



## Episode 27:



### **Roberto Torres**

*Lead Reporter, Technical.ly Philly*

**Dana Dobson:** Hello everyone! Welcome to Episode 27 of the Media Pro Spotlight podcast. I'm Dana Dobson, a PR consultant who helps leaders and entrepreneurs tell their stories to the media. The secret to getting greater exposure for your business through media coverage depends on your ability to understand the needs of your media contacts, and on the professional relationships you build with them over time. This podcast will give you the inside information you need to build those relationships.

This week's special guest is Rob Torres, who is the lead reporter at Technical.ly Philly. Formerly, Rob was a freelance contributor to Technial.ly and Latino newspaper Al Dia News. Rob is a native Venezuelan who moved to Philadelphia in 2015 after reporting on technology, research and politics at his alma mater, the University of Zulia.

You can download a complete transcript of this interview and view additional links and resources on the podcast page of my website, [danadobson.com](http://danadobson.com), click on Podcasts, and then Episode #27.

So now, I hope you enjoy today's interview with the very interesting and informative Rob. Torres.

**Dana:** Hey Rob. How are you? Thanks for being on the show.

**Rob:** No problem, thanks for having me.

**Dana:** It's my pleasure. So the way I usually like to start off is just kind of a free form question which is, "Who are you, and what do you do?"

**Rob:** Well I am Roberto Torres. I have found that friend and anyone can call me Rob with more ease. So I let them do that. I am a reporter based out of Philadelphia Pennsylvania. The lovely city that has opened its arms to me as an immigrant. I was born in Venezuela twenty-eight years ago, and I came here in 2015 in search for a country that would allow me to freely exercise my profession and to open its doors to me, as America thankfully has.

Here in Philadelphia I am the reporter for Technical.ly Philly, a tech news publication published by Technically Media. We offer services and we serve the community in different ways. In different ways, we focus on technology, and we also offer a site that's focused on non-profits called Generosity. Basically my entire career has been focusing on innovation and research, and while I did write a little bit about politics a few years ago I have long since been focused on technology and the different wonderful ways it can impact our lives.

**Dana:** Yeah. That must be a really interesting topic. Are there Technicality's in other places besides Philadelphia?

**Rob:** Yes. Yes, thankfully yes. We are based in Philadelphia because we were founded here in 2009 by our Co-founder's Bryan James Kirk and Chris Wink. But we are present in Baltimore, Brooklyn, D.C., the entire state of Delaware and Philadelphia.

**Dana:** Wow, that's quite a few locations. Well, how did you get your start as a reporter? How did it come to be that you wound up being a journalist?

**Rob:** Well as many reporters have, I went to, I went to journalism school with the thought in my mind of being on TV, being the news man in front of the cameras. Exploring my own skills and my own talent I found that I was much better at writing than I was at speaking before

a camera. So, I focused on that and joined my university's newspaper, which is quite different from a college news paper as we know it here in the US which is made by students. Then it was written by staff of the University just updating the community on the latest research, the latest developments, in the community, events and all that fun stuff.

So community reporting has really been the, the core of my work. As I joined that publication I quickly found that I was fascinated by people who loved what they're doing, by people who want to innovate it. I'm inspired by people who want to change the status quo, and to upset the way things are currently. So reporting has been an exercise in understanding the human race and what makes people be passionate about what they like.

**Dana:** Um hum. So how would you describe a typical day in the life as a reporter? How do you get story ideas? Are they assigned to you? Do you have to find your own? How does it work?

**Rob:** Well in my current position. I'm the lead reporter for Philadelphia so mostly I set my own stories, and I set my own course of action according to what's been happening lately and what's the breaking news or did we hear about something that's interesting but we can't say it yet it's just not the right time. So I let my own beat determine what I write and when I write it except for when my wonderful editors assign me stories. Whenever we team up and talk about things before hand, usually the result is much better because they can add in context and they can provide insight into what makes a story the ideal story for the day.

**Dana:** How many stories are you responsible for a week would you say?

**Rob:** So I, my goal is three a day it would mean 15 a week.

**Dana:** Um wow.

**Rob:** But whenever something is, requires more deeply sourced material I can do maybe 2 a day. In regards to your previous question on finding stories I would say that email is, accounts for a large portion of it simply because it allows me to make that first initial contact. Then in person interviews and just being within the community and using social media as well, also helps me to triage what's been happening and so that those that I think will be the most not only interest to our community, but the most used.

We really view journalism as a service. It's been the premise with which Technical.ly has been established, and we try to execute that every day.

**Dana:** Um well Philadelphia is a really big city, and there's a lot going on all the time. I just wonder if you're able to think of a couple of the coolest stories you've ever written. What's a story that really stands out that was really important and, or fascinating?

**Rob:** Well there's been a few. Now that you've mentioned it. The most recent of which I think would have to be a protest organized by the staff of Comcast by way of this employees only secret channel in a platform called Slack.

**Dana:** Um hum

**Rob:** Some 1200 employees got organized through that platform to stage a sort of walk out in protest of the recent series of immigration policies enacted by the federal government. The passion with which people were pouring out of the Comcast tower I Philadelphia is something that I'm not likely to forget anytime soon.

It was all so interesting to see both mid-management and C-level executives join that protest. Both the signs and mood of the day and how people happily spoke to the media to say that they were joining in solidarity. Though they were not from any of the countries affected, they maybe didn't even know someone from the countries that were affected, but here's a group of people from a tech company, of all things saying that tech has no walls. And that there wasn't ... something like that wasn't going to happen without them at least raising their voices.

**Dana:** Um that's really interesting. How did you find out about that?

**Rob:** Well my editor, Juliana Reyes first discovered that this protest was being organized. She quickly got some sources from within that Slack group and we got the tip off that the protest was going to happen. Then I joined. I just went down there and stood outside the building until the people came out.

**Dana:** Wow. There's a certain amount of bravery to reporting isn't there?

**Rob:** There is a little bit, yes. With ... and with that bravery a sort of mythical idea of the boots on the ground reporter comes also a great

deal of humility and a great necessity for having a leveled head and understanding that we're merely the vessels to the story that people who actually matter are the people doing the with the news making the things happen.

We are at the end of the day time and time again, serving an audience and serving the community if you're lucky enough to do community journalism as I am.

**Dana:** Yeah, Yeah. So do you take your own pictures and images? Do you have a photographer that goes with you? How do you illustrate you pieces?

**Rob:** I usually do my own photography, and I have to say I rely on social media quite a bit. It's amazing how quickly images can just find there way onto my computer and how fluid that whole process can be thanks to social media. I think logging onto Twitter is part of ... a big part of how I make up my day. It really provides an overview into what's happening. A lot of that is visual. Sometimes a story can just get started by way of a picture that illustrates maybe a new product for example. A meeting of people within our community that are sharing something via a social gathering or a work meeting, they can make their way into my feed simply because of a picture.

I think it's something that's very important. Is there a need for news outlets to have a dedicated photographer? I definitely think it's a plus. Since things have evolved so much it's no longer a necessity.

**Dana:** Hum, yeah that's true. Back in my day we had much more active and fully staffed newsrooms than there are today. So, I think in your generation you're wearing way more hats than we did a thousand years ago. So when you're I Twitter a lot of people ar still trying to wrap their head around the fact journalist and reporter in such are in ... actively in Twitter and other social media outlets. When you're in Twitter do you look for a particular hashtags, or what do you do when you're in there? Do you just scroll down? How does it work?

**Rob:** Well I have to say, I'm a little bit jealous of my colleague in D.C. who is the lead reporter because in D.C. there's a very active movement around hashtag D.C. tech. There are pictures being shared conversations happening, Twitter storms of all shapes and sizes. I am trying, actively campaigning for Philly Tech to be the same. I think it's a good idea to gather all our thoughts and all our ideas behind

that one hashtag so we can see just a little glimpse into a conversation.

**Dana:** Yeah

**Rob:** Outside of that I think at events it's the most useful. Whenever there's an event and I'm sitting down after having watched the event trying to write a recap post or maybe a longer more thought out post on some of the things I found there, my first step is to go into social media and see what has been shared. Maybe someone from the community found an idea that was interesting that was ground breaking. Although it's a bit challenging when we are doing live coverage of events I often try to share context live.

So for example, if a speaker mentions a thing that's connected to a story we did 2 or 3 years ago I quickly try to dig it up in my phone and share it. It makes for the conversation to be deeper. I find whenever someone is actively tweeting during an event or during the situation or after news breaks we are certainly listening. We are always listening.

**Dana:** Um yeah. Any idea how many ... how many readers Technical.ly has?

**Rob:** Um well, I'll share with you that we have this wonderful subscription list, people who get our daily news letters, and just in Philly it's around 6000.

**Dana:** Is that a month?

**Rob:** These people are ...we can definitely see it in the metrics that once the newsletter goes out at pm there's a big boost in our readership and social engagement just pretty much across the board.

**Dana:** Um hum. How many emails would you estimate you get on a daily basis?

**Rob:** At first I was counting it pretty ... I was keeping a close eye on that simply because I was to be quite honestly a bit overwhelmed by the sheer amount. Once I got to unsubscribing from things that weren't relevant to my beat adding folders for and just basically sorting it out. I've kind of lost count, but I think in these days you know ...

We try to at Technical.ly to enforce something that's called "Inbox Zero" that has increased efficiency I believe. When you stick to the

goal of having an empty inbox and just archiving everything that's not immediately necessary or that you're not currently working on. The numbers sort of fade away. It's more about not how many emails I get, but how many emails ultimately lead to a story. To this day it's still around 20 that I could possibly write a story on.

**Dana:** Um hum verses hundreds of others that probably don't make it because they've ... you're just not the right person or it's just not interesting or things like that right?

**Rob:** True, true.

**Dana:** So the subject line I imagine is very important to help you weed out the stuff

**Rob:** Um hum yeah. A little bit I think it's good when it's quick and to the point. I'm not a bit fan of catchy emails that try to grab my attention with something that's very loud in the subject line but when you get to the body there's nothing there.

**Dana:** Um hum

**Rob:** I think that crafting an email is the end of a series of steps that people who want to get my attention should follow. There's several things that ... in the writing of emails that should be done right before. What I'm saying is that a relationship and a connection needs to be established even before the email gets to my inbox. That's just the last step.

**Dana:** Um hum Do you get emails from people that you have relationships with it? It may be their correspondence with you carries a bit more weight than others.

**Rob:** Yeah absolutely I mean, I'm very very fortunate to have joined this company that has been able to connect me with CEO's around town and founders, investors. Surely when a name pops up off a page immediately will click and see what that person wants. Let's see the number one rule for me to immediately get to an email is someone I know in real life. Someone whose hands I've shaken someone who has shared a conversation with me and asked me in real life hey "What kind of stories do you usually do?" Or has expressed an interest in not me the person, but me the reporter. Making that distinction is very important.

**Dana:** Yeah well. I wonder then for people who are relatively new to PR or new PR people just coming in, what's most effective ...or best way that they can go about building a trusting relationship with you?

**Rob:** Well, as I've said before, one of the main things that to me tells me that someone is interested and someone knows how to do the job is an interest in meeting in real life. That is to say that not necessarily going out and having coffee and sitting down for thirty minutes, but maybe we run into each other at an event or that we found some point of connection there were we happen to meet and we now know who the other person is. We de-virtualize them so to speak.

I think once that is done another major thing is getting involved in and connect to what a reporter's beat is. The majority of email pitches that I delete are from people who don't understand that Technical.ly Philly only covers news for Philadelphia that directly involves Philadelphia. The ... I remember an email exchange with someone who was persistently trying to get me to write about some things specific, I don't think I even remember what the product was, but I just kept replying, "But what is the Philadelphia tie to this?" At the end it was just people an buy them I Philadelphia.

**Dana:** Um hum

**Rob:** But there wasn't something beyond that. There wasn't a direct connection. There was a yes Technical.ly Philly would write about this. There is also a timing issue sometimes. For me, the morning time is devoted specifically for writing the stories that I have that are pending. Getting statements and getting pictures, and getting all that is usually left off to the afternoon. So that's my personal work cycle.

I'm sure that other reporters may have different time slots that they use for different things, but taking an interest into that is something that helps me do my job better. I email back and forth with PR reps on a daily basis, and spokespersons. I would also say that whenever a PR person can enable a connection directly with the people making the news that also increases the possibilities of me writing about something.

**Dana:** Oh okay

**Rob:** Also I will say that reading up on what kind of stories I've done in the past will also help a PR manager or a spokesperson get a better



sense for what kind of things interest us as a media company, and what kind of things have the most possibility of succeeding.

**Dana:** Yeah that, that's very important advice to people. if they ought to do the research to see what your beat is and see what your tone and style is and really know who you are and what you do before they talk to you about anything. Being of assistance whenever they can. It's not just a publish my stuff, but how can I help you do your job. How can I help you write a good story?

**Rob:** Absolutely I have followed PR I this short year that I've been reporting for Technical.ly Philly I have established already relationships with PR agents who have gone two or three different agencies some of them have even gone and started their own firm in that time and I just think well, "I'm helping them do their jobs. They're helping me do mine. Establishing a communication. Helping me see the things that maybe I can't. You know, I've had people ... I initially passed on pictures, but a persistence from a PR agent has led me to take a second look and find something that was interesting.

It might not have been the initial idea, but it ... the persistence and the interest I connecting led to something happening their.

**Dana:** Um hum. Do you have ... We've kind of touched upon this a little bit, but do you have any particular pet peeves of things people do when they reach out to you, that they ... you wished they wouldn't do.

**Rob:** Well the one thing I'll say is that ... again, it all stems back to getting to know the media outlet and what interest us. Whenever something is a hot topic in news coverage. For example the video from the United passenger that was ... went viral recently or any other video or bio content. There's always that pitch where it's like this thing that just happened talk to this person that knows about it that really doesn't connect well with what we do.

I'm sure that other publications have some interest I that and maybe some articles can come off of it. For me specifically that doesn't work very well cause we are interested I what the community is doing and people outside of that they can contribute and they can collaborate but it has to be I a certain way.

Another thing that I have notices is, well, there's always a persistence of getting me to sit down with CEO's or getting on the phone with CEO's and sometimes, I'm not saying always, but sometimes mid

management staff or even software developers or product managers will have more in sight into things like product launches or news within a company.

CEO's and that kind of staff can talk to the strategy and the broader path of the news within a company, but maybe sometimes farther down the run can be a source of value can be found. That's a strategy that always interest me.

**Dana:** Um hum yeah. I've been talking a lot to people about having an online news room or press room or some other segment of their website were a reporter can go to find out more information, and find out who the contacts are. Is that something that's helpful to you when you go to a website? Is there anything in particular you look for when you go on a company's website to get more information?

**Rob:** That is 100% useful to me as a reporter, and I encourage anyone you talk to, any company please have a section on your website that has resources for the press that helps us understand what you do better. I would say things like pictures and particularly those with high resolutions always help. We're always trying to find images to go along with the article and finding those quickly makes the job easier. I can take more time and focus into telling the story correctly.

**Dana:** Yeah

**Rob:** I like it a lot when the personal history of founders, of mangers is included within their profile. It helps me to see that there's not just a Harvard graduate or its just not someone with 20 years of experience in the software management industry but a real person with a family with dogs. A person who involves skydiving. It always helps to build the character a little bit and helps to tell the story better.

**Dana:** Um that's great. That's great insight. I'm glad you're sticking by my story too. That makes me look really good.

**Rob:** Very good

**Dana:** It's

**Rob:** I'm happy I can do that for you.

**Dana:** Now if somebody wants to contact you what is the best way to do that?

**Rob:** Depends on what the somebody is. I would say my first line of engagement is email. I can use email to triage what stories or what's the next move where the contact is. Maybe it's about getting together for coffee or it's about simply connecting and establishing a connection there. I's say email is the best bet. After that comes social media, but the number 1 rule and number 1 recommendation is I have to go to a lot of events because of my work. That is the absolute ideal environment to approach me to say "Hi".

I feel that in the PR world journalist are depicted as these ogres or that have to just ward off PR pitches. The truth is that's our job. Our job is to listen to what's happen. We are people who are happy to connect and talk about what we do. We have a lot of things in common, journalist and PR managers. I think the more we an establish common ground the better both our professions are going to be.

**Dana:** Um hum. What is your Twitter handle?

**Rob:** My Twitter handle is @torresluzardo. That's my first ... those are my two last names per Spanish naming customs.

**Dana:** Okay. "Torres."

**Rob:** Very good you pronounce that very well Dana.

**Dana:** Oh I do try. Is there a URL to send people in the show notes so that they can take a look at your work?

**Rob:** Yes. I will give you the URL which is [Technical.ly/Philly](http://Technical.ly/Philly) and I will also take up a little bit of time to say that we here I Philadelphia are organizing Philly Tech week which is coming up April 28th to May 2nd. It is one of the most incredible experiences for someone trying to understand the Philadelphia tech scene. It is 150 ... a curated list of over a 100 events from the most technical developer and software related gatherings to more general events focused on a whole list of topics. There is literally something for every one. Let me correct the dates it's April 28th to May 6th. It's gonna be an incredible time and if someone is interested in coming to Philly for the events I would say check out the schedule which is on [2017.phillytechweek.com](http://2017.phillytechweek.com).

**Dana:** Philly, that sounds like fun.

**Rob:** Yes.

**Dana:** Okay I'll put that in the show notes so that people can refer to it. I'll also put up the URL for [Technical.ly/Philly](https://Technical.ly/Philly). I just want to thank you so much for making the time to be here today. You're very helpful and I love your work. I wish you continued success.

**Rob:** Thank you so much, and hopefully you'll come down from Delaware and join us of Philly Tech week.

**Dana:** Well, that concludes our interview today with Rob Torres, who was very instructive about how to work successfully with reporters. I hope one of your takeaways is that it's a good idea to have an online press kit on your website so that journalists can find information about you quickly and easily.

Remember that you can download a complete transcript of this interview and view additional links and resources on the podcast page of my website, [danadobson.com](http://danadobson.com), click on Podcasts, and then Episode #27.

And if there's a media outlet or journalist or big-time blogger you've been trying to work with but haven't been successful, shoot me a note at [dana@danadobson.com](mailto:dana@danadobson.com), and I'll do my best to have them on the show.

So have a great week, thanks again for listening, and I'll see you next time. Until then, go get 'em, because your public awaits.