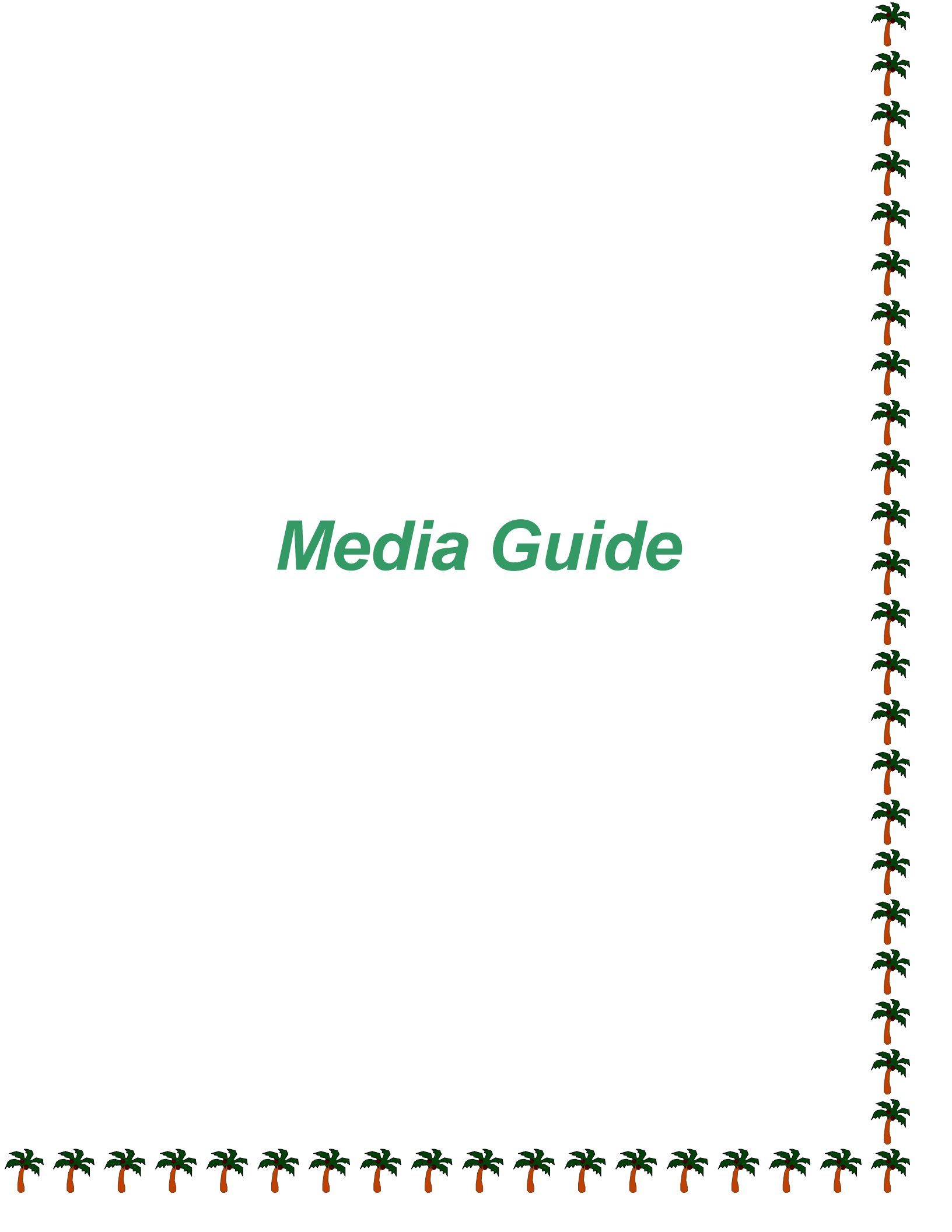


Media Guide



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is a key component to the success of any organization. Whether you are promoting an event, generating awareness about an issue or simply publicizing your activities and services – you will always get better results if you identify the most appropriate communication method with which to reach your audience.

Keep the news media in the loop; they are a valuable (and free) resource for communicating to the public and enhancing your organization's visibility.

Effective media relations is a skill, as well as an exercise in building relationships, and you must present newsworthy and credible information if you want to get the right message out.

This media guide is full of information and examples that will help you plan a communication strategy; locate the correct outlets for your message and utilize the proper tools to promote your programs, issues and events.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Whether your organization is consciously doing it or not, you already have public relations. You can't choose to have public relations or not to have public relations. You can only choose to have good or poor public relations. You can either make PR work *for* your group or let it work against you.

Very simply, the practice of public relations is building relationships with your various publics, or your audiences. It's any communication you have with your publics in one way or another. Even not being known at all is a form of communication — but not a very good one for those who could benefit from your group.

PR = Public Relations

PR is more than publicity and fundraising. Good public relations develops the underlying public support and citizen involvement needed to reach the goals of the organization.

PR = Personal Relations

PR can also stand for personal relations. According to the behavioral model of public relations, PR no longer means public relations — dealing with mass publics. Instead, it now means personal relations — or at least personalized. You're no longer dealing with a vague, faceless audience somewhere out there. As a communicator, you are dealing with individuals — one person at a time; individuals whose perceptions and attitudes have a potential impact on your organization.

Keep in mind that everyone in your organization should be aware of the importance of good public relations. The actions of all involved speak for the group. The friendliness and helpfulness of the receptionist is as important as a well-written news release. The personal contact of the board of directors, other volunteers and staff talking to others about the organization, even in social situations, is invaluable. Good public relations must be ongoing and every person involved with the organization should be aware of the role they play in creating its public image.

WHY GOOD “PR” IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

Whatever your organization’s mission is...

- Influencing people’s attitudes and behaviors to achieve desired actions.
- Providing services to individuals and groups in the community.
- Promoting the value of your organization among community and business leaders.

...public relations has an important role to play in the achievement of that mission.

If your organization is typical, your problem is probably not one of a *negative image*, but one of *no image* at all. And therein lays the essence of what public relations can do for you — it can let the people who need your organization the most *know* that you exist. That’s why a good, organized, well thought out PR plan is absolutely vital to any organization, regardless of its size.

Your organization could work day and night to develop and provide better communities for its citizenry, but if you don’t reach people by using every means necessary to communicate with them, your efforts will be wasted.

You have to communicate with the people who may be affected by your projects to let them know what the plans are so that they don’t fear the unknown. You have to communicate with the public-at-large to explain why your organization deserves their support, or your projects won’t be as successful as they otherwise might be. And, you have to communicate with legislators and local government officials about the issues that are critical to your mission -- or the legislation you are advocating or the continued funding you need may not pass.

Unfortunately, doing good work isn’t always enough these days. If you don’t tell people about your organization and the good it does, you may not have the necessary support when you need it the most.

Good Work + Public Recognition = Success

PLANNED COMMUNICATION

There are two approaches an organization can take regarding its communications.

Reactive Mode

Haphazard

Unplanned

Crisis/Response

Proactive Mode

Strategic

Intentional

Planned

If you're consistently operating in the "reactive" mode, the best that can happen is occasionally getting lucky and hitting upon an opportunity. The worst, a potential disaster can turn into a crisis because it wasn't foreseen and a response plan wasn't in place. Planning can often help you anticipate problems and keep them from occurring.

The importance of planning cannot be stressed enough if you hope to achieve a successful public relations program.

- How do you know you'll accomplish what you set out to achieve if you don't have a plan with specific objectives?
- How will you know you've arrived if you don't know where you're going?

Keep in mind that communications is not an end in and of itself. We communicate for a reason—to make something happen.

RESEARCH & AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION

Long before you begin writing a public relations plan for your organization, you need to uncover your organization's issues and audiences. You're looking for facts, issues, policies, problems, opportunities, challenges and organizational goals. You're also looking for what key audiences know, feel and do about your organization.

IDENTIFYING & PRIORITIZING YOUR AUDIENCES

1. Who are your audiences?

The first step in developing a plan is to identify and segment all of your audiences, both internal and external. Your eventual objectives will focus on audiences — what you want from them and what they want from you. There is no such thing as a mass audience. Groups have subgroups that need different appeals, communication channels, etc. Messages directed at specific audiences are generally more effective than messages directed at the general public.

2. How important are each of these audiences to building your organization?

Unfortunately, nonprofit organizations don't always have "enough to go around" when it comes to allocating their resources, be it money or staffing. This problem can apply to PR programs as well, which is why you will have to establish priorities and focus first on those audiences that will play a major role in building your organization.

3. What responses do you want from your target audiences?

Communication is not an end in and of itself. Always know what response you want from each of your audiences. We communicate for a reason — to elicit responses from people and to build relationships. Communication should be behaviorally based.

4. What are their perceptions of the organization?

People's perceptions influence their behavior. The process of assessing the perceptions each audience has regarding your organization will help you determine what you have to do. You will want to turn negative images into opportunities, and positive images have to be maintained. You will want to influence neutral perceptions in your favor.

By studying your audiences and determining the factors that have contributed to their perceptions, you can better gear your messages toward them and develop strategies designed to reach them.

5. What other attributes characterize these audiences?

Using informal and formal research, you might want to gather additional information about your publics. Here is a short list of attributes to consider.

- Demographics (age, gender, income, etc.)
- Size of audience(s)
- Education level

- Geographic distribution
- Psychographic characteristics (lifestyle, personality)
- Group membership
 - Opinion leaders in those groups
 - Other determinants of opinion

There are several research methods you can use to gather information about your publics. “Informal” methods are less expensive and data is often quite easy to get. Here is a list of some research techniques:

- **Informal** — reading, viewing, observation, personal contacts, incoming mail analysis, information from field personnel, media coverage, conferences, sales records, personnel files, other sources of organizational information (files, annual reports, history, etc.).
- **Formal** — PR audits, cross-section surveys, employee questionnaires, focus groups, telephone surveys, case studies, depth interviews, content analysis, psychosocial techniques. (Note: all have controls to eliminate bias.)

CRAFTING KEY MESSAGES

Effective corporate positioning statements have the following characteristics:

- **CONSISTENCY** – same messages going out to various audiences/media
- **CREDIBILITY** – gives your organization an honest reputation
- **DIFFERENTIATION** – show distinction between you and your competitors
- **RELEVANCE** – must be something the target audience cares about

The four C's of Messaging: Clarity, Consistency, Credibility and Coherence

- Make sure that your messages are compelling, and that they reflect coordination and consolidation. Those that incorporate these traits generally have better reputations than those companies that don't use compelling themes. The consistency of messages demonstrates communications power.

3 Key Points to focus on when crafting a message: (From the media perspective)

1. Use cause and effect.

Years ago, messages tended to target a company's corporate entity – being either broad brush-strokes or very specific. Broad brush-strokes don't unveil a lot of insights. Lengthy and drawn out messages saw very little media pick up because journalists would crop them down and change the overall impact. Now companies are taking their messages and making them more brand-focused, with more of a cause and effect structure.

Example:

- *Old:* Company x is a strong financial performer.
- *New:* Company x is a strong financial performer due to its innovation, new products and technologies.

2. Identify key messages that can be used globally.

You don't need a list of 50 messages; on a global scale, you really only need to pick 3-5 core messages that apply across all brands, sub-brands and services.

3. Identify messages that can apply to all divisions within a company.

As a company, you want to put a global face on your organization that will apply to all regions.

Example: You may tweak messages in press releases slightly to adapt to a specific region or issue; however you don't want to dilute the strength of the message so much that it makes it unrecognizable.

OTHER POINTS

It's important to apply messages that remain the same across the board and won't infringe upon your individual brands. Ensure that the message is tied to corporate identity and that it's measurable.

Ask yourself: What are the three things that we stand for as an organization? If you are unsure where to direct your global message strategy, you can start by looking at the topics that are driving your coverage on a global basis.

The most important thing in terms of messaging is to stay focused! Whether you are working within the organization or you are a citizen, you're seeing a lot of the same material. You need to be pitching the same thing on a consistent basis.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Before crafting key message statements, conduct an audience analysis to determine:

- What issues are most important to your audience?
- What are the audience's concerns and needs?
- What kind of vocabulary do they best understand?
- What does your organization have in common with the audience?

DEFINING & REVISING KEY MESSAGES

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I want the headline to say?
- What do I want the reporter to remember after the interview?

Define your goals. Do you want people to:

- Change their behavior?
- Seek out your services?
- Volunteer their time?
- Understand your mission?

Measure your success. After interviews, ask yourself:

- Did I get my key messages across?
- Did I provide enough information to reinforce my key messages?
- Did the reporter clearly understand my main points?

Weave three key messages into your interview that are two or three sentences long, or 15- to 30-seconds when spoken. Key messages provide spokespersons with direction, as well as help them prioritize and put things into perspective.

TYPES OF MEDIA

PRINT MEDIA

Print media refers to daily and weekly newspapers, magazines and any other written publication. Newspapers publish separate editions, ranging from one a week to seven daily. Magazines usually range from one issue a week to one a quarter. It is important to remember that space is a commodity among printed media.

All printed media have deadlines. Whether for weekly or daily publications, the reporter is usually required to have stories written no later than three hours before the presses roll. Learn your newspaper's deadlines. Call the editor to ask about deadlines.

Print media, particularly the larger daily newspapers, tend to concentrate on details and provide background to current events. As radio, television and the Internet provide faster, more immediate news coverage; newspapers stay competitive by providing context to the story – more background and detail. An interview for a news story may take as little as 10 minutes, while a magazine or feature interview may take more than an hour.

Print reporters are likely to ask probing questions and request background information, statistics, facts and profiles.

TELEVISION MEDIA

Television's strength is its ability to blend pictures with storytelling to create a compelling and visual broadcast that can leave an impression for a very long time. The images or “visuals” captured in a television shot, as well as the physical appearance and demeanor of the news subject, is extremely important. When participating in a television interview in which you have control over the location/setting (e.g., your office), it is important to consider what interesting “visuals” the videographer can shoot, such as designers' plans/sketches, the layout of a new project or a poster with a powerful image.

Time is critical for television news. The average news story on television generally lasts no longer than 45 – 60 seconds. In addition, television has created “sound-bite journalism” – the practice of packaging quotes into shorter and shorter bits. A 15-minute interview may result in a sound bite of no more than 10 seconds. It is very important for spokespeople to express themselves clearly and efficiently.

Television news deadlines are very short, limited mostly by the length of time it takes to edit stories. Story assignments are usually handed out in the morning and reporters have approximately four to five hours to complete interviews and obtain “on location” videotape before returning to the station for editing.

RADIO

Radio is the speediest type of everyday journalism. With no heavy camera equipment or time-consuming video edits, radio reporters can conduct a telephone interview and prepare it for broadcast in minutes. News radio deadlines can often be as short as television.

Interviews for fast news reports are geared to obtaining the desired sound-bite. Interview programs, open-line shows and studio debates are a forum found more often on radio than television. These forums — often a half hour or longer — are generally live and can involve unanticipated questions from callers or hostility from hosts or panel opponents. They require careful preparation.

Radio news is more repetitive than television or printed news. Studies have shown that radio listening audiences from 8:00 - 8:30 a.m. and from 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. have complete turnover every 17 minutes. Therefore, in a 30-minute to 60-minute radio news program, the same news may be repeated two to four times.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

NEWSPAPERS

Types of newspapers include dailies and weeklies from both large metropolitan papers and suburban papers.

Key staff contacts include:

- *City/Metro Editor*: assigns reporters to cover general interest stories
- *Business Editor*: most likely to cover stories on business or economic issues
- *Community/Neighbors Editor*: most likely to cover a human interest story
- *Real Estate Reporter*: most likely to cover development and property sales stories
- *Editorial Page Editor*: responsible for the editorial, op-ed and letters to the editor page

Coverage Opportunities

- Short news stories
- Detailed features
- Op-eds
- Editorials
- Business-sponsored advertisements

Don't forget about noncommercial newspapers such as denominational publications and special-interest or third-party newsletters. These can be helpful in reaching narrowly segmented target audiences whereas dailies and weeklies are valuable for the general public.

WIRE SERVICES

Wire services include Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. AP has bureaus in almost every major city.

Key staff contacts include:

- *Bureau Chief*: assigns general interest stories to reporters
- *Reporters*: cover general and specialized topics
- *Daybook Editor*: lists events taking place in the city each day

Coverage Opportunities

- Statewide news stories

TELEVISION

Television stations include network affiliates (ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX where available), independents, public broadcasting, public access and cable.

Key staff contacts include:

- *News Assignment Editor*: assigns reporters to cover a news story

- *Reporters*: cover general community topics
- *News Director*: the person with whom you could discuss a special series
- *Producers* of various guest segments on the news shows
- *Producers* of appropriate public affairs or talk shows

Coverage Opportunities

- News and feature stories
- Talk shows

RADIO

FM and AM stations offer programming that appeals to different audiences, such as pop, R&B, ethnic, oldies, country and western, easy listening and classical. All news and talk stations also have an avid audience of loyal listeners. Also consider state and regional radio networks and public broadcasting stations, some of which may carry National Public Radio (NPR).

Key staff contacts include:

- *News Director*: prepares stories for news broadcasts
- *Producers* of appropriate public affairs and talk shows

Coverage Opportunities

- News stories
- Public Service Announcements
- Talk shows
- Call in programs

CAPITAL PRESS CORPS

Tallahassee boasts one of the nation's largest groupings of press representation among capital cities, with every major Florida daily newspaper maintaining reporting staff. In addition, several television and radio news services provide reports on a subscription basis to broadcast stations in every major Florida market. There's also a significant AP presence.

Coverage Opportunities

- Statewide news stories (particularly those with political angles)

“NEW” MEDIA

Today, with the constant growth of digital technology, new types of media have emerged and become a part of daily life. From blogs to podcasts, this “new” media cannot be ignored. We must embrace it and see the benefits of these new opportunities for communication.

BLOGS

Blogs are web journals that allow the author and viewer to post and reply to messages on specific topics.

Benefits of blogging include:

- Efficient means of educating people, promoting awareness and obtaining the public’s opinion on subjects
- Quick way to reach a large audience
- Trendy medium — almost everyone (particularly young people) either has a blog, reads a blog and/or posts messages on a blog

As with any medium, there are risks. The greatest danger can often be found in the loss of key messages in the final article, newscast or web posting. Blogs more than any other medium are highly susceptible to misinformation. When a newspaper runs an article with incorrect information, they run a correction. In a blog, everyone is a journalist, for better or for worse. Because of this fact, many bloggers, wishing to establish their credibility, are choosing to abide by a bloggers’ code of ethics.

CODE OF ETHICS

1. I will tell the truth.
2. I will write deliberately and with accuracy.
3. I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly.
4. I will preserve the original post, using notations to show where I have made changes so as to maintain the integrity of my publishing.
5. I will never delete a post.
6. I will not delete comments unless they are spam or off-topics.
7. I will reply to emails and comments when appropriate, and do so promptly.
8. I will strive for high quality with every post – including basic spellcheck.
9. I will stay on topic.
10. I will disagree with other opinions respectfully.
11. I will link to online references and original source materials directly.
12. I will disclose conflicts of interest.
13. I will keep private issues and topics private, since discussing private issues would jeopardize my personal and work relationships.

(Source: Forrester Best Practices Report)

Popular blog sites include:

- www.technorati.com
- www.blogger.com

- www.blogpulse.com
- www.feedster.com
- www.bloglines.com

PODCASTS

Podcasts are video and audio files transferred over the Internet to a portable, digital device. As with most “new” media, podcasting provides the user the opportunity to distribute the information quickly and efficiently to a large and diverse audience.

The attraction to podcasting is its portability via the iPod. However, it can be problematic that not everyone can afford the device. Therefore, your message is not reaching a representative portion of the population.

Popular podcasting sites include:

- www.podcastalley.com
- www.ipodder.org
- www.podcast.net
- www.singingfish.com
- www.digitalpodcast.com

VIDEO HOSTING

Video hosting sites offer a quick way to get your video out to viewers. Whether a 30-second PSA or a 10-minute promotional video, video hosting sites allow you to upload your video to their site (usually free of charge). A video is an effective way of communicating because it is easy to watch, and its images and messages are often remembered.

The downside to video hosting web sites is the overcrowding. Nowadays, everybody has a video to share. It is very difficult to get your video to stand out among the rest.

Popular video hosting sites include:

- www.youtube.com
- www.ifilm.com
- www.video.yahoo.com
- www.video.google.com
- www.singingfish.com

“NEW” MEDIA GLOSSARY

Blog – shorthand for web-log, frequent and chronological sequences of comments and opinions on a web site

Blogger – person who posts a blog and keeps it updated

Blogging – action of updating the blog

Podcasting – method of distributing files, such as audio or video programs, over the Internet

Podcaster – host or author of a podcast

Web Video – videos that are hosted on a web site

RSS Feed – symbol that appears on web sites to alert the viewer that the page has been updated

WRITTEN PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS

Most media require specific formats for newsworthy information. If your information is submitted incorrectly, the following may occur:

- Cut from printing or air time
- Discarded due to space requirements
- Editors will hesitate to accept submissions from your organization

It is important to have a grasp of these concepts before crafting and submitting any written publication. Remember, positive media relations is important to the success of your organization. Failure to comply with submission requirements could prove to be detrimental to your organization.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

The press release often is viewed as the public relations professional's bread and butter. But, because reporters receive hundreds daily, you must make sure yours stands out.

A press release highlights the essence of your story and is written to heighten the editor's interest. However, reporters' most common criticism about press releases is that they lack news. Therefore, these are the first questions you should ask yourself when considering a press release—*Is this news? What are the most important points? Is there any new data? Is there new information being presented? Are well-known experts involved from whom I can obtain a quote that reinforces our main message?* Follow these guidelines when writing a news release:

- Identify the essential points you want to communicate and write your release from them.
- Place the most important pieces of the news in the “lead”—the first paragraph should give all the important information in case the editor doesn't read any further. Ask yourself who, what, where, when, why and how. Place the answers to those questions in the first few sentences.
- Arrange the details of the information you wish to communicate with the most important elements at the beginning of the release and the least important at the end.
- Write the release in easy to understand language (i.e., avoid jargon). Keep the release short. One page is ideal, but two pages are acceptable.
- Include a closing paragraph, which describes the purpose, your organization or program briefly.
- Try to write the release so it can be printed as is in a newspaper. Many smaller newspapers may actually print your entire press release. Larger media outlets will develop the story by using portions of the press release along with information gathered from your event and/or interviews.
- Place the press release on your organization's stationery. If your campaign is a multi-agency effort, devise a letterhead identifying participating organizations.
- Type the release on one side of the page only. Begin typing the body of the release one-third of the way down from the top of the first page.
- Place a contact name and telephone number on the top right-hand side of the release. Mark the top left-hand side of the release—FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or NEWS RELEASE, and include the date of release.
- Place a short, clear headline in all capital letters on the release above the first paragraph that will spark the editors interest.
- Center “-more-” at the bottom of the first page if the release is longer than one page. Do not break a sentence from one page to another.

- Put “Page Two” at the top of the second page and all successive pages along with a keyword from the headline in case the pages become separated. Use the symbol “###” centered at the bottom of the last page to indicate the end of the release.

[INSERT LOGO HERE]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE TO BE RELEASED

CONTACT: CONTACT NAME IN CAPS
NAME OF ORGANIZATION/COMPANY IN CAPS
PHONE: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
E-MAIL: XXXX@XXXX.com

TITLE OF RELEASE SHOULD SUMMARIZE THE CONTENT OF THE RELEASE IN ONE LINE AND SHOULD BE IN CAPS, BOLD AND CENTERED

NAME OF CITY IN CAPS AND BOLD – In the first paragraph of a press release, state the basic who, what, where, when, why and how information. A release should lead with the most important information and end with the least important. As a general rule, press releases should be no longer than two pages.

Paragraphs should consist of approximately 3 – 4 concise sentences. The body of a press release should be double-spaced, whereas the contact information should be single-spaced.

Print press releases on organization or company letterhead if available. Include the month (spelled out), day and year in your dateline at the top. Provide at least one-inch margins on each side of the paper if possible.

Use three number marks (###) centered on the bottom of the page to indicate the end of a release. If an additional page is necessary, indicate that the release continues onto the next page using “-more-“ centered on the bottom of the first page. If you must continue your release onto the next page, never break up a sentence. Simply begin the next page with the entire sentence.

-more-

In the “slugline”, use one to two words that summarize the entire release. These can usually be pulled from the title, and should be in all caps. Always place “Page 2” underneath. Slugline and page number should be single-spaced. However, the remainder of the release body will be double-spaced.

There is no need to use letterhead for subsequent pages. Plain white paper will do fine. Your last paragraph should be separate and list contact information in case the reader would like more information.

For more information, contact _____, at _____. You can include telephone, fax, e-mail or address.

###

MEDIA ADVISORY

A media advisory is a variation on a press release. It is a memo to the media and is only utilized if there is actually an event where there is a photo opportunity or something that the press can actually attend. It includes all the important information about your event or campaign. Instead of the paragraph form of the news release, media advisories use bullets of information. The following tips make the media advisory easy to read. Indicate important information.

Such as:

- Who is the primary contact?
- Who is sponsoring the event, participating or speaking?
- What is the event?
- When is it?
- Where is it?
- Why is it important?
- Are there any important things happening that make for interesting television?

[INSERT LOGO HERE]

CONTACT: CONTACT NAME IN CAPS
NAME OF ORGANIZATION/COMPANY IN CAPS
PHONE: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
E-MAIL: XXXX@XXX.com

**MEDIA ADVISORY/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY
(CENTERED IN BOLD, CAPS AND LARGER FONT SIZE)**

WHO: Name of the organization hosting the event
WHAT: Name of event/what is taking place
WHERE: Physical location – provide address
WHEN: Date and time of event
WHY: Purpose of event

You may choose to provide a brief summary underneath (1-2 paragraphs) with more detailed information on the event. Highlight particular aspects of the event that are newsworthy and not included in the basic who, what, where, when, why and how (e.g., dignitaries attending, special awards or honors being presented, activities surrounding the event or announcements being made).

For more information, contact _____ at _____.

###

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAs)

PSAs are typically 60-, 30- or 10-second free radio and television advertisements for charitable and non-profit organizations that promote programs, services, activities or issues of community interest. Competition for air-time is very intense. PSAs are usually scheduled when a station cannot fill the time with paid advertising, although many stations are required to air a certain number of PSAs from nonprofit organizations.

Tips about PSAs:

- Contact the stations and find out what its criteria are for running a PSA, including the preferred length. PSAs of the required length will stand a better chance of being aired than those of “irregular” lengths. Tailor your PSA to the requirements.
- Once you’ve written your PSA, meet or speak by phone with the public service director. Tell them you have a PSA and present a brief overview of the campaign and your event. Be prepared with facts and figures about your project. Public service directors must choose from among hundreds of requests for free time. The more information he/she has about your program, the better he/she will be able to make an informed decision.
- A prerecorded PSA may be expensive unless you have access to free production equipment. Some stations will permit you to provide talent to record the spot. However, most stations prefer that their on-air hosts read the PSAs, and you only have to provide a script.
- One way to get help with productions for radio or TV is to ask a local ad club or public relations association to “sponsor” your effort. Communication professionals in these organizations often donate their service to a worthy cause.

[INSERT LOGO HERE]

TITLE OF PSA SPOT
__-SECOND PSA

BROADCAST DATES

CONTACT: NAME OF CONTACT IN CAPS
PHONE: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
E-MAIL: XXXX@XXX.com

ANNOUNCER:

PSA COPY SHOULD BE TYPED ON THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE SHEET IN CAPITAL LETTERS. TRIPLE-SPACE THE COPY IN ORDER TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE ANNOUNCER TO READ. BE SURE TO LIST IF THE SPOT IS A 60-, 30- OR 10-SECOND SPOT IN THE TOP LEFT-HAND CORNER OF THE COPY, LIST THE DATES (MONTH AND DAY THROUGH MONTH AND DAY) YOU WOULD LIKE IT TO RUN. READ YOUR COPY OUT LOUD AND TIME YOURSELF TO ENSURE YOU ARE WITHIN THE APPROPRIATE TIME LIMITS. USE -30- TO INDICATE THE END OF THE COPY.

OTHER WRITTEN PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOLS

MEDIA KIT

The shell for media kits is usually a basic folder that has the name or logo of the organization. Media kits are used by organizations to provide basic information about the organization, special events, news conferences and crises to the media. In all cases, the kit should have a letter attached or enclosed addressed to the person who is going to use the information. The letter should explain why the kit is being sent, identify its contents and list important dates or contacts (see “Pitch Letters”).

Basic media kits may include:

- Press releases and/or feature articles
- Media “tip sheets” with brief story ideas
- A fact sheet giving information about the organization or event
- Biographical information on the principals/officers of the organization
- A backgrounder that tells something about the character of the organization and the nature of what it does
- Photocopies of articles printed about the organization or event in publications such as daily newspapers or monthly magazines
- Selected copies of any position papers prepared by the organization
- Selected copies of the organization’s serial publications such as newsletters or magazines
- An annual report or informational brochure if available
- Logo slicks
- Optional items: black and white glossy photographs (print media only); sound bites on compact disk (electronic media only); B-roll video footage (television media only)

PITCH LETTERS

A pitch letter should accompany any media kit sent, and is designed to solicit help from an editor, reporter or producer to provide coverage on your organization or event. A pitch letter is basically a standard business letter (about four to five paragraphs; a maximum of one page long) that includes the following information:

- Why you are writing them (e.g., announcing an event, new service, accomplishment or news conference)
- Why they should read through the media kit
- Tell them why it is interesting and/or important
- A brief statement describing the organization, event or issue
- A brief statement describing your organization and what it does (for event or issue letter)
- What the media kit contains
- Plea for support/what you would like from them
- Contact information

FACT SHEETS

Standard fact sheets present the fundamental facts about the organization or event in an easy to read, bulleted format. Fact sheets should not be any longer than one page, and may include:

- Names of officers
- Office locations with address, phone numbers, fax numbers and appropriate e-mail addresses
- Description of the organization/event
- Historical milestones in the organization's/event's history (e.g., when organization was founded)
- Major accomplishments
- Programs offered

For fact sheets on events, you may also want to include:

- Where and when the event is being held
- Cost, if applicable
- Past benefits offered as a result of the event and who benefited
- Names of participants
- Dollars raised/hoped to raise if a fundraising event
- Sponsor names

BACKGROUNDER

Backgrounders provide a more comprehensive overview of an organization, event or issue than a fact sheet. Backgrounders are longer and more general in content than a press release. For example, a two-page release announcing the merger of two organizations may not permit much description of the companies involved. A four- or five-page backgrounder provides more in-depth information on the make-up, activities and history of the merging firms. Backgrounders are usually not used in their entirety by the media but are excerpted. They must include the latest research and information in order to be effective.

CONDUCTING A NEWS CONFERENCE

A news conference is an excellent means for disseminating news to all media at the same time. It brings the media face-to-face with the person making news or making an announcement. It permits a more complete and convincing presentation of facts and enables reporters to ask questions and receive authoritative answers.

The news to be announced must be of enough significance to justify the assignment time of reporters and camera crews. Call a news conference only if you know your news warrants it. Nothing will discredit your organization and you as a news source so quickly as a news conference on a subject the media regard as trivial.

It is sometimes helpful to prepare a press kit ahead of time for distribution at the news conference, especially if the conference deals with a complex subject. The kit might consist of a folder, containing a press release, a photo of the speaker or speakers, a biography of each, a copy of any official statement, a fact sheet highlighting important aspects of the issue being discussed and pertinent documents, as well as other backup literature or information.

Not all the media will be able to attend for various reasons. Therefore, it is always a good idea to “messenger” the press kit or news materials to all media not attending immediately after the event is over.

TIMING

Send your invitation well ahead of time. It should be received by newsmen at least 24 hours before the conference is scheduled. Several days in advance is best. Be sure to send it to the proper person, usually the city editor of the local newspaper and trade magazines, and the news director or assignment editor of the radio or television station.

Generally, mid-morning is the best time for a news conference. Avoid scheduling your conference at or near the same time of any major events in your area, and when scheduling be sure to consider the needs and deadlines of your local media.

Be sure to greet newsmen as they arrive, identifying yourself and offering any assistance or information that may be desired before the conference gets underway.

CONTENT

Usually, a news conference consists of a newsworthy statement or presentation by the organization's spokesperson (preferably the president, senior officer or board chair), perhaps comments from other key leaders, followed by a question-and-answer period. A news conference should last no longer than 30 minutes, less if possible.

Other high-ranking representatives of your organization should be present, in case the subject touches on their areas of operation, they can answer questions of a more technical or precise nature. Discourage several people from making formal statements if one spokesperson can adequately cover the subject.

Expect a lot of questions. Plan ahead for them and how your spokesperson should respond. At the close of the meeting, the spokesperson should thank the reporters for their interest and attendance and invite later inquiries or clarification should the need arise. After the meeting, a reporter may desire a private interview with the spokesperson. This should be arranged if at all possible.

PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS

The physical arrangements will depend largely upon the number of reporters and photographers attending and whether TV cameras will be present. The location should be away from distracting noises and corridor traffic.

The spokesperson may prefer to present their message from a lectern, possibly equipped with a microphone to assure adequate hearing if the group is large. A lectern also may be desired by radio and TV personnel for locating their own microphones and recording equipment near the speaker.

To avoid potential problems if TV cameras are present, it is wise to provide seating to accommodate the differing requirements of the print and electronic media. It is usually best to locate the cameras in an aisle directly in front of the speaker, with chairs for the print media on either side.

For TV, make sure that electrical outlets are easily accessible and of sufficient amperage to accommodate the necessary lighting. Too much power drain could blow a fuse!

A plain background behind the speaker is preferred. Make sure there are no visual distractions such as a window, photograph, painting, or mirror that will reflect light or images. If necessary, drape a curtain on the wall. An effective public relations touch is to hang a wall banner, showing your logo, directly behind the speaker so it shows on camera. A similar, but appropriately smaller, banner can be hung on the front of the lectern.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Provide ice water and drinking glasses for the speaker. It may be helpful to place a tablet and pencil in each seat. Position yourself near the door to the meeting room, to greet late arriving news representatives and to discourage curiosity seekers from entering the room.

NEWS CONFERENCE CHECK LIST

- Be sure a news conference is needed (as opposed to one-on-one contact)
- Notify press
- Invite other officials (as appropriate)
- Arrange for photographer and/or videographer to document event
- Assign responsibility for physical arrangements
- Reserve room large enough to accommodate reporters, TV cameras and lights
- Obtain podium with banner and audio box
- Hang backdrop (as appropriate)
- Provide refreshments, if needed
- Assemble chairs/tables to accommodate needs of photographers
- Assemble diagrams and maps for display
- Brief your staff on the subject, spokesperson and schedule
- Obtain written statements for spokesperson (bullet points may be preferable to completely written text)
- Develop a list of anticipated questions and answers for the spokesperson
- Give advance copies of materials to your team
- Assign staff to direct media to briefing room
- Log the names/affiliations of media representatives who attend
- Distribute press kits
- Start company video and/or audio recorders
- Open the conference
- Identify yourself and other speakers
- Describe briefing format, schedule and then begin
- Summarize information in most recent press release and describe new developments
- Monitor the questions and answers closely
- Announce time of next conference and thank the media for their participation and cooperation

TIPS FOR MEDIA SUCCESS

CHOOSE THE RIGHT MEDIA

Although all media search out and welcome news stories, TV, radio and newspapers each have unique characteristics that will affect their likely interest in your story.

PRINT

What makes the print media unique is its ability to provide in-depth commentary by way of longer news articles and the fact that newspapers and magazines have long shelf lives (compared to radio and TV).

RADIO

When speed counts, radio has the advantage of being able to produce and air a broadcast report minutes after news breaks. Also, morning-drive shows and evening rush-hour programming often have large followings and loyal listeners.

TELEVISION

The strength of television is its ability to blend pictures with storytelling to create a compelling and visual broadcast that can leave an impression for a very long time

UNDERSTANDING WHAT MAKES NEWS

It can be a frustrating experience trying to sell your story to media outlets, but understanding what makes news can go a long way in breaking down the media barrier.

What makes news?

News is what people are talking about.

A nice simplification, but you need to know more. If you want a reporter to be interested in your story, you need to meet one of the following criteria.

- **Timeliness:** Nothing beats breaking news. Such news stories often command front page attention at newspapers and lead air time at radio and TV stations. Breaking news is immediate news about something that just happened and that matters to a defined audience. This is news that people will talk about.
- **Proximity:** Most media are first and foremost interested in stories with a local angle.
- **Conflict:** Like it or not, conflict -- whether it involves people, companies or government -- makes news. What may seem to be a simple rivalry between two business competitors is often a good news story for the media.

- **Eminence and Prominence:** Some people are newsworthy simply because of their fame or their position of power. If a prominent person attends your event or endorses your ideas, that could be a story.
- **Consequence and Impact:** The more people affected, the bigger the story.
- **Human Interest:** People are interested in people. It's a fact and a strong element of news. Those who read, listen and watch the news like to learn about others. Though a business story at first glance may not seem to be about people, playing up personal elements in your story will make it more interesting to viewers and readers.
- **"News Holes":** Often, space limitations (a busier news day and more stories) will result in your big event being dropped from the paper. On the other hand, editors may be desperate for another local story or for a photograph for the front page. That can work to your advantage.
- **Competition among media:** No one wants to cover old news. An editor or reporter is far less likely to write about your story if the competition had the same story a week earlier. On the other hand they may be more likely to run your news story if you approach them with an "exclusive" and give them the chance to cover the story before anyone else gets it.

APPROACHING THE MEDIA

Once you understand what makes news, it's time to "pitch" your news story to the media. Here are several things to keep in mind.

1. Don't confuse advertising with editorial.

Buying an advertisement doesn't warrant a news story. Advertising is separate from editorial (news) content, like church and state. It is NOT a good idea to have someone from your advertising department phone an editor. Appoint someone who understands the editorial side of the media. If you have a good newsworthy story it should be able to stand on its own. By the same token, the editorial page staff and the newsroom are run separately.

2. Know whom to contact.

Know your daily newspaper's sections (e.g., features, neighbors, health, business, etc.). Read the bylines so you know which reporters cover your issue. Follow all the local coverage of your issue; there are few better ways of shooting yourself in the foot than pitching a story to a reporter who has just written an article on that subject. When pitching a story, think of the specific reporter, editor or section that would be best suited to the story. Know the segments on your local TV and radio programs. Is there a feature program, a public affairs program that would be perfect for your organization?

3. Meet the press.

Cultivate a relationship with the reporter(s) who cover the beats related to your organization. Send them an email to introduce yourself, follow up with a phone call to offer to meet with them and share some background on your group. Gain their trust by consistently being an honest source who understands deadlines. Let them know your areas

of expertise and activism so that they'll think of you when they need a quote or comment on a story.

4. Call early but DON'T call often.

If you are sending out a press release, it is important to follow-up with a media call as soon as possible. Be specific when calling. Ask if the reporter received your release and whether or not you could have two minutes of his or her time to explain the contents of the release. Don't forget to tailor your pitch to the specific media. If the reporter says NO, more often than not it means NO. Thank them for their time and move on. If the reporter is interested, he or she will let you know. Then half the battle is won. If you are the media contact, *be available* for the media. There is no use putting your name on a press release if you are not willing or able to talk to reporters. Give your home and cell phone numbers. Reporters are often on deadline after you've left work.

5. Be prepared to run around.

If a reporter likes your story idea, then you are halfway to getting coverage. But you still have work to do. Reporters will often ask for background information and contact names, make sure you have them on hand. Media outlets with daily deadlines need information quickly, whether or not you have it available can decide whether the story runs or not.

6. Get to the point.

Not only are you busy but so are reporters -- so get to the point! Reporters face daily deadlines and between faxes, e-mails and telephone calls, they may receive hundreds of story suggestions each week. Reporters have good news judgment and can often decide within a few minutes or even seconds whether or not they are interested in your pitch.

7. Be a news hound.

Be well-informed. Listen to NPR, watch the news, read the papers and magazines. Being plugged in to the news will make you a more effective PR person and help you develop an appreciation of what makes a good news story.

8. Find the local angle.

If a big state or national media story is relevant to your issue, consider pitching a story to the local media that localizes that story for area readers.

9. Pick a peg.

Be on the lookout for a time peg on which to hang story ideas for your issue (e.g., the anniversary of a big news event, a recognized day or week commemorating an annual event, the holidays, etc.). This peg can be used for a story pitch or for an op-ed piece/guest column you submit to the paper.

10. Create news.

Your organization can generate its own news story through an interesting event, a local survey or a stance taken on a timely topic.

11. Think outside the soapbox.

The editorial section of the paper is a good place to get your voice heard. If you have a strong opinion on a story in the newspaper, write an op-ed or letter-to-the-editor on it.

12. Paint a thousand words.

When pitching a story, think of what photo opportunities (still or video) you can offer the media outlet you're pitching. Work to create access for those photographers and camera people. If a photo runs with your story, it will draw more attention. Also, papers often run "stand-alone" photos that don't have a story with them, just a caption. So, don't forget the photo editor of your local paper when promoting a visual event or activity.

13. Be an all-star pitcher.

When pitching a story, cold calls aren't generally effective to busy, besieged journalists. The best strategy is to send an email that summarizes what makes your story timely and relevant to local readers. In the next day or two (or sooner if timing dictates), follow up with a phone call, citing the email you sent. Try to avoid leaving messages; just keep calling until you get the reporter or editor on the line. They may ask you to resend the information. Follow up again. Communicate excitement for your story idea without being pushy. Take a "no" graciously, but also ask if they think another reporter might be interested in the story. If there has been a big story on your group recently, don't expect the paper to be open to another feature story for at least a year. Timing is everything!

14. Be a know-it-all.

You can get your organization's name and mission into print by letting the media know you have experts on certain subjects in your organization. The idea is to get the media to think of you as a resource — to prime the media to think of your organization, or experts within your organization, as people to turn to for an explanation or quote on a story that deals with issues related to your group. This can be accomplished by faxing or emailing a neatly-formatted list of people affiliated with your group and listing the subjects of their expertise. With luck, the reporter will file it away and refer to it when an expert on your topic is needed.

15. Think like a journalist!

Journalists like: a news peg, statistics, trends, human-interest angles, anecdotes, experts, prompt response to phone calls, lively/colorful quotes, visuals.

Journalists don't like: no news peg, lies, defensiveness, feeling manipulated, jargon, feeling stereotyped.

WHEN THE MEDIA CALL

If you receive a request for an interview, and you haven't had a chance to prepare...

DON'T give an interview on the spot. Ask questions of the reporter to gather some information that will help you compose your answers (and buy a little time):

- Name, title and employer
- Area of interest
- Deadline
- Story angle/relation to your company
- Other interview subjects
- Story appearance/publication date

Tell them you can't conduct an interview at the moment (e.g., due to meetings or business commitments), but promise to call back in a timely manner -- postponing 15 minutes is even helpful so you can collect your thoughts and gather some materials (including reviewing key messages).

Some reporters may know a lot about your industry or profession, others will not. *Providing relevant background information, statistics, or third-party references can offer a reporter a new perspective on the story.*

When writing a story, reporters have three basic approaches. They look for: change, controversy and human interest.

THE ROLE OF THE SPOKESPERSON

In order to serve as a spokesperson for your company, you must:

1. Understand the media and their needs.

- Clarify the purpose of the interview to determine if it is appropriate and which spokesperson from your organization should participate.
- Become familiar with the reporter, media outlet and relevant past news coverage.
- Focus on directing your messages to the audience in question (i.e., consider whether you'll be addressing citizens, residents or business leaders).

2. Prepare for your interviews.

- Know the issues.
- Understand the supporting and opposing views.
- Be well versed in the organization's viewpoint.
- Determine what you want to say and set your agenda.

Don't agree to an interview without having a chance to prepare.

3. Have background information on the situation/issue at your fingertips.

- Key messages
- Facts
- Statistics
- Authorities or Experts
- Analogy or Comparison
- Personal Experience

4. Know your facts and stick to them!

Example: Representatives from your organization provide different answers to the same question, throwing up a "red flag" to reporters. They may wonder which representative is right and who is speaking on behalf of the organization.

All spokespersons should be delivering consistent messages!

TYPES OF INTERVIEWERS AND QUESTIONS

MACHINE-GUNNER

This reporter barrages you with questions.

- Listen to the questions, and then choose one that gets you directly to your key messages. Leave the other, more negative questions until later.
- Don't give control back to the reporter by asking which of all those questions the reporter wants answered. Chances are good the reporter will go straight to the toughest of all.

INTERRUPTER

This reporter steps on your story by interrupting you.

- You have rights with the press – exercise them.
- Graciously acknowledge the interrupter, but return to and finish the point you were making.
- If you sense that the reason for a reporter's interruptions stem from excitement about your story, you may choose to elaborate more fully on those questions.
- Be sensitive to a reporter who interrupts because your answers are too long or unfocused.

PARAPHRASER

This reporter may try to put words in your mouth.

- Reporters paraphrase to make certain they understand what you are saying.
- They are looking for summary statements that put your story, points or perception in a nutshell.
- They may be trying to challenge you by presenting a different perspective on what you've been saying.
- Don't let reporters put words in your mouth.
- Listen for paraphrasing clues:
 - *“So what you're saying is...”*
 - *“In other words...”*
 - *“So in summary...”*

- Since paraphrases may be attributed to you, restate even those paraphrases that you think are good summaries of your story, just so the quote will be in your own words.

DART THROWER

This reporter uses negativity to dislodge interesting negative quotes from you and break down your story.

- Treat this person with kindness.
- Avoid responding with a negative tone.
- Avoid repeating the specific negative language a reporter introduces into the conversation.
- A denial of a negative idea or statement that puts the negative in your mouth is very quotable.

INTERVIEW TIPS & TECHNIQUES

- Be clear and concise. Write your key points down in order of priority. Make them memorable and quotable. Make them brief.
- Use a full script with LARGE TYPE for easy reading.
- Leave wide margins for notes for yourself.
- Highlight and mark your script to guide your delivery.
- Make sure you can back up every key message with facts and examples.
- Don't be intimidated by tape recorders. This ensures accurate quotes.
- If you mistakenly give incorrect information, correct yourself immediately.
- If you tell the reporter you will get back to them with additional information, be certain to respect their deadline.
- Speak at your normal voice level. Emphasize key points.
- Don't respond to hostility. Calmly state your points — back them up with facts.
- Don't accept "what if" questions.
- Don't speak for someone else.
- Explain corrective steps you're taking.

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

THE FIRST QUESTION

The first question can set the tone for the entire interview. If the reporter starts off with an open-ended, weak or confusing question, it's your job to provide some focus.

BE CONVERSATIONAL

An interview does not have to be a question-and-answer session. Think of it as a conversation, and you have an important story to tell. Engage the reporter in a conversation. Deliver your key messages and state your case.

QUOTABLE LANGUAGE

Prepare to make comments that will stand out. Use an example, an analogy or a colorful comparison. The best quotes occasionally become headlines or get prominent display within a story.

CONTROL

Composure is crucial during an interview. Listen carefully to questions and think before giving an answer. Do not allow yourself to be baited or bullied, but always respond to challenges or accusations that may place you or your company in a negative light.

BODY LANGUAGE

Body language is particularly important for television interviews, but also plays a role in any face-to-face interview. It affects your credibility.

- sit/stand upright and forward (physically participate in the conversation)
- sit/stand still (swiveling and fidgeting make you look dishonest and disinterested)
- use your hands (naturally, not excessively)
- animate your voice, let the reporter know what interests you
- make eye contact with the interviewer (don't talk to a camera)

BLOCKING AND BRIDGING

The most common mistake in interviews is becoming fixated by a question, and losing sight of your key messages. The most effective spokespeople listen to the bigger issue behind each question.

Blocking is deftly avoiding an unwelcome or inappropriate question.

Bridging is making a smooth transition from an undesirable topic to one fitting your agenda.

TIPS FOR PRINT INTERVIEWS

- Don't be intimidated by a tape recorder. Tape recorders help ensure that quotes will be accurate.
- If you mistakenly give misleading or incorrect information, correct yourself immediately.
- If you tell the reporter you will get back to them with additional information, be certain to respect their deadline.
- Following the interview, you CAN ask a reporter if they plan to use the interview and when they think it will run (though that is their editor's decision, not theirs).
- Do NOT ask a reporter to see the story before it runs. You don't have the right to review it or change your quotes. However, you can ask a reporter to repeat back your quotes or the information you provided to ensure accuracy.

TIPS FOR TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

- Dress conservatively by avoiding loud ties, shirts, blouses, etc. Don't wear white, as it casts unflattering light on the face. Also avoid large or loud jewelry and light-sensitive glasses.
- For men: medium-gray, blue or brown suits and pastel or off-white shirts are best. Avoid suits with bold patterns and stripes. For neckties, muted colors are best, avoid checks and very small patterns. Don't wear bow ties. Men should shave before the interview if possible.
- For women: solid colors are most effective. Avoid white and light-colored blouses, as well as clothing with small patterns. Jackets and suits in neutral colors generally work best; however, deep reds are not as flattering. Wear very little jewelry and avoid heavy make-up.
- Arrive at the interview site early so you can acquaint yourself with the program's crew and set. You'll be more comfortable for the interview.

- If you plan to use graphics, charts or other visuals, practice handling them before the interview. Advise the station in advance, so that the appropriate equipment will be available.
- Minimize distractions. Turn off all electronic devices and focus on the interview.
- Do not chew gum.
- Don't be afraid of the camera or microphone – think of them as your audience.
- If you have a lavalier, or “lav” microphone clipped to your tie or jacket, avoid brushing against it with your hand. Be sure it is unclipped before walking away!
- Speak at your normal voice level, gesture naturally, so your expressions match your words. Emphasize key points.
- Avoid nervous movement, such as foot-tapping, swiveling or rocking in your seat, clenched fists, etc.
- Speak to the interviewer, not the camera. Remember to make your points punchy and concise.
- Keep your eye-line focused on the interviewer. If you look down or look from side-to-side, you appear uncomfortable or uncooperative, thus losing credibility with the audience.
- Be conscious of time. Make sure you get a chance to cover the area you believe to be the most important and sum up your main points before time runs out. Remember your key messages.

ETIQUETTE FOR STAND-UP INTERVIEWS

- Keep your hands at your sides, not crossed or in your pockets.
- Keep your feet next to each other, firmly on the ground.
- Don't shift around.

ETIQUETTE FOR SITTING INTERVIEWS

- Avoid swivel chairs. If no other chair is available, don't swivel because the movement will distract viewers from your message.
- Men cross their legs at the knee. Women cross their legs at the ankles with knees together. If the reporter stands, you stand. If the reporter sits, you can sit or stand. Try to stay on the same level as the camera so it neither towers over you nor looks up at you.

TIPS FOR RADIO INTERVIEWS

- Arrive at the interview site early. You'll be more comfortable for the interview.
- Speak at your normal voice level, and modulate your voice to emphasize key points. Remember, there are no visuals, so use descriptive examples to illustrate your message.
- In a one-on-one interview, speak to the reporter, not the microphone. NEVER try to hold the microphone.
- Do not chew gum.
- Avoid deep sighs, yawns, squeaking your chair, or other noise producing activities — the microphone captures everything.
- Don't respond to hostility from a caller or host. Stick to your guns and don't get flustered. Take the moral high ground, calmly state your key points and back them up with facts.

INTERVIEW TRANSITIONS

Transitions provide the clarity and consistency needed to ensure a smooth interview. They also help your “bridge” back to your key messages.

Some common transitions include:

- Just let me add...
- That reminds me...
- Let me answer you by saying that...
- Let me give you some background information...
- Let's take a closer look at...
- That's an important point because...
- What that means is...
- Another thing to remember is...
- Now that you've covered_____, lets move on to_____.
- You may be asking why_____is true...
- While_____is certainly important, don't forget that...
- As I said...
- That's an interesting question, let me remind you though...
- Before I forget, I want to tell your audience...
- Let me put that in perspective...
- What's important to remember, however...
- What I really want to talk to you about is...
- What's more important is...
- And don't forget...
- Before we get off this subject/topic, let me add...
- That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...
- That's a good point, but I think your audience would be interested in knowing that...
- What I'm really here to talk to you about is...

Remember: Stumbling indicates confusion and uncertainty, so use transitions to help your conversation flow.

COMMON INTERVIEW PITFALLS

NO COMMENT

Some spokespeople view “no comment” as a get-out-of-jail-free card and use it whenever a tough question is asked.

- Tends to come across as evasive, or as an admission of guilt. It’s preferable to explain why you “don’t have the answer at this time” (e.g., you don’t have background information at your fingertips, etc.). BUT, finish on a positive note by telling the reporter what you *can* say.

JARGON

Talk in layman’s terms. If you need to use a technical term, give it a quick, simple definition.

- Even if the reporter has a technical background, clarifying the term assures that your message will be understood far better by the reader/viewer.

ON/OFF THE RECORD

Going “off the record” puts your credibility at stake. It’s best to always be “on the record,” before the interview begins, after it ends and everywhere in between.

FISHING

People sometimes say too much, and reporters know this – they often like to “fish” for information. Sometimes, a reporter will do this by saying nothing and waiting for you to fill the void.

- Spokespeople must be careful not to inadvertently give away confidential, sensitive or proprietary information. It’s important to be honest with reporters, but don’t give out company secrets. Block and bridge to appropriate answers.

HE SAID/SHE SAID

A reporter may attempt to create a disagreement between yourself and a competitor or detractor by asking a question such as, “Mr. X says your new product misses the target. Do you think he’s worried about your product? What’s your reaction to his criticism?”

- There is no benefit to criticizing your competitor; it will simply make you look petty. Take the high road. Speak to your strengths and avoid mud-slinging.

A possible answer to the above question may be, “I can’t speak on behalf of Mr. X, but I can say we are very pleased with our new product and are confident it will succeed in the marketplace.”

LOADED QUESTIONS

Reporters occasionally ask a question based on an incorrect premise. Correct their error

immediately. If you allow a piece of misinformation to go by unchallenged, you are tacitly agreeing with it and it may show up in the reporter's story.

Using the phrase, "Actually, that's not quite accurate. Let me explain...." will alert the journalist to their error, as all journalists place a premium on accuracy.

Interview Do's and Don'ts

Do –

- Discuss and determine the type and content of the questions you will be asked and which you are comfortable answering.
- "Flag" key points with phrases like, "The most important thing is ..." or "I think the bottom line is ..."
- Speak in easily understandable terms. Avoid jargon.
- Use facts and figures as appropriate to reinforce your main points.
- Use illustrations and anecdotes to "humanize" and explain your topic.
- Be sensitive to reporters' deadlines.
- Be yourself. Don't reinvent yourself for an interview -- you won't be credible.

Don't –

- Over answer. When you're satisfied with your reply, stop.
- Be afraid to pause. Taking a few seconds to think will seem longer to you than to the reporter or audience.
- Allow yourself to be provoked. Keep cool.
- Fake an answer if you don't know it. If appropriate, assure the reporter you will provide the needed facts in a timely manner, or refer him/her to another source.
- Assume the reporter knows more about your area than you do. Usually, the reverse is true.
- Assume the interview is over until the reporter is gone.
- Lie to a reporter. Ever.