

Overview

Follow these tips for gaining coverage in public media—newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

- * **4 Keys to Publicity Success**
- * **3 Ways to Generate Publicity Coverage**
- * **Know What's Newsworthy**
- * **Ideas for Generating News**
- * **Publicity Materials Checklist**
- * **Writing News Releases: A Checklist**

Four Keys to Publicity Success

- * Understand what's newsworthy
- * Understand basic formats, and genres
- * Understand conventions and grammar of media story-telling and framing
- * Understand routines, competitive concerns, constraints confronting media workers.

3 Ways to Generate Publicity Coverage

- * **Write materials**
- * **Provide spokesperson, conduct interviews**
- * **Stage an event**

Variations on the Theme

Write/Provide Materials

- * Offer articles/photos/graphics/columns to publications on an *exclusive* or *special* basis.
- * Distribute/offer (through a national service) ready-to-reproduce, typeset feature stories to smaller newspapers (mat releases, color pages).
- * Produce public service announcements for broadcast, print and out-of-home media (not-for-profits organizations)
- * Distribute a video news release or audio release to broadcast media.
- * Produce your own program, short feature for cable stations or broadcast media. (Also can be used as a videobrochure, video for club/schools programs, or streamline video on the Web.

- * Provide products as props for films, TV shows (financial consideration might be requested)
- * Offer your facilities as a venue for the production of TV shows, movies, commercials, etc.

Interviews

- * Appear as a guest on TV talk show
- * Go on radio talk, call-in shows
- * Retain a professional spokesperson
- * Go on a multi-city media tour
- * Conduct a radio media tour (via phone)
- * Hold a satellite media tour or news conference

Stage Events

- * Hold an educational seminar/program/tour for media
- * Sponsor, co-sponsor a charitable or other event that will earn recognition for your organization. Consider a major media organization as your co-sponsor.
- * Stage a demonstration, protest rally, or event
- * Provide products that can be used as prizes at events, seek publicity accordingly.
- * Sponsor awards for media coverage of an industry, issue; provide financial support for awards, other projects sponsored by media-related professional organizations.

Know What's Newsworthy

MAINTSTREAM NOTIONS OF NEWSWORTHINESS

From Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism* (1991), p. 35. Boston: South End Press.

* Public Recognition

- . Issue Recognition: Is the problem already recognized as an issue or is it relatively unknown?
- . Famous Faces: Are faces known to the public involved? How many people? What institutions?
- . Trendiness: Is the issue currently fashionable or has it peaked? Is it timely?
- . Proximity: How directly will the impact be felt? On individuals? On groups?

* Importance

- . Power: Does the event/campaign signal a significant power struggle? Does it represent a move by a powerful institution?
- . Impact: What impact will the event/campaign (or the issue raised) have? On whom?
- . Currency: Is the problem happening now?

* Interest

- . Good Story: Is the event/campaign packaged with a story line that offers conflict and resolution?
- . Human Interest: Are there any appealing characters with whom the audience can identify?
- . Memorable Emotions: Does the story transmit feelings, not just ideas?
- . Visuals: Are there interesting visuals (dramatic action, good photo opportunities, not just talking heads)?
- . Cultural Resonance: Does the event/campaign incorporate broad cultural themes (corruption exposed, little guy beats odds, small town pulls together after tragedy, etc.)
- . Fresh Twist: Is the event/campaign different, unusual or funny -- something that hasn't been done before?

Alternatively, events have described as more newsworthy when they feature *prominence* (famous people), *drama*, *human interest*, *physical proximity* (localness), *psychological proximity* (emotional connection), *consequence*, *oddity*, and/or *timeliness*. Many features stories are consider worthy when they provide *practical tips*, *self-help advice* or “*how-to*” *information* to people on timely topics.

Ideas for Generating News

THIRTY-TWO WAYS TO CREATE NEWS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

From Wilcox, Ault and Agee, *Public Relations: Strategies & Tactics*, 3rd ed. (1992), p. 274. .

1. Tie in with news events of the day.
2. Work with another publicity person.
3. Tie in with a newspaper, other medium on a mutual project.
4. Conduct a poll or survey.
5. Issue a report.

6. Arrange an interview with a celebrity.
7. Take part in a controversy.
8. Arrange for a testimonial.
9. Arrange a speech.
10. Make an analysis or prediction.

11. Form and announce names for committees.
12. Hold an election.
13. Announce an appointment.
14. Celebrate an anniversary.
15. Issue a summary of facts.

16. Tie in with a holiday.
17. Make a trip.
18. Present an award.
19. Hold a contest.
20. Pass a resolution.

21. Appear before public bodies.
22. Stage a special event.
23. Write a letter.
24. Release a letter you received.
25. Adapt national reports and surveys for local use.

26. Stage a debate.
 27. Tie into a well-known week or day.
 28. Honor an institution.
 29. Organize a tour.
 30. Inspect a project.
 31. Issue a commendation.
 32. Issue a protest.
-

Publicity Materials Checklist

* News Releases (General distribution)

- New products, services;
- Significant changes in product offerings, e.g. price.
- Events sponsored (e.g. fundraisers, tours, open houses, seminars, rallies, awards programs, meal events)
- Observances (anniversaries, etc.)
- Facility openings, relocations, closings
- Personnel changes
- Distributor appointments, changes
- Contracts, grants received, given
- Awards, honors or designations received, given
- Reports issued, research findings
- Position statements
- Gifts, contributions received (not-for-profits)

* Feature Stories (Offer on an *exclusive or special* basis or for *general distribution*)

- Profiles (people, products, companies or causes)
- Round-up, trend stories
- Service features ("how to")
- Case studies
- Product application stories (trade publications)
- Signed, first-person experiences, reminiscences
- Op-Ed pieces (signed articles)
- Letters to the editor

* Fact Sheets/Background materials

- Key data at-a-glance
- Glossaries
- Directories (key contacts, office list locations, etc.)
- Questions and answers
- Suggested interview questions
- Texts/excerpts of speeches, reports, books, articles

* Photos and Captions

- Action photos
- Portraiture (mug/head and shoulder shots, candid)
- Product portraiture, products in use
- Architectural
- Landscapes

* Graphics

- Logos
- Graphs, charts
- Illustrations

* Audio-Visuals

- Video news packages (video news story, b-roll video)
- Audio news releases (scripts only, scripts with background sound, recorded stories, actualities /“sound bites” only)

Public service announcements (script for announcer, scripts with slide for TV, recorded audio or video

audio-visuals, reports) at the bottom (or top) or release
-- avoid embedding e-mail links in text (might trigger e-mail spam filters)

News Advisories for Events

Tip Sheets (Memos to media with story ideas)

Writing News Releases: A Checklist

- * Challenges of writing publicity materials
 - Limited space or time (“news hole”) available to media
 - Alternative viewpoints possible, competing sources
 - Publicists write for many media; editors have different interests and quirks that shape their news judgments.
 - Not all client activities are equally newsworthy.
 - Editors' are skeptical about publicity-seekers.
 - Publicists often are their own editors – mistakes happen.
- *How releases can be used
 - As-is (generally limited to routine, non-controversial news)
 - As source of information for a story written by a reporter (only excerpt facts, quotes, background information)
 - As the basis for selecting sources, conducting interviews.
- * How releases are delivered:
 - E-mail
 - Web sites (usually using *online newsroom* or *media room*)
 - Electronic news distribution services
 - Syndication (RSS feedback requested by user)
 - Postal mail
 - Facsimile
 - Personal delivery (paper or flash drive/disk)
- * Important information to provide with any story
 - Contact name, e-mail, office and after-hours phone numbers (Be available for follow-up inquiries)
 - Release time (“For immediate release” or embargo with specified date and time)
 - Headline (identifies the release)
 - Dateline in lede (optional; include if location is important)
 - Date (possibly a serial number or other identifier, too)
- * Basic Format for Traditional Announcement Story
 - Ideal length: 400-500 words
 - Format for *digital delivery*: Single space (double space between paragraphs preferred for reading on screens)
 - Write in *inverted pyramid style* – summarize most important information in first two-three paragraphs, with additional details in descending order of importance.
 - Most important element in story is a strong *lede* (first paragraph) -- grab the attention of editors and readers.
 - Answer the 5Ws&H: Who, what, when, where, why, how
 - Optimize text* for online delivery, archiving, and retrieval by search engines users:
 - name the organization as the first words in the headline,
 - include links to relevant Web sites and other online resources within the text
 - feature *keywords* (possible search terms) liberally at the top and then throughout the story
 - include links to supplementary information (images,

* Alternate News Release Formats

- Paper news releases are still sometimes required. Text should be doubled spaced, printed on one side of a sheet, and leave ample white space for editing and notetaking. Center “--MORE--” at the bottom of the text on each page and “###” or “--END--” at the end of the text on last page. Include a slug at the top of each subsequent page with the name of the organization or release and add corresponding page numbers.
- Social Media News Releases (SMNRs) are intended primarily for use by bloggers, opinion writers, and others who don't publish stories as provided. Contents include:
 - a bulleted list of 5-7 key points
 - 2-3 quotes for attribution. Include name, title of source.
 - links to relevant background materials or Web sites,
 - links to visuals or audio (photos, logos, graphs, video clips, audio actualities or sound bites),
 - links to social bookmarking or other social media sites where users can recommend or comment on the story
 - *trackback* (URL where release is posted on Web).
- * Writing Tips: Make your key points!
 - Telegraph key message near top (first or second paragraph)
 - Work other (positive) points into text
 - Avoid hyperbole or puffery, beware of claims as *first, only, unique* or *finest* that cannot be corroborated
 - Use quotes to advance critical ideas in the story – and to infuse opinion and explain the rationale for actions.
 - Quotes should be central to the story (not window dressing) and be provocative so spokesperson is quoted.
 - Avoid trite quotes that state the obvious, congratulate client.
 - Cite the most appropriate spokesperson for organization (not always the CEO)
 - Don't bury bad news. Stress actions being taken to rectify problems. Stress positives; avoid needless negatives.
 - Integrate key branding information subtly into the story.
 - Include a standard (*boilerplate*) paragraph at the bottom that summarizes how the client should be described. .

Writing Tips: Avoid common problems:

- No news of interest to editor (usually a misdirected release)
- News is buried (an annoying ploy when news is bad)
- Ledes that are wordy or with the wrong focus.
- Missing information; fails to anticipate basic questions
- Excessive commercialism -- news is not advertising.
- Release lacks a sharp focus or basic news values.

Writing Tips: Write like a pro!

- Use clear, concise, vivid language.
- Sentences should not exceed 15 words; paragraphs should not exceed 30 words or four typewritten lines
- Distribute releases on a timely basis. Meet media deadlines
- Write for the audience, not the client
- Scrutinize for proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Follow the *Associated Press Stylebook*.
- Proof, proof, proof!

