



Q1 2024

# Propel Media Barometer

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The framework  
of a perfect pitch



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## Thank you!

# Overview

Each quarter, the Propel team does an extensive study on nearly a half million PR email pitches sent to journalists, sharing key findings in a quarterly Media Barometer report. The goal of these reports is to highlight overarching trends and changes in the PR industry to make it easier for any organization to get the earned coverage that exceeds their branding goals in an increasingly challenging media environment.

It's not surprising that securing high-quality press coverage continues to become more difficult, especially given newsroom resources getting stretched ever thinner, the threat of deep fakes and misinformation, as well as a constant demand for strong PR across industries. This report will show you how to optimize your journalist outreach strategy when pitching news for your brand or clients based on the performance of over 425,000 pitches sent during Q4 of 2023.

## Here are a few key findings from our email PR pitching study:

- The average response rate to pitches was **3.15%**, a 5.41% decrease, but a rate more in line with the rest of the year
- The most popular day of the week was **Monday** (24.67% of all pitches), but pitches sent on **Tuesday** received the highest response rate (35.69% response rate)
- Subject lengths of **1-5** words were responded to the most (3.88%) but subject lengths of **6-9** words were sent the most (34.99%)
- Pitches with body lengths of **51-150** words were responded to the most (3.03%)
- There was a 22% **increase** in podcast pitching, but an 11.4% **decrease** in responses
- No pitches using Taylor Swift as a hook were responded to

# Journalist engagement



# Q4 2023 open & response rates: Q/Q comparisons

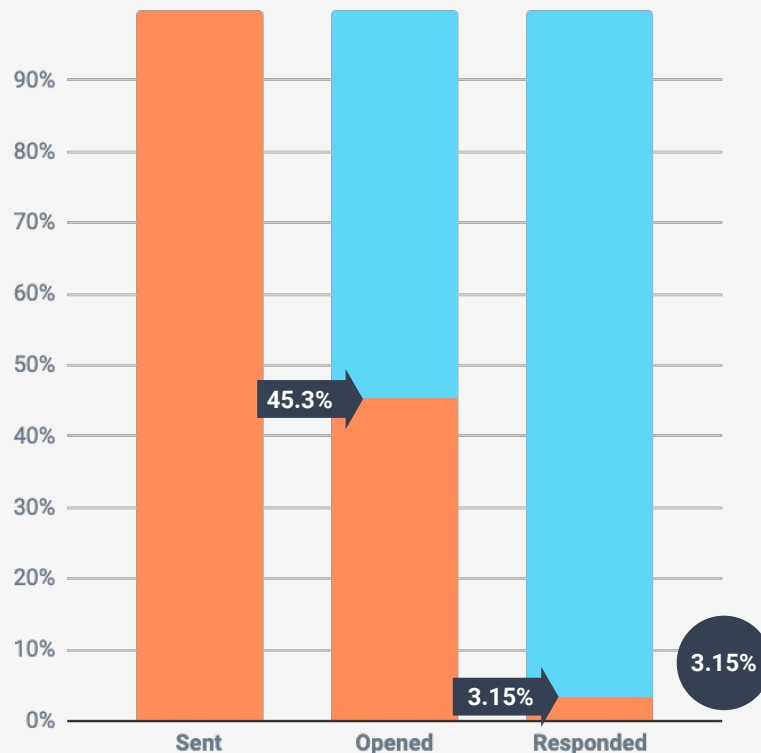
Journalists opened an average of **45.3%** of the pitches they received.

- The average open rate to all pitches in Q4 of 2023 dropped slightly from what we saw regarding pitch engagement from Q3 of 2023 (48.28%). This drop is a bit worrying, as it is the second quarter in a row with dropping open rates.

Journalists responded to an average of **3.15%** of the pitches they received. A response can include anything from “no thank you” to “I’ll take the story.”

- This drop puts the Q4 2023 response rate more in line with the rest of the year, reversing the gains seen in Q3 2023. However, drops between Q3 and Q4 are common, with similar reductions in response volumes being recorded in 2021 and 2022 as journalists go on vacation. However, it should be noted that journalist response rates are still higher this quarter than they were in both Q1 and Q2 of 2023.

Average open & response rates

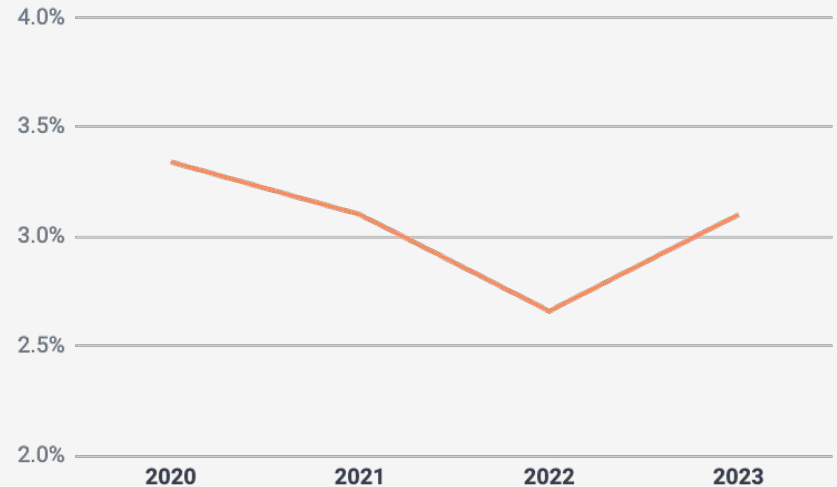


# Journalist engagement explored: Y/Y comparisons

The continued overall increase in response rates in the second half of 2023 coincides with the rise of genAI and its large-scale incorporation into PR workflows.

Thought leaders have been arguing that genAI will be a game changing tool in the PR toolbox because it will free them up to focus on the more core aspects of PR. So far, the numbers continue to support this.

Q4 Average Journalist Response Rate (%)



# Timing

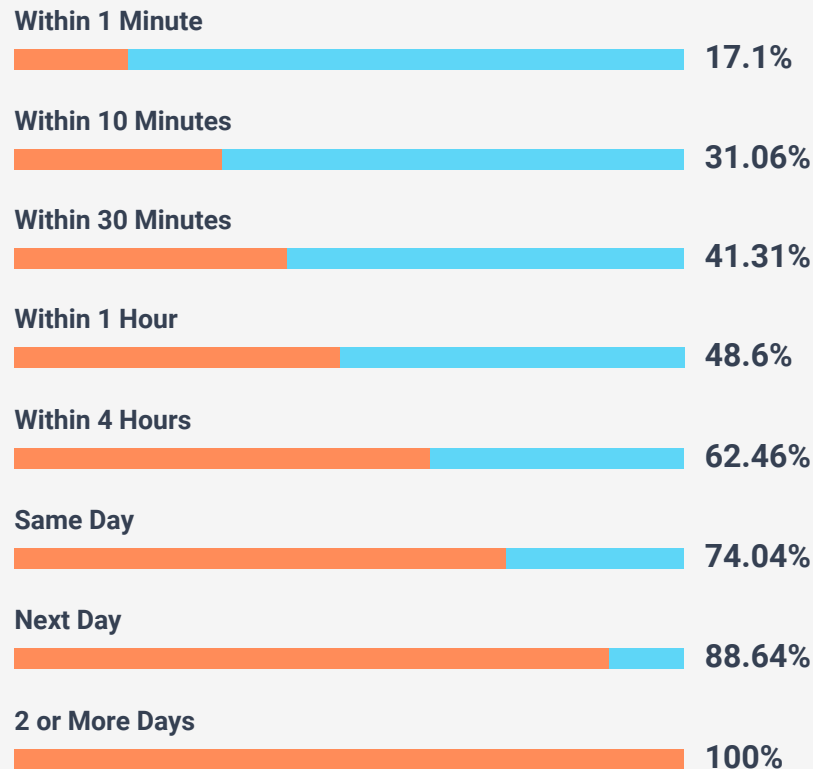


# Average time to open a pitch

There was a slight decrease in the number of pitches being opened in the first hour compared to previous quarters, with 48.6% of pitches being responded to in this timeframe, a 5% decrease from last quarter.

As mainstream media outlets continue to lay off journalists, those who remain are picky about which pitches and stories to cover given time constraints. This is happening as the news cycle begins to move ever faster, with major stories coming out seemingly hourly. In addition, there are increasing reports of journalists leaving the industry due to burnout.

These numbers prove how important it is to time your news pitches perfectly and only send them to journalists that they are actually relevant to.





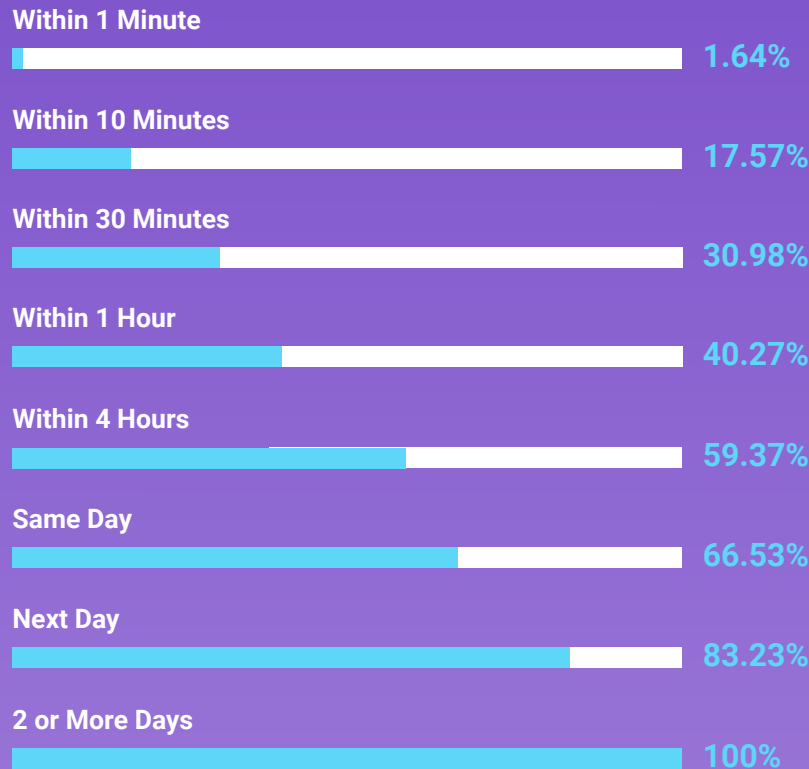
# Average time to respond to a pitch

As it turns out, **59.37%** of all pitch responses were still happening within **four hours** of the pitch being received.

It is also important to note that nearly **70%** of pitches are responded to within the same day it's sent (if it is going to be responded to at all).

It's more important than ever to be respectful when communicating with journalists, particularly when it comes to time-sensitive content. Propel recommends PR professionals follow up after a day or two if they still haven't heard back from a journalist.

However, when working to place evergreen pieces, Propel recommends patience with their media contacts to preserve long-term relationships as journalists navigate time and resource constraints on their end.



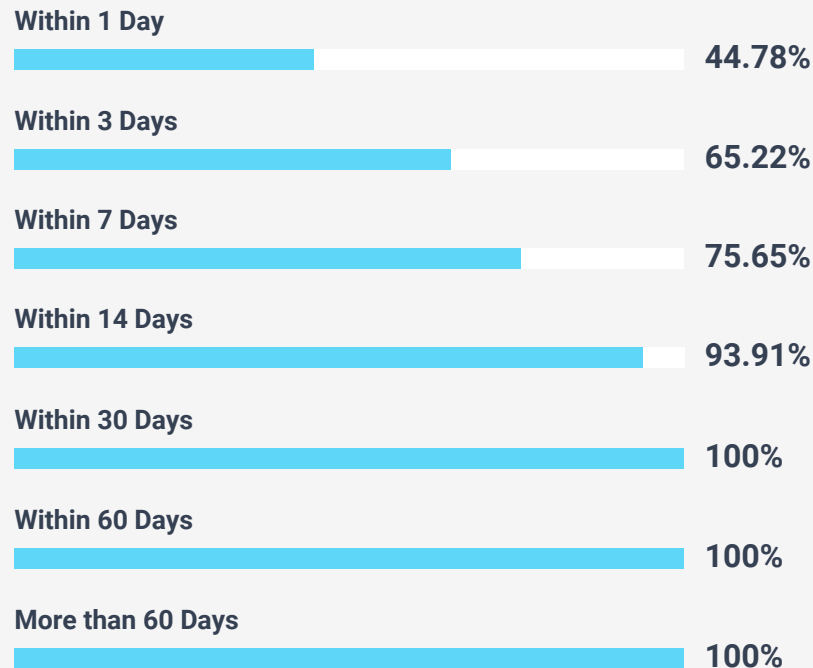
# Average time to publish a story

In the last quarter, we saw a major uptick in how fast stories are getting published.

For example, in Q3, **54%** of news stories were published within three days of the initial pitch being sent, but in Q4 the number rose to **65%**. This is more than in Q2 which had the second fastest turnaround, and is a **20%** increase over Q3's number.

This number shows that people in the media are working harder than ever to pump stories out, likely as a result of the smaller newsroom headcounts.

See the Q4 2023 percentage breakdown on the right. Please note that the figures only include publish times for pitches that were turned into articles and aren't accounting for pitches that don't lead to publication.

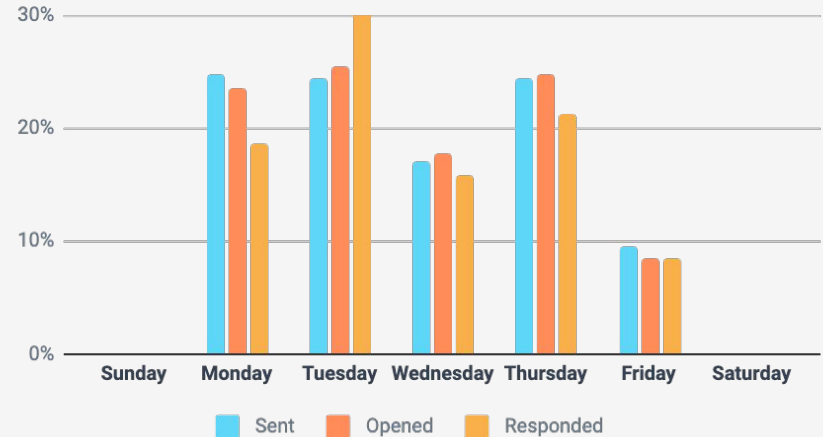


# Send vs. open vs. response times

**Monday** is surprisingly the most popular day for sending out pitches, but the most popular day for journalist engagement is still **Tuesday**.

- In Q4 of 2023, PR pros sent out **24.67%** of all pitches on Mondays.
- However, journalists opened the most PR pitches on Tuesdays, with **25.38%** of all pitch opens occurring on this day.
- Finally, **35.69%** of all journalist responses came in on **Tuesday**, an increase of 33% over Q3 2023.
- Interestingly, pitches sent on **Wednesday** saw the second lowest journalist response rate at only 15.89%

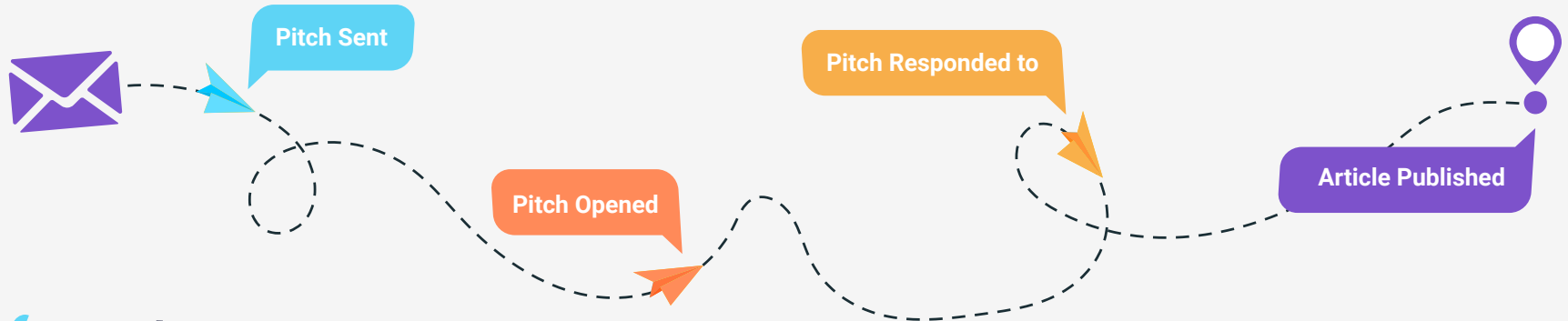
Pitches Sent vs. Opened vs. Responded



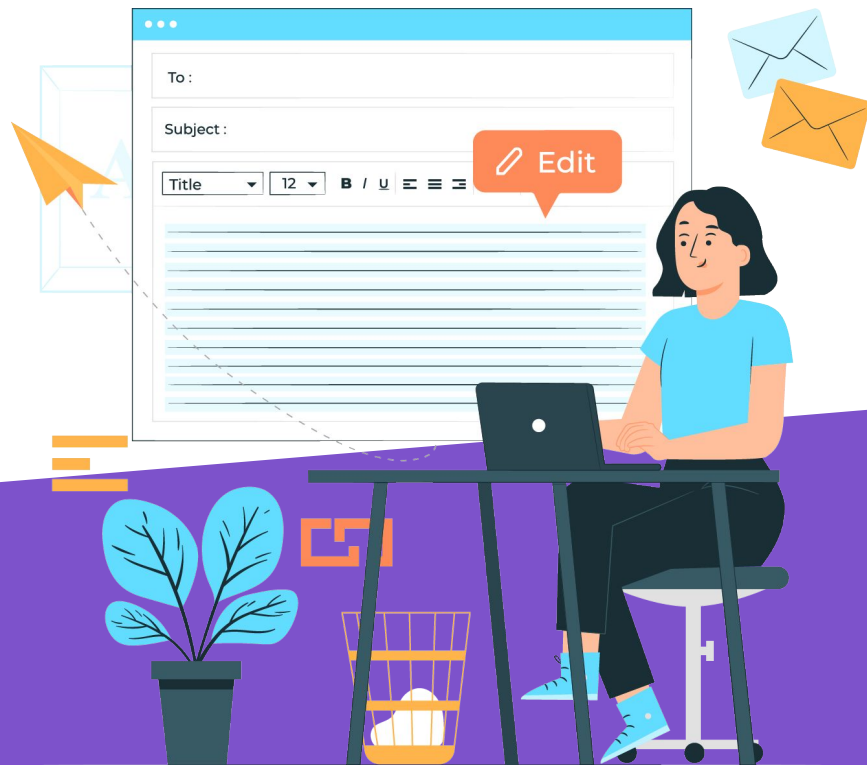
# From pitch to placement – understanding the media relations timeline

For this study on "pitching cycle" duration, we determined the amount of time it takes for the majority of pitches to move throughout the pitching cycle, from the initial pitch sent, all the way to an article being published. See a breakdown of the pitching cycle stages showing the time it takes for the majority of PR pitches to be opened, responded to, and published:

- The majority of pitch opens happen within **4 hours** of a journalist receiving the pitch (**62.46%** of all opens).
- The majority of pitch responses happen within **4 hours** of a journalist receiving the pitch (**59.37%** of all responses).
- The majority of news placements are published within **3 days** of the initial pitch being sent (**65.22%** of articles published).



# The framework of a perfect pitch



# Which pitches from Q4 2023 did journalists engage with the most?

To determine the most engaging or hypothetically “perfect” pitch from Q4, we analyzed journalist open and response rates correlated with key pitch elements like journalist-topic relevance, subject length, number of embedded links and more.

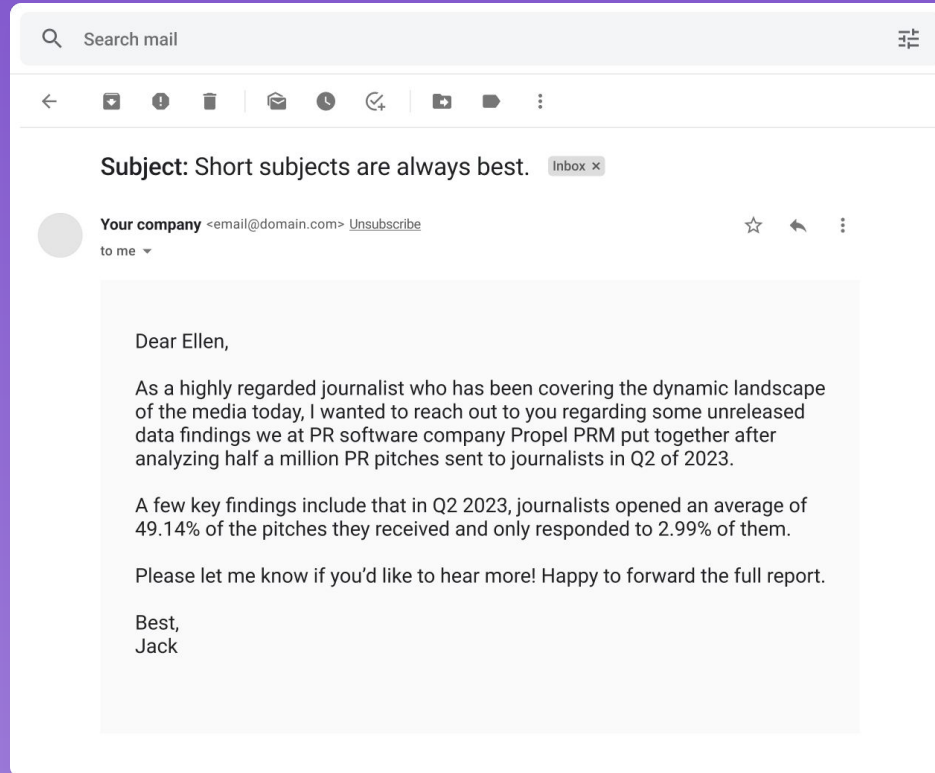
After studying the best results from nearly half a million pitches, we arrived at the following recommendations seen on the right for optimal media engagement results, along with their response rates, which you can see in the table to the right.



## PR Pitching Best Practices:

- ✓ Best subject length: **1-5 words (3.88%)**
- ✓ The best pitch lead length: **81-100 words (3.38%)**
- ✓ The best pitch body length: **51-150 words (7.13%)**
- ✓ The optimal number of embedded links: **2-3 (2.4%)**
- ✓ Best day for pitch responses: **Tuesday (35.69%)**

# The perfect pitch structure of Q1 2023



# Trending news topics at the pitching level





# Tech

The tech world was once again dominated by news regarding generative AI technologies. It is still one of the most popular subjects to pitch despite seeing a 49% decrease in the number of pitches on this subject going out compared to in Q3. However, pitches mentioning AI received response rates of 3.77%, a 156% increase over the quarter prior. Meanwhile, pitches using the words “technology” or “tech” were responded to 4.24% of the time, staying almost the exact same.

- Meanwhile, pitches using the words “technology” or “tech” more than doubled, they were still responded to **4.24%** of the time, staying almost the exact same as in Q3. Crypto pitches also had an above average response rate, with journalists responding to them at a rate of **4.3%**.



# Tech funding

After last quarter's tech funding plateau, the numbers have begun falling. However, these were still some of the most successful pitches sent.

- For instance, while there was a **20%** decrease in the amount of seed stage funding pitches, they were responded to at about the same rate at **9.69%**. Meanwhile, Series A pitches saw their volumes go up by **50%**, but their response rates drop **35%** to **10.89%**. Meanwhile, Series B pitches saw their volumes stay the same, but their response rates dropped to **4.13%**, a **71.54%** reduction compared with Q3 2023.
- Finally, there was an **8.86%** increase in the amount of pitches sent on Series C funding rounds compared to Q3, and responses to these kinds of pitches increased to **15.1%**, an increase of **47.75%** compared with the previous quarter.
- Most strikingly, while the volume of pitches mentioning investments grew by **68.77%**, responses were only garnered **2.99%** of the time, a decrease of **52.61%**.



# The economy

Incredibly, there were no pitches sent mentioning inflation or recession in Q4 2023. This could either point to a positive economic forecast, or to the fact that people don't want to talk about negative news trends.

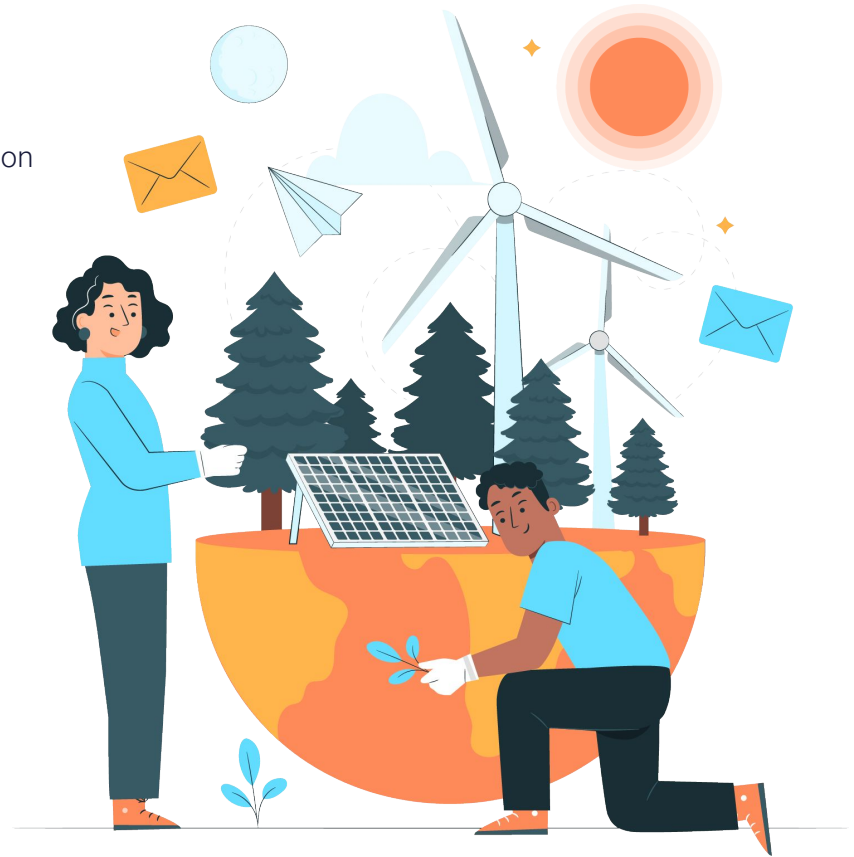
- Meanwhile, with the Hollywood writers and UAW workers strikes finishing, Propel saw a **95.98%** fall in the number of pitches mentioning strikes, while there was a **176%** increase in the number of pitches mentioning unions sent in Q4 2023. Union pitches received a **5.13%** response rate, a **41.5%** decrease in responses compared to the quarter before.



# Climate and Energy

Large scale weather events and 2023 being labelled the hottest year on record climate and energy near the top of the list in terms of pitch hooks.

- For instance, the terms “fire” and “gas” were used in over 2900 pitches and 3100 pitches respectively. However, they only received response rates of **1.66%** and **1.6%**. Meanwhile, the volume of pitches using the term climate change increased by **600%**, but were only responded to **2.89%** of the time. This response rate is **75%** less than in Q3 2023.
- Meanwhile, in terms of sustainable energy, PR pros pitched almost equally about solar and wind. However, journalists were more excited about solar energy, responding to these types of pitches **6.32%** of the time, compared to only **1.04%** of the time for wind.



# Social Media

There was a lot happening behind the scenes of social media as various platforms attempted to combat misinformation. The volume of pitches mentioning Meta or TikTok tanked over the past quarter, with no pitches being sent mentioning the owner of Facebook, and an **88%** decrease in pitches mentioning TikTok.

And yet, the volume of pitches mentioning Twitter/X skyrocketed by over **3,700%** compared to Q3 2023, garnering response rates of **4.23%**.



# New Media

Increasingly, podcasts are becoming a much more utilized form of media, and many PR pros speak about them in the same breath as television and print media. This was also shown in the numbers, with podcasters receiving **22%** more pitches than Q3 2023, a continuation of an already steady trend being seen by Propel over the course of the past year.

In fact, overall, the number of pitches to podcasts increased by **45%** over the course of 2023. However, with this continued increase in pitch volume, podcasters are decreasing the amount they respond to pitches, responding to only **13.45%** in Q4, and continuing a downwards trend seen starting at the beginning of the year. It appears Podcasters are starting to become inundated with pitches as well.

Influencers were more responsive to pitches, with **28.11%** of pitches to them being opened. These pitches were opened **91.08%** of the time. Given that more and more people are getting their news from influencers, this avenue is turning into an even better way to get your organizations' message across.



# Big Names

Using celebrities as hooks is a very popular choice among PR professionals. However, this is a hook that simply doesn't work. Looking at some of the biggest names worldwide – Taylor Swift, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and Donald Trump, among others – no pitch mentioning these people were responded to. The only name that got any sort of response was Joe Biden, and even then, the response rate was **0.22%**.

In short, if you don't have an inside scoop on someone famous, it's best to avoid name-dropping in your pitch.





# Thank You & Happy Pitching!

Still looking for the right PR tools to help you tell your story? Propel PRM is made to make your life easier as a comms pro, from researching the perfect media contacts to easily measuring results.

Most recently, we now offer AI-powered pitch & press release writer and media list builder that you can [try for free here](#).

Finally, you can [book a demo with our team](#) to learn more about Propel, the all-in-one PR tool suite you've been looking for.

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