

Media Relations¹

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This publication about media relations strategy development is the first of a four-part series on media relations. This series also covers working with the media, news releases and public service announcements, and media interview skills.

Introduction

Media relations is a strategy of working with the news media in order to get out information about an organization's events and activities in local news outlets, such as newspapers, television and radio newscasts, and magazines. A media relations plan consists of such components as contacting reporters directly, writing news releases and public service announcements, knowing how to answer questions that reporters ask, and providing photo or video opportunities for photographers and videographers (video camerapersons) to shoot. The *primary goal of any media relations strategy* is for you to serve as a credible and trustworthy source of information for the news media. Ultimately, what you want is to present a positive message for the news media to communicate to a specific audience. This publication focuses on media relations strategy development.

Developing an effective news media relations plan for your organization can:

Enhance the public's knowledge and understanding of your program, event, or activity. The public usually does not know about a topic until they hear about it through the

news media. Media relations helps get your message out about your program, event, or activity.

Build credibility in your program, event, or activity, since people perceive that what they see in the news media is important.

Extend the reach and increase the frequency of your message. Using the news media may mean your message reaches people in your community, as well as across your state.

Possibly recruit new members or recruit support for your program. Some people will learn about your organization through news stories and may be interested enough in the activity that they want to join. You also may get more support for your organization or for the activity your organization is conducting through the information people see in the news media.

Developing a Media Relations Strategy

You must develop a media relations strategy in order to build an effective relationship with the news media. That is what "media relations" is all about – building relationships. The relationship does not happen just by itself; you have to take the initiative by visiting or calling reporters, instead of having reporters come to you first. Here are suggestions as you map out your media relations plan:

Set specific, realistic, and measurable goals. It is probably unrealistic to expect that every news release you send

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out or every phone call made to a reporter will result in a front page story. You should establish realistic goals. It may be that you set a goal of trying to get one story every quarter in a newspaper. Maybe the goal is to get a notice of an upcoming activity on a television station's community calendar. Be sure that the goal is something that can be measured so that you can evaluate if you were successful. For example, perhaps the goal will be to increase attendance at an event from the previous year when you did not have a media relations plan, following the release of a newspaper, television, or radio story.

Decide on your approach to get your goals accomplished. Will you communicate through news releases, personal visits to reporters, or on-air television or radio interviews? Which form of news media do you need to use to reach your target audience? Remember that you use the news media to reach the general public, but a "general public" audience is very broad. It usually is better to identify specific audiences to try to reach. These audiences could be children, teenagers, agriculture producers, teachers, parents, or older adults. Each specific audience consumes news differently. For some audiences, they are more likely to watch early morning television programs. Others may hear their news on country music radio stations. Still others may only read a newspaper. Use the news media that your audience uses most.

Decide who is responsible for handling news media requests. Who will be the person to answer reporters' questions? It could be your organization's president or reporter or someone else. Whatever the situation, everyone in your organization should know who handles the calls, so that if a news reporter calls, the correct person can answer the questions.

Become a reputable and dependable expert source. One of the components to an effective media relations strategy is to become a reputable, expert source. This also means that you should contribute news items to let reporters know what is going on in your organization.

Maintain a directory of reporters in your area. Find out how the reporters like news releases, photographs, public service announcements, or other materials submitted, and enter that information in your directory. Some places may want all items submitted through electronic mail, while other places may want a printed news release. Update this information at least once a year.

On a regular basis, provide informational materials to reporters. Examples of these types of materials include

news releases, public service announcements, brochures, and photographs. Sometimes these items, when they are grouped together, are called *media kits*. Many media kits are posted to organizations' web pages for reporters' easy access.

Get to know the reporters in your area and what topics they cover. Depending on the story's topic, a story might be covered by an education reporter, a business reporter, or a science reporter. Contact the reporters personally, and follow-up with phone calls, e-mails, letters, and personal visits.

Explain your need to reporters personally, especially if you need a good deal of exposure in a short time. However, remember that you are asking for free time or space (in a newspaper or magazine). Anytime or space that is given to you is better than none. Your task is to help them see how this information is newsworthy for their audience.

In addition to contacting individual reporters, you may wish to send information about your event to the public affairs director or promotions director at your local newspaper or television and radio stations. Many television and radio stations have a *calendar of events*, which airs once or several times a day. Newspapers tend to list community events once a week. Stations and newspapers are more likely to publicize the event if it will impact large numbers of people.

Integrate social media. Using social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other platforms, is becoming more popular as organizations try to reach news reporters. Many reporters use social media platforms to find stories and sources. Social media also allows your organization to bypass the news media and go directly to interested audiences who may follow your social media accounts.

Be ready to go on the air early. Many television and radio stations invite guests to discuss their upcoming events on the air. However, these interviews usually are early in the day. Be ready and willing to appear during early morning hours if you are asked.

Develop public service announcements (PSAs). Many television and radio stations air PSAs throughout the day. Radio stations are much better about airing PSAs because they do not take much time to produce. Talk radio stations also have more time to fill and usually are more likely to air PSAs.

Write news releases. News releases, explained later in this publication series, are stories written just like a regular

news story. Their purpose is to provide reporters with the basic information they need to cover a story.

Additional Information

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