

Media Databases: The Ultimate Guide





A **media database** is a structured directory of journalist and influencer contact information. This allows communications professionals to search and find the right people to reach out to when seeking earned media coverage.

Intro

You know those dreams where you try to scream but nothing comes out?

You've just had a meeting with your executives. You're going public with some of the biggest news your organization has ever been a part of. This is going to change everything.

Now you're at the microphone, in front of a room full of reporters. The big names are all there: The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, CNN. You smile your winning smile, clear your throat, and let 'em have it.

But nothing comes out.

You can't for the life of you get any words out. You're standing at the mic, speechless.

And that amazing announcement? I guess we'll never know.

This is what public relations is like without a media database.

If you don't have a way to find the right journalists with the right contact details, no matter how revolutionary, feel-good, or just plain awesome your announcement is, it will never get past your own lips.

Media database. Media list. PR list. Press database. Whatever you want to call it...

...it's a media relations super-tool and it's integral for PR and communications professionals.

This page is going to delve deep into what a media database is and what it can do for you.

We're going to talk about everything from what exactly a media database is and what it's used for, to how you can use one to make the most of your revolutionary, feel-good, and awesome announcements.

Here's how we're going to break it down:

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What is a media database?

So what exactly is a media database?

It's a fancy term for a list.

At its simplest, a media database is a list of journalists, reporters, and other influencers, like bloggers and social media personalities.

It's a list that lets you search by a variety of filters – like outlet, region, media type, etc. – to find the most relevant and best fitting media contacts for your organization or campaign.

But a media database is not just a list of the people to whom you want to reach out, it also provides the means to reach out, giving you their contact details. The best ones even provide areas of interest and social media links so you can get to know your would-be advocates that much better.

A media database is how you **find** and **connect** with your ideal advocate.

So just who exactly is in a media database?

Like we said above, it's populated with journalists, reporters, and other influencers.

But let's break this down a bit.

Journalists vs influencers

Journalists can be influencers, but not all influencers are journalists.

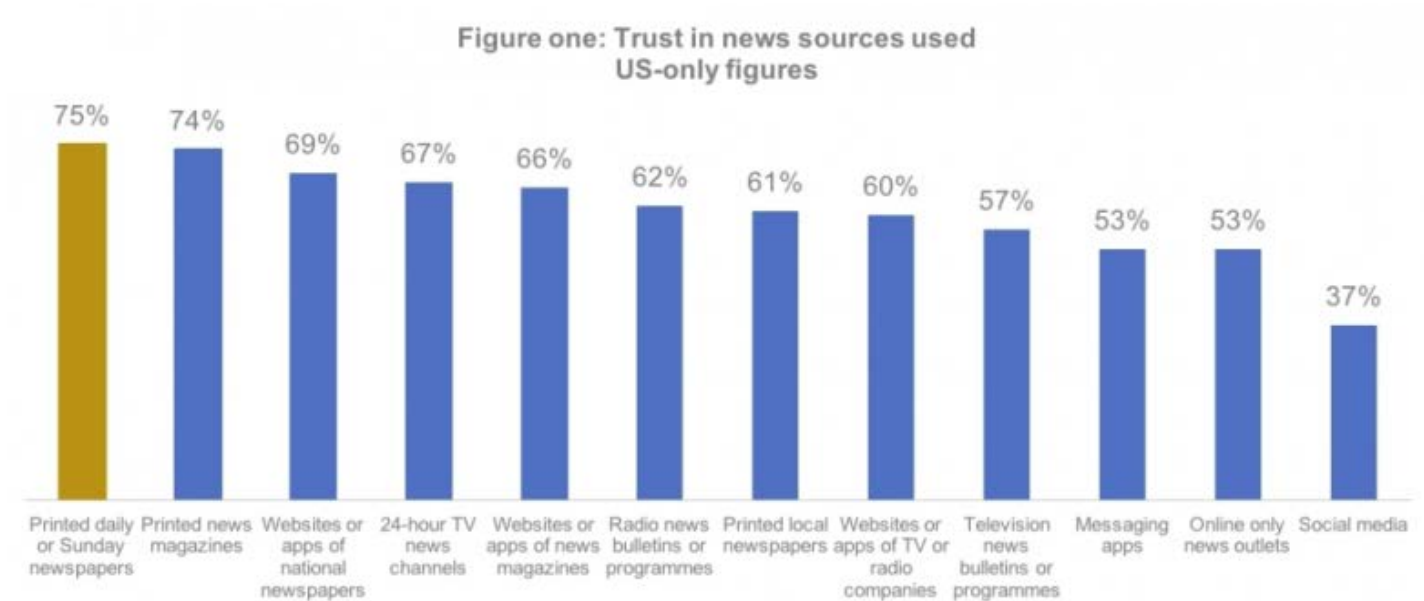
Does that help?

Okay, how about this?

Journalists are the original influencers. Long before the internet came along, they were the ones the public turned to for information. They've always had the credibility of their outlet and

the confidence of their readers. And that hasn't changed.

Despite the proliferation of fake news and the growing narrative that the media is not to be trusted, [a 2017 study](#) from research, data, and insight consultancy Kantar found that daily newspapers enjoy a trust rating of 75% among American adults.



But when people talk about influencers, more often than not they mean [social media influencers](#).

They mean the people on Twitter and Instagram and Pinterest who have the hearts and minds of their followers.

Jack Simpson of [Econsultancy](#) defines them as individuals who have the ability to influence the opinions (and buying decisions) of a specific audience.

And, just like journalists, social media influencers belong to varying tiers according to their industry authority: celebrities (1M+ followers); macro-influencers (100K-1M), and; [micro-influencers](#) (<100K). And each has their own allure as a champion for your brand.

When it comes to spreading your message, both journalists and social media influencers have their advantages. Journalists have the credibility of their profession and the clout of their outlet behind them; influencers have the trust of their followers and can be a critical word-of-

mouth advocate or awareness builder for your organization; an authentic recommendation has more power than you know.

IF YOU AREN'T SURE WHICH TYPE OF INFLUENCER IS RIGHT FOR YOU – ASK YOURSELF WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE'S ATTENTION IS.

Is it with traditional journalists or the digital authorities? Once you answer this, simply align your efforts with the channels your audience pays attention to.

And regardless of who your ideal third-party advocate is, check to make sure the database has those types of people in it; some focus strictly on social media personalities, after all. Because having the right influencer spread your good word can make all the difference.

Functionality

A media database helps you search for (and find) the most relevant journalists and influencers. The best ones even have [features](#) that allow you to learn about their interests and what they're writing about, so you can personalize your outreach and increase the chance of landing that elusive earned media.

MEDIA DATABASE FUNCTIONALITY



When it comes to functionality, a basic media database will make it easy to search for journalists based on keywords, beat (what they write about), region, type of media (radio, print, and so on), etc. It should also have detailed contact info for them, not just general inbox emails. Ideally, a basic database will also let you save your lists and/or the search criteria for future use. The provider should also have a research team that constantly reviews, updates, and adds contacts to the database. This eliminates those annoying bounce-backs and missed opportunities, and saves you the headache of trying to stay on top of every [media move](#).

PR databases with more advanced functionality may also have distribution capabilities built right in, so you can personalize and send emails to the journalists in your lists. Some also have tracking so you know who opened your email and where they clicked, making follow-up so much easier.

When it comes to the ultimate level of functionality in a media database, you get ways and means to discover new influencers and really get to know the ones in your lists. You get access to the published articles and social posts of the journalists and influencers you are researching, so you know exactly what they're working on right now, what they've covered in the past, and how they've done it. You also gain insight into any personal interests or quirks they might have, knowledge you can use to make your pitch stand out.

When you can do deep research into the ones you want advocating for you, the better you can craft and tailor your pitches. The more you know, the more success you'll have with your outreach.

Influencer Streams

The screenshot displays the 'Influencer Streams' interface with four columns of content. The first column is filtered by the keyword 'parliament' and shows tweets from James Dowling, Alice Coster, and Steven Wardill. The second column is filtered by 'newsjacking' and shows tweets from Eleanor Dickinson. The third column is filtered by 'Technology writers' and shows a tweet about energy usage for laundry. The fourth column is filtered by 'Canadian Technology Engli' and shows tweets from Claire Neary and Ian Bailey. A profile card for Janko Roettgers is overlaid on the third column, providing details about his role as a Senior Silicon Valley Correspondent at Variety, his outlet website, potential audience of 26,954, and social media handles.

So there you have it! Now that you know exactly what a media database is, who's in it, and what features distinguish the good from the very good, let's talk about why you need one.

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Why you need a media database

As we've said, trying to execute a successful public relations campaign without the use of a media database is like trying to scream without a voice.

The truth is, **databases give you access to the people who can spread your message.**

But there's more to it than that.

The journalists and influencers a media database connects you with are gatekeepers. They have the eyes and ears and hearts of your audience. They deliver your message with credibility and – ideally – authority.

You need a media database because, simply put, **media relations still matters.**

Media relations

The world is changing. The way we consume information is changing. And, for PR people, so too is the way we interact with the media gatekeepers.

A bit of context: media relations holds a special place in the world of PR. Plainly put (thanks to [Wikipedia](#)), it's the practice of working with members of the media “for the purpose of informing the public of an organization’s mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner.” And whether you advocate [a return to its glory days](#), or claim that we need to embrace a more modern approach, it's clear that media relations is essential.

But it's not like it used to be, where you had your trusty Rolodex of reporters whom you'd rely on to get your story out there, where you'd call your local newshound and the next thing you knew – boom! – front page.



However, despite the changes, interacting with those in the media and convincing them to spread your message is still the backbone of what you do.

Alex Slater, founder and managing director of D.C.-based [Clyde Group](#), agrees:

“THE CORE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IS RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, AND IT’S BASED ON A MUTUAL RESPECT BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND PR PRACTITIONERS.”

With a database, you can get back to building long term, mutually beneficial relationships with journalists – what media relations should be. Databases make it easy to find the right people, do your research on them, and reach out to them effectively – even if you’ve never spoken to them before.

Whether you’re big or small, an established player or the new kid on the block, a not-for-profit or a financial giant, securing and managing media coverage is a fact of life.

But it’s not easy when the only constant of the media world is that things are in constant upheaval.

- Journalists move around a lot.
- Their emails change.
- They hardly ever have a physical desk in an office anymore...
- and if they do, they’re hardly ever at it.

They may even write for a number of publications about a number of subjects. They may work a specific beat but write articles about a personal area of interest as well.

**WITH A MEDIA DATABASE AT YOUR DISPOSAL,
EARNING COVERAGE BECOMES THAT MUCH EASIER.**

Conversely, trying to get press coverage when you have no clue whom to pitch? Not so much.

Nowadays, your “local” newshounds are global, and that front page is as elusive as Bigfoot. Your Rolodex has to keep up or your messages will never land. Enter the media database.

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How to use a media database

Not all media databases are created equal.

They vary in size, regions served, and data accuracy, among other things. But, generally speaking, the way you use a media database is constant across the industry.

(Keep in mind, we know and love [our database](#) the best, and it's the one we spend the most time in, so we're kind of assuming that everyone else's works the same way. If you're using another one and it doesn't have features like ours or sound as easy to use, no harm in talking to us about switching.)

When you log in, you'll see your dashboard. It will have handy little charts on handy little things like your recent distributions and whom you've been targeting.

From there, you begin your search and start building your lists.

There are typically three ways to do this:

1. Search by beats/topics
2. Search by outlets/journalists
3. Keyword search

A few words about each...

Search by beats/topics

For those young'uns who've grown up in a newspaperless world, a "beat" is a particular issue, sector, organization, or institution that a reporter specializes in.

Read: [Beats vs. areas of interest: how to catch a journalist's attention](#)

This is the way your grandpappy built his lists. But don't be fooled – it can still be very effective.

When you search by beat, you identify those journalists who primarily write about a certain topic eg. oil and gas, semiconductors, or college football. These are the experts, the authorities on your subject, and their audience (aka your audience) listens to them.

Search by outlets/journalists

Sometimes you'll have a client who is desperate to get some coverage in a particular outlet, whether it be a specialty publication or a top-tier national one. When this is the case, simply search for that outlet and the database will return every single person on its roster. From there, you can drill down to see which ones are worth contacting.

Likewise for specific journalists. If you know the name of the influencer you want to target, simply type it in, see if they're in the database, and add them to your list. Badaboom.

Keyword search

Here's where the best databases set themselves apart.

If you're having trouble finding suitable media contacts searching by beats or outlets, try the keyword search.

It works like this:

When you type in a term, the database searches the text of articles (this requires the tool be integrated with a media monitoring solution). It then can identify who is writing about the keyword(s) for specific topics, industries, or even competitors. Agility has an integrated monitoring solution that pulls in millions of articles every day – so you're searching billions of articles.

This easy-to-use, effective, amazingly useful way to search also makes it simple to identify non-traditional journalists – like bloggers or influencers – who may not cover a conventional beat or subject.

Media databases allow for hyper targeting.

By employing filters like media type, location, job role, publication frequency, news focus, etc. – you can drill down to such a depth that you all but guarantee the contacts you find are the perfect ones.

Filters make your pitches count. When you refine your search results, you create a list of the people most likely to want to hear from you and spread your message.

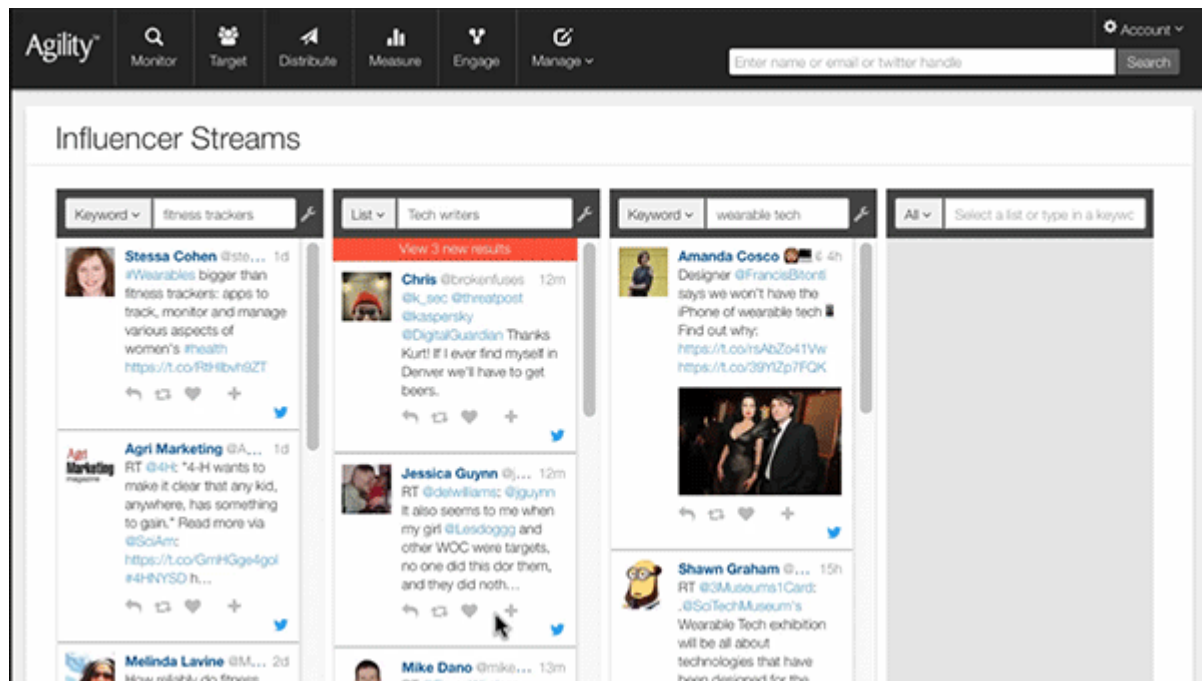
There's power in that.

You can also apply filters to a keyword search, which helps when you need to build a niche list. For example, filters let you find journalists who have written about the Oscars but normally cover sports, or influencers who are known for blogging about high-tech but might sometimes dabble in ballet reviews.

The screenshot shows the 'Research and Target Media' search interface on the Agility PR Solutions website. The navigation bar includes 'MONITOR', 'TARGET' (highlighted), 'DISTRIBUTE', 'MEASURE', 'ENGAGE', and 'MANAGE'. A search bar in the top right contains the text 'Name, email or @twitter'. The main content area is titled 'Research and Target Media' with the subtitle 'Search our global media database for journalists, outlets, and bloggers writing about your topics and industry.' Below this, there is a 'Search for' dropdown menu set to 'PEOPLE' and a link to 'Try our new keyword search'. The search filters are organized into sections: 'writing about:' and 'located in:'; 'with the job role:' and 'publishing in:'. A section titled 'and working for outlets...' includes 'named:', 'in the format:', 'writing about:', and 'covering the area:'. The final section, 'then narrowed down by...', features 'media type:', 'news focus:', 'publication frequency:', and a checkbox for 'including blog outlets'. Each filter has a corresponding input field or dropdown menu.

Keyword search 2.0

The Agility database has yet another feature that takes keyword search even further: Influencer Streams returns articles AND tweets containing your chosen keyword. But it sets itself apart from Hootsuite and TweetDeck in that it only shows you tweets from journalists and influencers, not just anyone with a Twitter handle. Influencer Streams also lets you interact directly with the journalists you find, retweeting, following, or replying to their posts, thereby making yourself known and establishing a rapport before you even reach out.



First you do the searching, then you build the lists, then it's all about the...

Distribution

Getting coverage depends on making sure your pitch gets read – that means you must [stand out from the 100 other pitches](#) that journalist got today. As a communicator you know that to have a message hit home you need to tailor it to an audience. As Alex Slater says, “Above all, tailor your pitch.”

A database makes it simple to create multiple media lists – lists that you can use for different types of pitches or even to spin the same story in a different way to appeal to a niche list of journalists, eg. ones who write about business but have a personal interest in sports.

By segmenting your database into focused lists of influencers who cover niche topics, your chances of getting coverage increases. The spray-and-pray method is passé and plain does not work. Journalists are tired of getting pitches that don't apply to them. As explained in our [Media Matchmaker whitepaper](#), 73% of journalists responded that their number one pet peeve is PR pros not knowing their beat. Nothing irks an influencer more than getting a mass email about something irrelevant to them.



Lucky for you, today's media databases further distinguish themselves from the Rolodexes of old by also being distribution platforms.

This is the way ours works...

Step 1:

Choose the list to which you want to send your pitch.

Step 2:

Set up your distribution. That is, name your release (for your own tracking), come up with a fantastic email subject line (because [we all know how important those are](#)), specify whose name will appear in the "from" field and what "reply-to address" is shown, and decide whether you want to send the pitch as soon as you build it or schedule it for later.

Step 3:

The meat of the thing. This is where you build the content of the email.

To make it easy on you, we've developed a feature that lets you **import a Microsoft Word document directly into the email body**. The beauty of the tool is that everything you created in Word gets imported just as you intended, formatting fully intact. You shouldn't have to build your pitch twice.

Another feature at this step is the mail merge option. You can personalize your email by inserting a unique first name, last name, outlet name, city, and Twitter handle. This customization is pretty standard in most every email marketing platform, but it's worth mentioning; Statista reported in 2014 that the open rate for emails with a personalized message was 17.6%, compared to 11.4% without personalization ([source](#)).

Step 4:

Confirm. Take a last look at all the details, make sure you're putting your best pitch forward, and hit submit.

You are now the proud owner of an optimized pitch destined to earn you some kick-ass coverage.

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How to choose a media database

Well hang on a minute here...

Before you figure out how to choose a media database, you might be asking yourself, "Do I need one at all?"

Fair question.

Build vs. Buy

If you're doing any kind of PR work, you will have to keep track of contact information for a number of journalists and influencers. But do you need to source a media database tool, or can you just [keep track of your own lists](#)?

The answer to this age-old PR question will depend on a few things, but the biggest factor has to be the number of journalists and influencers you regularly contact – or hope to contact.

If you're operating in a relatively small and local information economy, there is probably only a handful of journalists who would ever even consider covering your stories. If this is your situation, it's safe to say you don't need a professional grade media database solution.

Maintaining your own lists?

PRO	CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ No financial investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ You have to make sure the contact information is up to date■ Find and add new contacts on your own■ You may have out of date contacts and not even know it■ No integrated way to send to email list■ Can't easily track opens or responses

If, on the other hand, you are operating in a bigger arena (think state-wide, national, or international) or you have a number of different publics you need to reach, then things are different. There may be dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of journalists and influencers who might be interested in covering your stories – but only if you can reach them.

What professional media databases do really well is save you time.

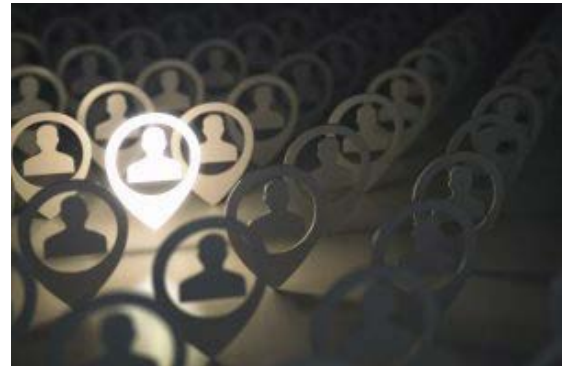
And we all know that for PR and comms folks, time is at a premium.

That's why a good media database can be your best friend.

You know, that friend who's forever got your back, would never let you down, and is always there in a pinch.

A good media database does the heavy lifting, the behind-the-scenes, thankless work...and never moans for recognition. Making sure you have the most up-to-date contact details of the most hard-to-find influencer at the most out-of-the-way outlet...for your old friend the good media database, that's thanks enough.

At Agility PR Solutions, our research team's only job is to track down contact details and update the database with the accurate data. They're hunters and gatherers, and they make sure that when you reach out to a journalist or influencer, your email will get where it needs to go.



And for those rare times that you do get a bounce-back, a good database will automatically alert its researchers, so the team can get to work finding the correct address and update it, meaning the next time you email that contact, it will get through.

As a communications professional, you're busy crafting high quality messages. This is your [superpower](#). This is the work that will generate the biggest impact for you. If you're spending your limited time and energy on the endless task of maintaining a media database...you're not investing your time well. Please stop.



Now, when it comes time to buy, to choose the database that's right for you – whether you're switching providers or it's your first time subscribing to one – you're going to want to do your homework before signing.

Questions to ask a media database provider

This section is designed to help you [ask the right questions](#) so you get a solution that's right for you. So read on, you discerning professional!

1. **How many UNIQUE journalists and influencers does the database have in your industry? In your region?**

Some database providers will claim huge numbers of contacts but count a single journalist who works for three outlets as three contacts. Beware the bloated database.

2. **Is the database global?**

Or are there core markets, regions, industries, etc. that they specialize in? Your business will determine which type of database you require.

3. **How often is contact information updated, new contacts added?**

You want this to be as frequently as possible. Ideally, there's a research team adding and updating thousands of records every day.

4. **Can you request research into new contacts in a niche market (Harry Potter-loving healthcare writers in Malawi)?**

Some database vendors will do custom research and find contacts in a niche market or region – and really amazing ones will do it with a smile, usually within a couple business days.

5. **How easy and intuitive is the tool?**

If you need an advanced degree to figure out how to build a list, that's a red flag. If the user reviews you read on review sites like G2 Crowd talk about how simple and straightforward things are, you might have a winner.

6. **Can you save and export lists?**

Yes, you can? Good.

No, you can't? Bad.

7. **Is it possible to save search criteria so your lists can be automatically updated with the latest contacts and info?**

The biggest issue with maintaining your own list is keeping up with all the media moves. You want a database that lets you save your searches (using keywords and filters, of course) so your lists automagically (#notypo) update without you having to do a thing. And when new journalists do appear in your lists, you'll see an icon beside their name, so you can know immediately who the new kid in town is, and treat them accordingly.

8. **Are you able to reach out to influencers with personalized pitches directly from the platform?**

That is to say, is email distribution built in? And what about tracking capabilities? Sending emails to your lists right from the platform is good and useful; what's better is knowing who opened them and on what links they clicked. You want both.

9. **Can you easily format your pitch or add multimedia to it?**

Hint: it's so much easier when the answer to these questions is "yes."

0. **What post-sales support and training is provided?**

Is it free or is there an additional cost? Are you given a login and that's the last you hear from them until it's time to renew?

1. **How much does the database cost?!**

Look for a company that's open and transparent about [pricing](#). Do they have prices posted on their website or do you have to talk to a salesperson first?

2. **What are the payment terms?**

Is there room for flexibility? For example, can you pay monthly instead of annually?

Is there an auto-renew clause? (Most have this so make sure you read the fine print.)

3. **Are there references you can consult?**

If so, make sure they aren't handpicked by the vendor. Get the real story on a review site like [G2](#) [Crowd](#).

There's a lot to consider when it comes to media databases, but what most every PR professional already knows – and what we've been trying to tell you over the last 3,500 words or so – is that, bottom line, **you need one**.

Because no matter how overwhelming it can seem, how many variables there can be – from the database's size to its contact accuracy to the regions and industries it serves – engaging in public relations without a media database is tricky at best, madness at worst.

We're here to take away any angst that comes with choosing. We're here to show you that [the Agility media database](#) is the only one you'll ever need. With our phenomenal research and support teams – and, of course, our phenomenal database itself! – we're here to make sure Agility does in fact become your best friend.

Want the inside scoop? Let us give you the grand tour of our CONNECT Package – the ultimate media database and influencer outreach suite.

[TALK TO US ABOUT OUR MEDIA DATABASE](#)