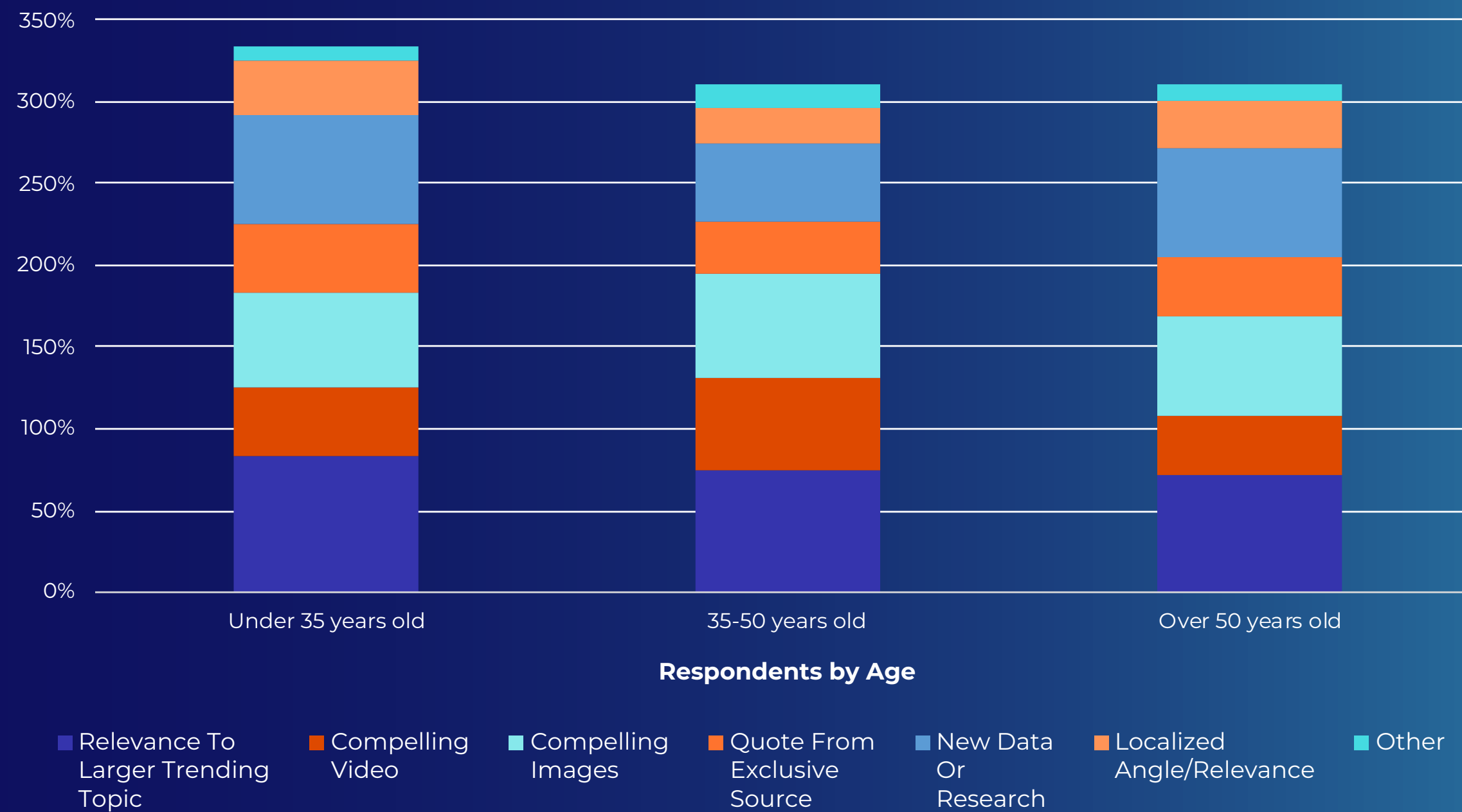
# Insights

## Content Trends

### So, what content makes a story more shareable?

Transportation journalists believe **relevance to a larger topic, compelling images and new data or research** are the three most important **elements** in making a news story sharable. These responses were selected by more than 60% of respondents – and can **help guide communications professionals when crafting pitches to targeted journalists**.

What elements make a news story more shareable?



### FUTURE

Where will content trends go in the next five years? Transportation journalists predict **the rise of electric vehicles** as a prominent content theme. And **short-form content – particularly video** – will be the dominant content format, along with emerging digital formats like augmented and virtual reality platforms.

#### **An important note about video content: it's already trending upward.**

A whopping **72%** of transportation journalists believe they will publish “more” or “significantly more” videos in five years. **22%** think this type of content will remain the same as current levels, and only **6%** believe they will be publishing less video content than they do today.

When considered alongside responses about what makes content more shareable, those surveyed agree that **the younger the target audience is, the more important video becomes.**

**It's clearly an essential content format for future audiences.**

# Insights

## Live Events Aren't Dead

In the niche world of transportation journalism, live events historically figured prominently in generating media coverage of a product or technology.

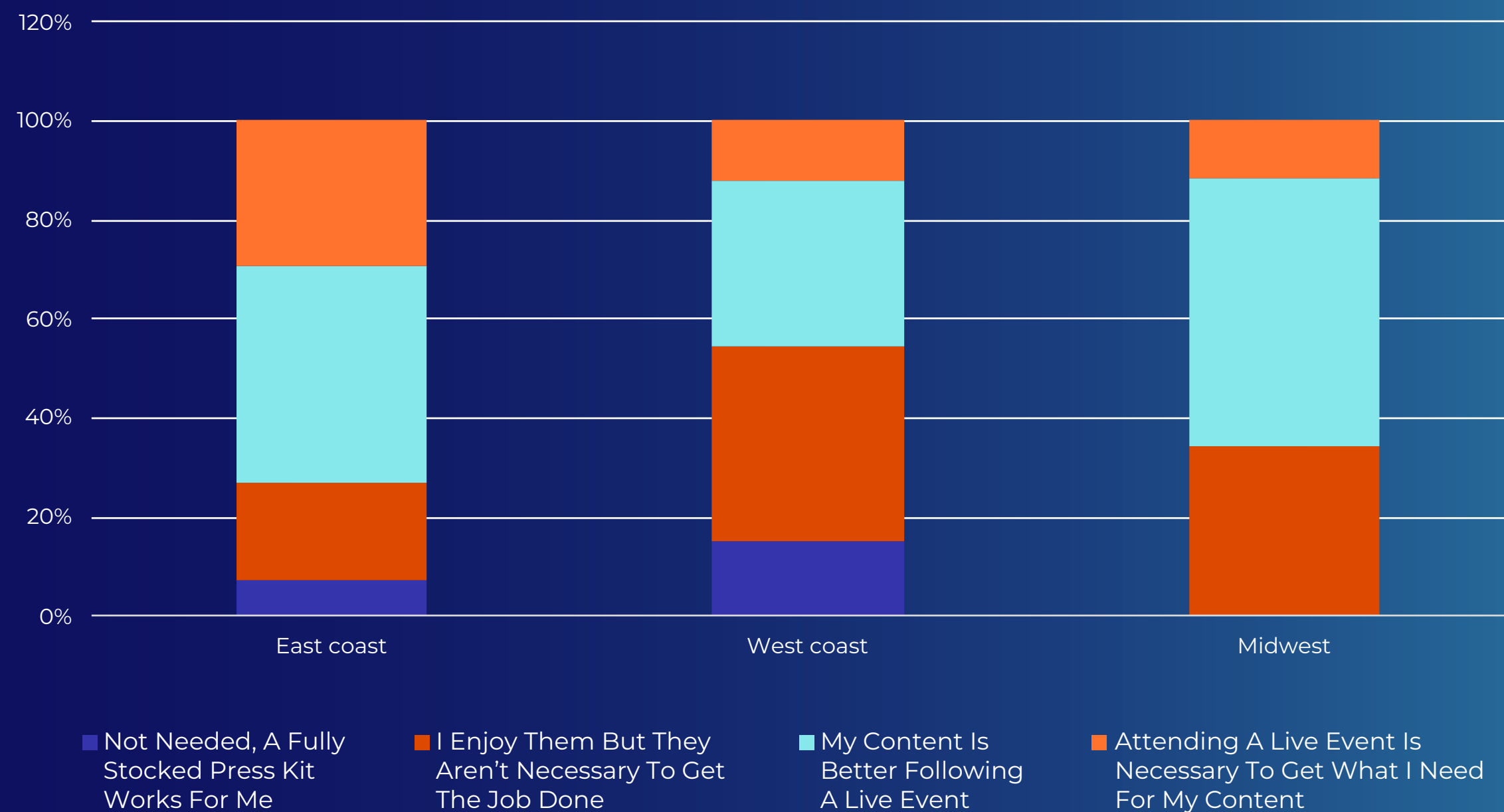
### Are they still relevant today?

Survey says **yes.**

**40%** of transportation journalists said their content is better following a live event and an additional **19%** indicated attending a live event is necessary to get what they need for their content.

**Fewer than 10%** said these events are unnecessary if given a thorough press kit.

### How important are "live events" to create content?



# Insights

## Live Events Aren't Dead

### Survey results

**80%** of journalists overwhelmingly prefer to attend events in person and genuinely enjoy doing so

**10%** of those surveyed prefer to tune in live to a virtual event with Zoom and YouTube Live

**Geographically speaking,** west coast journalists are less receptive to attending live events, while midwest journalists desire them more.

**So how do you become a trusted source of useful content?**

**Let's first take a closer look at the transportation journalist world.**

# A User Guide

Understanding the Transportation Journalist

What motivates  
journalists?

What pitch  
elements do they  
find most useful?

How do they want  
(and not want) to  
be pitched on a  
story idea?

What  
communications  
practices work  
(and don't work)  
for them?

Let's **find out.**

# A User Guide

## Measures of Success

To truly get inside the head of a transportation journalist, it's essential to understand how their success is measured.

Here's what they shared with us:

**To be successful, engagement with their content and its related generated revenue are the keys to success.**

The majority (62%) indicated the number of clicks their content receives is a priority.

Revenue generated from people who have viewed their content; the number of social media shares; and the volume of content published **are all tied for second place at 36%, 35% and 35%, respectively.**

Transportation journalists provided insights into what kind of content is most useful to them in a pitch.

**The biggest winner? Photos.**

**65%** said linked photos are useful

**51%** of those surveyed said attached photos work fine

**48%** said infographics are helpful

**47%** said linked videos are helpful

**67%** said infographics help them understand an issue but do not end up in their content



# A User Guide

## Elements of a Useful Pitch

Now that we know what they need to succeed—

### how do we give transportation journalists what they want?

Let's talk about **pitching**, because pitching the right content, the right way, at the right time is critical to developing a mutually beneficial and collaborative relationship.

### How **receptive** are transportation journalists to pitches?

**24%** never base any of their content on pitches

**54%** base content on pitches a quarter of the time

**17%** more will base content on pitch half of the time

**4%** will base content mostly or entirely on pitches.

# A User Guide

## Pitching Do's and Don'ts

While transportation journalists have individual preferences, those who we surveyed shared some essential basic tips for what to do (and what not to do) when pitching.

### DO

**Research the outlet, the journalist and recent coverage before pitching**

**Email your pitch directly, or call if it is an established contact**

**Pitch early in the week and in the morning (before noon EST)**

**Customize your pitch and keep it brief (between 100-200 words)**

**Follow up ONCE within the first week of your pitch**

**Review/proof your email and content for typos before sending**

**Provide useful assets (e.g., photos, videos, etc.)**

### DON'T

Cold call or blind pitch a journalist you haven't researched with a story that is not relevant to them

Pitch a topic that has recently been covered (without new information)

Pitch after business hours or on Friday afternoon/the weekend unless it's breaking news

Copy/paste a generic pitch

Follow up repeatedly

Sound like a salesperson

Tag or DM on social media with a pitch idea (unless you have a rapport and know they're comfortable with this)

# A User Guide

## Best and Worst Lists

Probing a little more into what works and doesn't work when developing a story, transportation journalists shared what they love and hate about websites designed for media consumption.

### BEST WEBSITES

**Easy navigation; user friendly; streamlined layout**

**Regularly updated, useful content**

**Quality content and assets, especially photo and video**

**Access to archived older content**

**Strong search function**

**Easy access to information and assets (no email registration required)**

**New info highlighted upfront**

### WORST WEBSITES

Cluttered layout; hard to navigate or find key info

Disorganized and dated content, or content that is too sales-oriented

Too little specs/product detail

Lack of historical information

Poor search function

Poor quality images; hard to access/download

Unresponsive PR contacts

# A User Guide

## Pitching Do's and Don'ts

They also shared what best (and worst) practices they've encountered when working with communications professionals in general.

### BEST PRACTICES

**Quick response or turn-around; respecting time and deadlines**

**Researching and understanding the journalist, their outlet and their audience before pitching**

**Being personable and investing in the relationship; working collaboratively**

**Providing tailored, accurate and thorough information**

**Honesty and directness in all communications**

**Being efficient/concise and getting to the point**

**Anticipating needs and being nimble with story angles**

**Sharing journalist content and following up to express gratitude**

### WORST PRACTICES

Cold pitches/pitching irrelevant stories/  
generic pitches

Pitching multiple contacts at one outlet

Pitching off-hours (late night/weekends)

Excessive follow-up

Ghosting on challenging questions

Not responding in a timely manner;  
hiding behind email and not answering  
phone calls

Not being able to provide an interviewee

Underestimating the amount of time it  
takes to do video content

# Methodology & About

## What Transportation Journalists Want

### THIS RESEARCH

This survey received 239 respondents from Stratacomm's proprietary database of transportation journalists, 97% of whom cover the transportation sector on various topics. The margin of error was +/- 5.81%. It was comprised of 38 questions, five of which were open-ended to allow respondents to express their responses in their own words.

Most respondents are freelancers or digital content creators (55%); the remainder work for consumer magazines, broadcast outlets, daily newspapers, tech-focused publications and trade outlets.

Respondents were relatively evenly geographically distributed among the east coast, west coast, midwest, and south/southwest. The majority (92%) are 35+ in age.

# About Stratacomm

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**Stratacomm knows transportation journalism—  
automotive, heavy truck, rail, aerospace and beyond.**

**D.C.**

**Detroit**

Our deepest roots lie in Detroit and Washington, D.C., and we've come of age with a generation of manufacturers, suppliers and the journalists who cover them, who we still work with today.

**360°**

**Expertise**

Our wealth of **transportation knowledge** and expertise includes automation, electrification, sustainability, mass reduction, enhanced driver and passenger safety, supplier and dealer relationship and new ownership models.

**Stratacomm**



# About Stratacomm

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**We are trusted partners with industry and media contacts—  
just ask the journalists themselves!**

“The Stratacomm people I’ve worked with have been great at what they do. They get me the proper information within the time frame I need it.”

“Fantastic! Pitches are always well-targeted with information that’s easy to grasp at a glance.”

“You guys are responsive and hardworking. The fact that you’re asking us this says a lot.”

“[Stratacomm] ... understand my needs.”

“Very professional. I never get a pitch that isn’t germane to the beat I cover. If I need further info or to set up an interview, I always get fast responses.”

“[Stratacomm] coordinated some very fun events and experiences ... that I still talk and write about.”

“Friendly folks with well-crafted and individualized pitches.”

“Excellent handling of media programs.”

# About Stratacomm

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And media relations is **just the start** of what we do.

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Stratacomm is an integrated communications agency steeped in mobility and driven by strategy. Explore our range of services – including research capabilities used to execute and analyze this survey – to learn how Stratacomm helps clients at [stratacomm.net](https://stratacomm.net).

Did you find this information helpful? We're here to help. Let us know what topic you'd like us to dive into next by contacting us at [intel@stratacomm.net](mailto:intel@stratacomm.net).

**Stratacomm**