



Volunteer Managers Meeting

May9th 2006

Handout on Press Release Writing

This handout has some great ideas of what to think about and do when writing a press release! The first part of the hand out is a brief summary on what Wendy McCrae will be presenting about, and the rest of the handout are some great tips sourced from the internet.

Summary of presentation to be given by Wendy McCrae:

1. Why write a Press Release?

- Free ad space for upcoming events/fundraisers
- Raise awareness of important issues
- Correct a public misconception
- Recruit volunteers
- Refresh public image

2. The 5 W's + H

- Who – The Agency
- What – The Good Deed/Upcoming Event/Accomplishment
- Why – People Story – Who did you do this for?
- Where – Where did it take place?
- When – Upcoming? Past?
- How – Was it decided to address the need?

Other points are:

- It is also important to have a good title that will catch reader's eyes.
- Use stats that make an impact!
- Don't assume that everyone in your story wants to be in it

3. Pictures

Points to be made:

- Invite reporters to your events
- Have your digital camera ready at all events
- Try and capture active photos
- Do not take class photos!
- Make sure photos that you send in are jpeg format and good quality
- Think about contacting local colleges, universities for students that may want to help out with taking photos – they get pictures for their portfolio – you get pictures for your press release – and community building takes place!
- Make sure you have a photo release form for those that are in your picture

4. Follow Up

Points to be made:

- It is important to know who your contact person is and when they are available – have their number/email
- Ask them when they might need to hear back from you
- Don't pester them
- Remember that your story may not go in right away; it may be put in another edition depending on the news that week
- Be prepared to be contacted about the article; be prepared to answer questions – do not let them rush or pressure you
- Read letters to the editor in case you need to correct feedback, or to simply see what the feedback was

5. Relationship Building

Points to be made:

- Create a trust but watch out for saying things that you don't want in the paper
- Never say bad things about other organizations

10 Essential Tips to Ensure Your Press Release Makes the News

<http://www.stetson.edu/~rhansen/prguide.html>

1. Make sure the information is newsworthy.
2. Tell the audience that the information is intended for them and why they should continue to read it.
3. Start with a brief description of the news, then distinguish who announced it, and not the other way around.
4. Ask yourself, "How are people going to relate to this and will they be able to connect?"
5. Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
6. Avoid excessive use of adjectives and fancy language.
7. Deal with the facts.
8. Provide as much Contact information as possible: Individual to Contact, address, phone, fax, email, Web site address.
9. Make sure you wait until you have something with enough substance to issue a release.
10. Make it as easy as possible for media representatives to do their jobs.

How to get the Press on your Side

<http://www.frugalmarketing.com/dtb/press.shtml>

Here are some events or situations that often lead almost effortlessly to lots of free publicity:

- Organizing an event open to the public
- Achieving significant recognition in your field
- Release of a book or record, opening of an exhibit, etc.
- Performing an important service to the community
- Running for office
- Writing legislation, testifying at hearings, etc.
- Inventing, manufacturing, or offering a new product or service
- Being present at--or, better still, involved in--major news events
- Joining or taking leadership in a professional or community service organization--especially one with membership standards
- Offering apprenticeships, training programs, classes, or opportunities to volunteer
- Teaching, lecturing, or presenting at a professional conference
- Winning a contest, sweepstakes, or lottery
- Offering franchises of your business

But you can also get some coverage of far more mundane events. You may not get followed around by a reporter, but you might well get your releases in the paper--and reap all the benefits we discussed earlier. Here are a few examples:

- Moving or opening a new branch
- Educational achievements (including attending work-related seminars) or other accomplishments by members of your staff
- Hosting an open house
- Hiring or promotion of employees
- Annual meetings
- Issuance of any publication available to the public

Use your imagination. You only risk a stamp, and may gain exposure to thousands of people. The media that promote you have something to gain as well; they need an endless supply of fresh material.

But don't expect the media to drop everything and report on you, just so you can get some free publicity. Remember their goals of reporting news and serving the community; you must blend with that agenda. Many editors shy away from blatantly promotional pieces.

Make Life Easier for Your Editorial Allies

Another aspect of thinking like an editor is presenting yourself as the kind of person editors want to deal with. In any oral or written communication with a media outlet, you should be friendly and approachable, articulate and concise. Be willing to answer reporters' questions, even if you have to research the answers and get back to them. (Don't be afraid to say you don't know but can find out, and never give an answer you're not sure is accurate.) If you're running an event or a tourist attraction, let the press in for free to cover it. Finally, know the deadlines and publication schedules of the media you deal with, and understand their importance.

A deadline is the day and time a reporter has to get a story in if it's going to be printed or broadcast in the next edition. Except for very hot last-minute news, those deadlines may as well be written in stone. Get your stuff in on time and don't try to wheedle a journalist into bending a deadline for you--the bad reputation you will get among the press is a far worse disease than being left out once. And don't forget that a reporter needs some time to work with your material, and is balancing your story against many others.

Typically, morning daily newspapers close the edition around 10 p.m., afternoon papers at around 11 a.m., weeklies two to four days before publication. Some sections may close earlier than others. A large metropolitan Sunday newspaper may close the magazine, comics, arts, living, and classified sections as early as Monday, and have them already printed and collated as early as the previous

Thursday. This frees up the presses for news and sports sections that get printed Saturday night. TV stations tend to like to do the camera work at least two to four hours before the newscast. Give daily and broadcast journalists a minimum of a couple of hours before their deadline to write their story-- several days if you're dealing with weeklies, and even longer for monthlies--and don't call any reporter or editor right at deadline, when s/he's frantically trying to get all the stories out.

Feature departments, including community calendars or letters to the editor, may have a deadline that applies to you, rather than the reporter. In my area, the newsweekly and the most popular commercial radio station both want calendar notices two to three weeks ahead! Again, respect the deadline and be on time.

The Event: A Cornucopia of Publicity Opportunities

The easiest way to turn the press into your publicity bureau is by having an event. An event gives the press a handle; they understand how to treat events as news, and as promotable calendar items. Having any kind of event makes you automatically newsworthy. So a good trick for you as the publicist is to phrase your activity as an event. Yes, the same techniques apply to other promotable activities, but so many more doors are opened by linking your publicity agenda to some kind of event that I'd encourage you to do them whenever possible.

For instance, don't just have a sale; a sale is not a news event, but a commercial device to increase business. But a sale can be rolled into something more newsworthy, such as: charity dance-a-thon with reduced prices on dancing shoes and leotards; appearance by a local person who is known for using your product, with concurrent sale on the product; craft demonstration by an artisan who uses materials that you sell, with price cuts in those supplies; foot race from a central point to your food shop, with free refreshments for participants; old shoes trade-in: deduct 10% off the price of a new pair of shoes by bringing in an old but still usable pair for donation to charity; food sampling fair, with discounts on all the participating foods; plain, old party with store-wide clearance sale; concert in a music store, with sales on the instruments the band plays; downtown cleanup with free brooms to participants, as well as a sale on trash bags, rubber gloves, etc.

The Community Service Tie-In

You will notice many promotable events involve charity or community service. This is not coincidence. It is always easier for a business to get free publicity if it's also promoting a cause. Food donations, community improvement projects, and raising/donating money all attract publicity--and help something you genuinely believe in. That last part is key: if you try to do charity insincerely, it will show, and boomerang back at you. But your firm can get commercial mileage out of its good deeds! The donation can be small or large, but it must be genuine and heartfelt.

Here's a large scale example pioneered in my area by Stop & Shop supermarkets: They worked out a deal with a computer manufacturer to donate computers to elementary schools, then invited schools to participate. For every hundred thousand dollars or so in register receipts, the school got a new computer. It was a brilliant move; the promotion was much talked about in the community. Many people switched to Stop & Shop for the duration of the campaign. It cost the store nothing, and also benefited the computer company. Not only did the manufacturer get good will, but also trained a new generation of students in using its products--a classic win-win scheme.

Get the Media to Invest in You

For community service or entertainment events, enlist newspapers and broadcast stations as cosponsors. Typically, media cosponsorship means you do the work and spend whatever money is necessary; the station or publication gives you oodles of free publicity, reports on it, and/or broadcasts portions of the event.

Electronic media are required to provide public service programming as a condition of their license, and publications have a vested interest in maintaining their credibility as the eyes and ears of the community. Because cosponsorship demonstrates the media outlet's community interest and also lets the public hobnob with media personalities, a suggestion for cosponsorship will often be greeted enthusiastically.

What's the difference between the ordinary free publicity you can garner and bringing the station in as a cosponsor? Jordi Herold, proprietor of the Iron Horse Music Hall in Northampton, Massachusetts, uses cosponsorship several times a month. Asking for radio cosponsorship "is not asking for something for nothing, but raises the estimation of the station in [the eyes of] it's audience--makes it possible to hear the same music live. It does a lot to contribute to the positive image of the station." Ideally, "it becomes a priority at the station. That's not measurable in times of mention, but it becomes part of the dj's patter on the air--you can't log that, you can't buy that, you can't specify that."

Newer, smaller media are good bets, says Herold. "We have a station that's new in the area and is competing for market share. If I do a copromotion, I'm likely to get up to 50 free mentions in addition to my paid advertising. With a station...that doesn't have a relationship with the club, I may only get a one-to-one relationship between the spots I buy and promotional mentions. With a college radio station, you can be all over the map without any expenditure of money."

For live music, radio cosponsorship is an especially valuable endorsement, because the station's promotional spots will give listeners the chance to hear a little of an artist they may not know--and because the station's role as an arbiter of music carries over to readers who see the cosponsorship listed in the newspapers and on posters. It's even okay to have several media cosponsoring

an event--if they don't compete. For instance, I organized a candidate forum and got sponsorship--and publicity--from one newspaper, one radio station, and one cable TV station. If I'd wanted to get two radio stations, I would have needed to check with both stations that it was all right to have direct competitors cosponsor the event.

Consider cosponsorships for political candidate forums, live entertainment, fairs and festivals, auctions, and special events.

By [Shel Horowitz](#), marketing/frugality consultant and author of *Grassroots Marketing: Getting Noticed in a Noisy World*, *Marketing Without Megabucks: How to Sell Anything on a Shoestring*, *The Penny-Pinching Hedonist: How to Live Like Royalty with a Peasant's Pocketbook*, and other books. Visit Shel's 350+ page Website, <http://www.frugalfun.com>, for free advice and monthly tipsheets on frugal marketing and frugal fun, as well as Global Arts Review, Global Travel review, and Down to Business magazines.