

The Basics of Media Relations

By Andrew R. Sutton

A sound and disciplined approach to media relations can set your agency apart from all others and garner it significant placement in media stories.

Finding success with the media relies on research, tight writing, timing, availability and perseverance.

Before writing your next press release and emailing it into the black hole of media, give some consideration to the following tactics.

Know Who Covers Your Business

Taking the time to find out who reports on your sector shows that you've done your homework. By scanning the papers and watching the TV, you can get a good sense of who covers the education, religion, science and health & human services sectors.

Doing just this little bit of research will save you hours of aggravation and will connect you with a media professional that will appreciate your respect of their time.

Make a Friend Before You Need One

Reporters receive hundreds of press releases every day. If a reporter recognizes your name, there's a much greater chance that your story will be placed in their column or news package. Make a call or send an email and introduce yourself. Tell the reporter a little about your agency.

Make a Reporter's Job Easy

Create a press kit that includes background information on key people, fact sheets, annual reports and photos to help give depth to the agency.

Submit Newsworthy Press Releases

As mentioned, members of the press receive hundreds of press releases every day. The average TV newsroom receives thousands. Make your press release stand out by making sure it's newsworthy.

Reporters judge newsworthiness by looking for 6 factors. The more factors your press release contains, the greater the chance that it will make it into a news story.

The 6 factors are:

Timeliness – The more current the information is, the better chance it has to gain placement.

Novelty – An unusual story is newsworthy.

Impact – If your story impacts a great number of people, or a small number of people greatly, it is newsworthy.

Prominence – Reporters love a story that includes a person or company of prominence.

Proximity – The closer the story is to readers, viewers or listeners, the greater the chance it will be judged newsworthy.

Controversy – A controversial story is very newsworthy.

As you write your press releases or pitch your stories to the media, do your best to find these qualities.

Write a Professional Press Release

Write your press release just like a news story. Place the most important information at the top of the press release and structure the remaining paragraphs in descending importance. By following this method, editors can delete information right from the bottom and still maintain important details.

A well-written press release saves a reporter time and enables your agency to maintain control of key messages.

Be sure to follow up with a phone call to each reporter. Make sure they got your press release and ask if they have any questions.

(Visit www.afpstlouis.afpnet.org for more detail on writing press releases)

Be Available For Follow Up Questions

Most of the time, reporters will have questions regarding details of your press release. Be sure to clearly list your contact information (telephone works best) and then be available at that number! The number of press releases without contact information is startling, as is the number of PR professionals that aren't available for follow-up questions. Take the steps necessary to rise above your competition for media coverage.

Set Up a Virtual Press Room

One of the first things a reporter will do when assigned a story is to research the subject.

Establish a page on your website that contains leadership biographies, fact sheet, annual report, high-resolution photos of leaders, programs and logos and PDF's of all prior press releases and news coverage.

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