

Hacks & Flacks Meeting Summary

Design Automation Conference, June 4, 2003

Purpose of the meeting:

To begin a discussion between editors and PR people on how we can make communication more effective and less time-consuming for all.

Panel:

- Peggy Aycinena, Contributing Editor, EDA Weekly
- Richard Goering, Group Editorial Director, CMP Media
- David Maliniak, EDA Technology Editor, Electronic Design
- Tets Maniwa, Editor, Chip Design
- Gabe Moretti, Technical Editor, EDN magazine
- Mike Santarini, EDA Editor, EE Times

Moderator: Steve Pollock, VP of Sales and Marketing, Anasift; Emerging Companies Chairman, EDAC

Questions of the panel:

- Editors, how can PR people make your life easier?
- What is most memorable and effective when a PR person gets in touch?
- What are some of the best and worst pitches you've seen?

General consensus responses from editors:

- **Quotes:** Don't include quotes in press releases. They are meaningless; these editors don't use them and feel that they just waste time and space. If they want quotes, they will get in touch to get responses to their own specific questions.
- **Know your editor/ media:** Know what an editor covers, what the publication covers, and what the lead times are before you get in touch. Look at editorial calendars. Know how we need to get images. Realize that we're not interchangeable – each have different needs.
- **Technical articles:** [Mixed opinions, depending upon publication.] EET likes to have technical articles copy edited by PR as a first cut at editing; remainder are put off by polished writing and would prefer something straight from the engineer.
- **Attachments:** Most editors prefer not to get attachments, but to have text cut and pasted into the body of an e-mail.
- **Marketing/ sales language:** It undermines your credibility with editors and will not be used.
- **Follow-up:** Don't call and ask when a piece will run. It is out of the hands of most editors.
- **Pricing:** Include pricing (at least a range) in any new product announcement. For most publications, it is policy NOT to run info on a new product without pricing.

General comments from PR people:

- **Quotes:** Wire services pick up releases; quotes are useful there, on Yahoo, and for some other media not on the panel. Quotes should be more substantive than “this is great,” “this is better than...”
- **Info on editors/ media:** Sometimes it's hard to find the information on web sites, and what's there (about editors or submissions) is incomplete.

Suggestions:

- Have an annual Hacks and Flacks meeting. Aim for roundtable discussion rather than editors on a podium
- Make info on editorial guidelines/ editors' needs accessible from the editor contact page on publication websites
- Set up a chat board so that both editors and PR folks can discuss things with our peers.

Summary of responses/ ideas from each editor:

Aycinena:

- Please, no attachments. Cut and paste text into the body of an email.
- I have five words for you: contribution, attribution, competition, retribution, and prostitution.
 - On contribution: PR people are an important part of the pipeline. There is no pecking order; we're all in it together.
 - On attribution: I refused to run an article that was full of marketing b.s. The technical marketing manager called me and said that the author, a woman on the technology team, was in tears because I wouldn't run her story. The company's PR person called me later and said she wrote the story; there was no woman in tears. The manager lost all credibility and I did not run the story. Moral of the story: don't push the editors to do something they don't want to do.
 - On Competition: All publications compete with each other. It makes the industry healthy. If I get a story, I'll run it, and I don't care if it is after my competition runs the story. Embargoes need to be honored and I honor them. But don't call me at 6 a.m. or 10 p.m. to tell me I have to kill a story or give me a piece before break date if you've promised an exclusive to another publication. I work at home. Just call me during normal business hours. I'll understand.
 - On retribution: Editors don't keep "black lists" of PR people they refuse to deal with. Everyone makes mistakes, if that happens, just admit it and move on.
 - On prostitution: Editorial and PR should not be in bed with each other. Don't think your friendship with an editor will buy you a story. We can be grumpy given that we work 24/7 and have constant deadlines. There is a difference between friendship and business. Both editors and the PR community get mistaken cues sometimes.
- Unlike most of the other panelists, I concentrate on the human side of technology.
- **Reader's want:** remember to include the human side.

Goering:

- Understand my job. It is not to run your press releases; it is to present stories my readers want to read, to assemble a constantly loyal audience for EET. Know what kinds of stories draw readership; make what you have to say understandable to our whole readership. Have a sense for what we need: something real. Good technology stories, news; things that will help engineers do their jobs.
- I get a lot of PR-sourced press releases full of "marketese." I don't have the faintest idea what it says. I need enough technical information to know what questions to ask in a follow-up.
- What's most useful is good clear technology information, timeliness, complete information
- If it's a product revision story, the release should say what's new and different in the new release vs. the old release. It's often very difficult to tell from a release if what is being announced is new.
- Find an interesting angle to the story. For example - we don't normally run personnel releases, but ReShape announced a new VP engineering that they found in Antarctica. That was an interesting angle and we ran the story with some interesting pictures of the guy next to a glacier.
- Presentations: why do you DO these? I will never sit through a presentation, and can look up your company/ executives' backgrounds if I want that information. I've seen enough Moore's Law slides to last a lifetime. Also don't need to see customer logos. It only increases the megabytes needed to download and store this stuff, and increases the download time. What would be more useful would be a well-written whitepaper explaining the technology, with good diagrams.
- **Readers want:** they don't want single-product stories... anything user-oriented they like. Recently, favorites have been SNUG reports, info on asynchronous resets, technology issues, research on lab work at Intel or IBM.

Maliniak:

- It's the age of the web, but some publications have longer lead times. Respect that.
- Please understand the resolutions of images we need.
- Put things in context of the flows and methodology.
- Quotes are useless. Have a customer available to talk to. The best would be to give me the name of one customer with a good experience, and one with a not so good experience using your tool.
- The best pitch is complete – i.e., it has a good product description, price, and availability. It needs to be a real product, not vaporware.
- **Readers want:** No News; also a long lead. Technology and methodology focus. Help me put things in context. Remember this is not an adversarial relationship. We need each other; we can't do our jobs well without each other.

Maniwa:

- Don't think of us as being interchangeable parts. We all have different needs, different deadlines, etc.
 - Quotes are useless. Get them out. Put the information on one page, and give me contact information at the bottom. If I want more information, I'll call the contact.
 - No nonsense statement, please. Explain clearly what's going on.
 - Engineers WILL write articles, believe it or not. I have an article I wrote on how to convince an engineer to write an article
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- **Readers want:** to know how to solve problems, how to do their job better. I have space for three stories; I get 150 – 200 things to choose from. No news; I have a 3-4 month lead-time.

Moretti:

- I'm not a reporter, I'm an editor. Understand my job and my publication. My magazine comes out monthly or bi-monthly. We deal with fact, not fiction. I need news about products that are real, not products that are coming out in six months.
- Use email, not phone, to contact me.
- EDN's policy is not to run quotes unless I get them myself. Don't ask me to fight battles with my management. I've run four quotes in 3+ years with EDN. Those four quotes, I talked to the people directly.
- MUST have pricing information. I have to tell people, "No price, no coverage." Or, in the case of IP where there isn't one single price, tell me your pricing policy.
- Never call me and ask when a story will run. I have no clue. I'm the writer, not the publisher. I just write the stories and send them to the managing editor. She runs it when she can. You'll probably see the article before I do.
- Moretti: Regarding contributed articles, EDN has a very specific policy. Go to our web site (www.ednmag.com) - read Joan Lynch's "How to Write for EDN." EDN editors do the cleanup, put it in EDN style. We want articles by engineers. I'll know if an engineer has written the story within the first few sentences
- **Reader's want:** Our readers are practicing design engineers. They want problem/ solution articles. They also want to know what still is NOT solved.

Santarini:

- I'm a reporter. This is a minute-by-minute job. I judge PR people on turn-around time: How quickly can you get me to the person I need to talk to?
- Quotes are useless; we don't even want to see them. I've received many press releases with customer quotes that say "put customer name here" ... that's useless.
- If it's a product announcement, I need to know what goes into it, what comes out, and what's in the middle – how is it used? Why is it useful to engineers?
- You can get contributed articles from engineers – and then the PR people can clean them up and send to us. PR people serve as a great buffer, cleaning up the article. Articles from engineers are the best, most helpful.
- We understand that PR is sometimes the whipping boy between the marketing person who screwed up and the editor. Everyone blames the PR person.
- Be real with me, not just friendly when you need me.
- **Reader's want:** I want a scoop; feed me scoops.

Q&A:

(Answers included above and in "Suggestions")

- Why haven't we gotten it right yet? What are we not doing at a higher level to build right relationships?
- How do we keep an open conduit of communication?
- I'd like to see more international editors on the panel.
- Could each panelist tell us what are readers asking for?

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