Building a working rapport with journalists is key to meeting everyone’s needs. In order to do so, you have to understand the news business.

**News is a deadline business.** A story that is not filed by deadline is wasted. Reporters are pushed to file today’s story today – however they can get it – and then move on to their next story. So get in front of a reporter early in the day and be responsive and timely in your correspondence.

**News is a simplification process.** In many cases, the more succinct your comments, the more likely a reporter will use them. Reporters have to compress time into a very limited space (column inches) or time allotment (broadcast seconds). Their stories have to be easily understood by the public with a limited attention span.

**News is highly stylized and packaged.** You must think like editors and reporters. The better the quality and presentation of information, the better the chances are of the story being used.

**Be mindful of information overload.** Today’s reporters are responsible for covering multiple beats and producing several stories daily. They receive hundreds of emails and dozens of phone calls every day, so it’s important that your pitch is clear, concise and persuasive.

**Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds:**
A common and fairly easy way to increase your share of voice is through opinion-editorials or letters to the editor.

Opinion-editorials offer you the opportunity to publish your view on a particular topic, piece of legislation or event within your community without the filter of a reporter.

Do you ever see a story in your local paper that incorrectly portrays our industry and your business, or opens the door to discuss the value beer distributors provide? You can respond and correct the facts with a letter to the editor.

Here are some tips:

- The Key: Write well, be succinct and tell an engaging anecdote.
- Timeliness is Everything: Aim to send your letter to the editor the same day or the day after an article runs. Many papers will print letters to the editor the next day or the following day, so sending your response quickly via email increases your chance of being included in the conversation.
- Less is Best: Many papers have a specific word limit, which is generally posted on their websites. In general, aim to submit no more than 250 words.
- Stick to One Point: A letter to the editor should not read like a commercial – the paper will not run your letter if it comes across as a sales pitch for your company. This is an opportunity for your company to share your opinion on a particular topic, so clearly and concisely state your support or objections to the topic at hand and do not stray too far into other areas of interest. Give an example or anecdote where appropriate to provide interest.
- Contact Information: In your signature, make sure to include your name, title, company, email and mailing address. Papers will only print your name and company, and possibly your city, but all contact information is required for credibility and confirmation.
Here is an example of a letter to the editor penned by a beer distributor and a craft brewer in the state of Missouri that responds to an op-ed and communicates the role of beer distributors in helping craft brewers grow and providing consumers with a vast beer selection:

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Distribution system is key to craft brewers’ success

June 2, 2014

America’s craft brewers are an American success story. With more than 2,800 breweries operating in the U.S. and a new brewery opening each day, craft beer provides significant contributions to the American beer industry and the overall economy.

“Antiquated, burdensome laws hurt craft brewers” (May 28) praised the entrepreneurial spirit for craft brewers, but wrongly criticized a system that has been key to their success. Craft beer’s exponential growth — 18 percent last year — has been propelled by the effectiveness of an independent, three-tier distribution system (brewer, distributor and retailer) and laws that support an open and transparent marketplace where brewers of all sizes can compete and gain access to all retailers of all sizes.

This distribution system, regulated by the states, provides the infrastructure for craft brewers to reach a wide network of retailers and customers. Local businesses like ours work to ensure consumers see a vast selection of beers on menus and in retail outlets. The system helps brewers like Springfield-based Mother’s Brewing build a name, establish a brand and generate a loyal following of consumers. Premium Beverage Sales in Springfield and its 60 employees are proud to be part of this system that promotes new and exciting brews to retailers — large and small — and deliver a wide selection of beer tailored to consumer preferences.

In short, brewers aim to make good beer, and distributors aim to ensure that good beer reaches retailers for consumers to enjoy. This is an exciting time in the beer industry, and America’s 3,300 beer distribution facilities are eager to deliver the robust selection of tasty options being created by innovative brewers to consumers in Missouri and across the country.

Brian Gelner • Springfield, Mo.
Vice president, Premium Beverage Sales

Jeff Schrag • Springfield, Mo.
Founder, Mother's Brewing