

Working with the Media

There are a number of rules to follow if you want to develop a sound working relationship with the media.

- ◆ Study the media in advance. Don't contact producers of a television or radio program without first having seen or heard at least one show. Not knowing basic things about the program (who the host is, who the major sponsors are, the types of stories presented, etc.) is really quite insulting to the producer.
- ◆ Find out if the program is produced live-to-air or filmed in advance. Some programs, such as holiday shows and home and gardening shows are produced months in advance.
- ◆ Programs can't always guarantee when they will actually put material to air. If they have invested time and money in coming to do a story then it will probably run — sometime. You can ask, by all means, and if it doesn't appear when they said, you can check to see what's happening. But don't keep calling every day.
- ◆ Television — in particular — can be time consuming, frustrating, and exasperating. It can take many hours to shoot something that will end up being less than two or three minutes of television time. It requires setting up lights, sound equipment, doing rehearsals, waiting for on-camera celebrities, and doing re-take after re-take.
- ◆ It may be tempting to go away and 'leave them to it'. Don't! Stay with them, be cheerful and helpful, provide coffee for the crew, and keep an eye on everything that is happening.



- ◆ Let the crew know if you have ‘things’ which can add visual appeal (a particularly attractive or unusual location, animals, artefacts, etc.) or which will add colour to a broadcast.
- ◆ Brief everyone about upcoming media publicity. Tell staff when the media are expected, and make certain that the frontline staff — guards, receptionist, and admissions staff — are informed. Tell them what will be happening and approximately how long you think it will take.
- ◆ Bring along extra copies of your news release, etc. Always assume that someone will have mislaid the information. Having extra copies of your material will ensure the media get the names, dates, and details right.
- ◆ Try not to be overwhelmed by celebrities. Meeting on-air hosts and reporters can be quite exciting for staff, but try not to appear too star struck.
- ◆ Look after the crew. Thank everyone for their help, especially the behind-the-scenes people, producers, panel operators, camera and sound crew, etc. They can make or break the way you look and sound. Remember to look after them as well as the on-air celebrities.
- ◆ Make your own arrangements for tapes, copies, etc. It is unprofessional to ask the media people to provide you with a video of the program, etc. That’s your job.
- ◆ Accept the fact that the media can be abrupt, sometimes rude, often disorganised, and frequently late. They can agree to come, and then ring at the last minute to cancel. But that’s the way it is. You still have to be polite. Remember, they have something you want — access to your target markets!!!

Evaluating Effectiveness

The most common way is to keep track of the articles, television, and radio coverage.

The usual practice is to use one or two press clipping services. They employ people to clip all types of printed publicity from newspapers, consumer magazines, business publications, and trade papers.

Clippings are sent to the clients on a regular basis. Clipping services can not only keep track of your publicity, but they can send you copies of publicity received by your competitors as well. Then you can calculate the dollar cost of the media space you have received based on the number of articles, their size, etc.

There are also services which will monitor radio and television broadcasts for you, but they are quite expensive. If you do find out that something has appeared on radio or television and you missed it, these commercial organisations usually keep copies of most media broadcasts for a set period of time, and you can purchase copies from their 'library'.

How to Write a Media Release

Although there are no hard and fast rules about writing media releases there are some guidelines which should be followed to give your media release the best chance of being used.

The major complaints from journalists about media releases from arts and entertainment organisations are that they are not professionally presented, they are too long, and they do not come to the point quickly enough.



Format

- ◆ Keep the text short — ideally one side of a single A4 page of letterhead. Material should be typed and one-and-a-half line spaced. Use generous margins on either side of the text (a minimum of 2 cm — editors like to write in the margin!). Do not include fancy computer graphics, etc. to decorate your printed page.
- ◆ Head the page — MEDIA RELEASE (not press release).
- ◆ Below the media release make it clear when the information can be used. Write 'For Immediate Release' or 'Embargoed Until ...' [date and time].
- ◆ Provide a heading which identifies the subject matter of your media release. Do not spend a lot of time writing a catchy 'headline'. Headlines in media stories are written by sub-editors who rarely use the headline you've worked so hard to create.
- ◆ Supply information which will assist the journalist. If photos are to be included send colour transparencies, clearly labelled. If the event is visual, and you can genuinely offer several minutes of good visual coverage, let television journalists know what is on offer and when filming can be arranged.
- ◆ At the end of the release include the name and telephone number of a contact person and a summary of the relevant details (dates, time, cost, etc.)

Style

- ◆ Use clear, accessible everyday language, suitable to the readers or viewers you are targeting. Technical or highly academic descriptions may sound boring or confusing.
- ◆ Avoid long sentences. Complicated sentence construction is a problem when the information is being read over the radio or television. A sentence which carries on for 10 or more lines looks confusing in newsprint.
- ◆ Use quotes from relevant people when possible.

Content

- ◆ The first paragraph is the most important part of the media release and should include key information. An old journalist's trick is to remember the five Ws:
 - Who?
 - What?
 - When?
 - Where?
 - Why?... and... if it's relevant... How?
- ◆ Find an 'angle' in your story — something particularly newsworthy about your festival, event, or exhibition that will attract a journalist's interest. Is it the first? The biggest? The oldest? The richest?
- ◆ Use the main part of the text for more detailed discussion of the information provided in the first paragraphs. Be sure to mention sponsors particularly if doing so is part of your sponsorship agreement.
- ◆ Use the pyramid approach. Always assume that the editor will cut your story. So, make certain the most important information comes first, then the next most interesting detail, followed by other information. Don't save the best for last — it might never be picked up!

Timing and Delivery

- ◆ Think about who in the media might be particularly interested in your exhibition. Follow the rules of etiquette and send information to the Chief of Staff, but you can also send information to specific journalists if you have a working relationship with them.
- ◆ Pay strict attention to deadlines and facsimile releases if necessary.



- ◆ Always follow up with a phone call (prior to the event) to ensure that the release has been received and be prepared to answer questions.
- ◆ Check and re-check everything for accuracy. Be especially vigilant in terms of the spelling of names, people's titles, and dates and times.
- ◆ Send your release to both on-air presenters and producers.

Media Conferences and Interviews

Organising a media conference or interview is a quick and efficient way to brief the media. It is particularly worthwhile when something has happened which is likely to generate interest, for example:

- ◆ a major event or announcement;
- ◆ a crisis of some sort;
- ◆ a controversial or newsworthy event;
- ◆ release of a government report which affects your organisation;
- ◆ a celebrity, overseas expert, or other noteworthy individual who is available.

Planning the media conference will require attention to the following:

- ◆ Notification — generally notices are sent out at least 24 hours in advance outlining the venue, time, subject, spokesperson, and what additional information, photo opportunities, interview opportunities, etc. will be available. A contact name is included. These are usually followed up by a telephone call as a reminder and to check on intended attendance.
- ◆ Timing — provide at least 24 hours notice. Late morning or early afternoon is best, particularly if you want coverage on the prime time television news broadcasts.
- ◆ Location — at your own location if you are centrally located; otherwise in a central spot with easy parking and access for the media (who may be carrying television cameras and sound equipment).

- ◆ Format — the format is fairly standard — journalists are greeted by the PR, marketing person, or CEO. A press release or media release is distributed. The spokesperson is introduced and delivers the message. Usually there is then time for questions, but sometimes only a statement is made.
- ◆ Room layout — should be large enough to allow for setting up lighting, seating for journalists, display space if required, space to set up a table, or whatever else is needed for the speaker and presentation.

