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No Idle Zone / Anti-Idling

Four Elements of Effective Media Relations

The effectiveness of a program or campaign often depends upon the level of marketing efforts implemented before the program actually launches, and well after it ends. Media relations is a cost-effective marketing tool to reach a target audience on a small or large scale using the broad reach and influence of the media. The following four elements of media relations are cornerstones for achieving the most positive results:

- Planning
- Media Tactics
- Execution
- Follow-Up

I. Planning

It is no secret that the success of a campaign or event largely relies upon the planning that goes into it. The focus of media relations planning is to help reporters and media representatives better inform the public. It is your job to deliver the most complete and concise information for a valuable story.

Media outreach requires the same meticulous preparation and thought that is invested into the program you want to promote. Once program objectives have been solidified, it's a good time to begin the public relations planning process, which establishes the appropriate audience, key media sources, relevant media materials and messaging, program spokesperson(s), and the option for a media event or press conference.

Determine target audience

It is important to know your audience. By raising awareness about a particular issue, your organization can help initiate change. The media can help deliver your message to a broad audience, but it is imperative to first establish the best primary and secondary recipients of that message. Narrowing your focus will also help to prioritize media sources to generate press coverage.

Consider the following:

- Who does this program affect? Who should receive this message?
- What is a common denominator for members in this group(s)?
- Who has the ability to reach and influence other audience members?
- What core values and objectives are shared?
- What benefits are expected for these individuals?
- What is the current level of awareness among these constituencies?

Identify target media

By developing a direct line of communication with the media, your organization can take an active role in establishing a position in the community. When determining which media targets to pursue, keep in mind the idea of quality over quantity. A single, in-depth and thoroughly written article directed at the right group of people can often have more potential for effect on your target audience than multiple impressions with less substance.

Media can be divided into five basic groups:

- Print (newspapers, magazines, newsletters, internal and trade publications)
- Television (news programs, talk shows, and public service announcements)
- Radio (news programs, talk shows, and public service announcements)
- News wire services (Associated Press, United Press, Reuters, etc.)
- Online news publications

The more you know about the needs of any media organization and the media professional, the more efficient and effective you can be as a communicator and program liaison. Do some research - by reading or watching your target media diligently, you'll considerably increase the chances for a favorable response and positive view of the story that you are pitching.

Assemble a media list

To assure effective communication of your message, distribute relevant information to the right people. This can be accomplished by developing a comprehensive media list that identifies the most appropriate contacts at each of the media outlets at the community, local, state and/or national level. Assembling a media list allows you the chance to better promote a program and respond quickly to publicity opportunities. Make a list of media that are important to your organization and identify appropriate contacts for each media group.

Create a spreadsheet or list with the following information to help in all story pitching efforts:

- Media organization name
- Phone number
- Media contact name
- Fax number
- Title
- E-mail address
- Area of expertise/interest

- Circulation (daily, weekly, etc.)
- Address, city, state, zip
- Personal notes, contact log

The following is a list of different types of media, the general kinds of editors and reporters on staff, and the range of stories each will cover. Some media (e.g., newspapers, TV) have reporters who write stories exclusively on specific topics (e.g., environment, health, consumer interest, government, etc). If there is no such topic-specific reporter, ask for someone who covers these similar issues and direct all communications toward that person.

To obtain the appropriate contact information for any media professional, start out by visiting their main website or searching through the actual publication for a general contact. Even for the most experienced public relations professional, narrowing down the right contact person can be a bit of a wild goose chase. Have patience and keep trying until you identify the appropriate contact to help you deliver your message.

Print

- Journalist (types of coverage) *Newspapers*
- Environmental Reporter (responsible for environmental stories)
- Health Reporter (responsible for health related stories)
- Consumer Reporter (responsible for consumer issues)
- Lifestyle Reporter (responsible for local profiles and human interest stories regarding people involved with a local cause)
- City Editor (responsible for news taking place in your city; emphasis on community events; features on outstanding residents; local issues)
- Features Editor (responsible for human interest stories including: profiles of outstanding citizens; social trends; lifestyles; programs that benefit the community)
- Photo Editor (responsible for events or backdrops that provide good photo opportunities) *Magazines*
- Managing Editor/Articles Editor (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and choosing which stories to cover)
- Environmental Editor (responsible for coverage of all environmental issues)
- Newsletters Editor (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and choosing which stories to cover)

Television

- Journalist (types of coverage)

News Program

- Assignment Editor (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and assigning stories to staff reporters)
- News Room/Desk (responsible for receiving all incoming press materials and story leads, passes information to editors)
- Health Reporter (responsible for health related stories)
- Consumer Reporter (responsible for consumer issues)
- Environmental Reporter (responsible for environmental stories)

Talk show

- Producer (responsible for reviewing all incoming materials and choosing which stories to cover; also responsible for booking guests for the show)

Radio

- Journalist (types of coverage)

News Program

- News Director (responsible for reviewing all incoming media materials and choosing stories to cover on the air)

News wire Services

- Journalist (types of coverage)
- Bureau Chief (responsible for reviewing all incoming press materials and choosing stories to cover)
- Photo Desk (responsible for assigning news photographers to cover events and other photo opportunities; also distributes photo submissions)

Determine media timeline

Depending upon each media outlet (print, television, radio, etc.), you will need to begin pitching at different times. For example, magazines require a longer lead time for stories, while television news programs usually accept story pitches up to the morning of an event. A media timeline should be developed as part of an overall organizational schedule to provide a guide for when messages should be created and sent to the media. When first establishing contact (see Sec. II: MEDIA TACTICS - 'Making the Pitch') be sure to get deadline information from the media professional immediately.

Establish key messaging and program spokesperson

Maintaining consistent key messages is imperative to the program, since any incomplete or incorrect information can create unjustified concern and jeopardize the program's credibility. To help facilitate the dissemination of accurate and relevant information to an audience and members of the press, create documents that briefly summarize the program (e.g., mission, objectives, activities, etc). These materials should be compiled and included in media kits, which become reference tools for generating a good story.

Media kits

Media kits usually include the following:

- Press release with program logo
- Program background information
- Program fact sheet with stats
- Spokesperson biography
- Other relevant background information
- Organization contacts
- Key news articles

Spokesperson

Selecting the appropriate spokesperson for your program is very important. It is essential for keeping your message as straightforward and concise as possible. This individual(s) should be seen as a resource for the audience and media professionals, someone who is an expert and directly entrenched in the program issues. Selecting too many representatives can dilute program messages and decrease the chance for effective communication.

A spokesperson not only needs to be knowledgeable but also open to interviews and comfortable appearing on camera and in photos, and/or being quoted. This person will essentially serve as the face and voice of your program, so choose wisely.

- Create talking points (summary of program key features that highlight newsworthy facts and issues)
- Training/briefing (formal media training of key spokesperson(s) on what to expect and how to respond to media inquiries)
- Practice (prior to interviews, make time for practice runs)

Determining the need for media events

Media events provide members of the press with a special opportunity to see a program in action and capture key images and interviews. However, not every program will need a media event since it means additional planning time and finances. It is a great way to reach multiple mediums in an appealing and memorable fashion that highlights all major points of a story.

Consider the following to gauge whether or not a media event is appropriate for your program:

- Magnitude - How many people are impacted by your program?
- Newsworthiness - Compared to all other activities taking place in the community, is this important at the given moment?
- Locality - Is the story relevant here?
- Visuals - What interesting imagery, action, interviews are available?

II. Media tactics

With your communications planning and key messaging finalized, it is time to begin generating interest for your program with active media outreach.

Making the pitch

Media professionals are always on deadline and have little time for long story pitches. Remember that you are not the only one trying to get a reporter's attention. Anyone can pitch a story; it does not rest exclusively upon the spokesperson. The most effective way to begin sharing a story with the media is by telephone and email. Be aware of the preferences of individual media professionals, since some may prefer to receive news releases by fax or email instead of the telephone.

When talking with media professionals, remember to:

- Sound enthusiastic about the story you are proposing
- Be an authority and know your program
- If you don't know, be honest and follow up with an answer later
- Always follow up any conversation with an email and another phone call

Media follow-up

Even the most compelling story requires active follow up efforts. Once you have established an appropriate contact with the media, continue to check in regularly to maintain interest around your story and program. The only way to gauge their interest for your story is to follow up.

If you are ready to announce your program or event, send a media release via email and/or fax and confirm whether or not the reporter received the information they needed. If you are planning a media event, provide a media advisory that details the occasion, followed by a press release.

Finalize program messaging and media resources

From program media kit materials to question and answer sheets for the spokesperson, all messaging and resources should be completed and finalized at this time. Since you control the information shared with the media, maintaining accuracy and uniformity is crucial for these reference materials.

III. Execution

After a period of detailed planning, making media contacts and booking appointments, it is time to launch the media campaign in order to create ongoing visibility for the program.

Briefing the media

The best way to impact a member of the media is to conduct a personal, face-to-face briefing where media materials can be passed on and questions are handled efficiently. While this meeting situation is ideal, it may be hard to secure face-time with every journalist, so use the following tactics to help you in seeking and obtaining coverage:

- Media Releases (customize) - Depending upon their medium and specialty area, each media professional will interpret and use the information you provide differently. Take time to customize your message and media release for the targeted journalist.
- Media Alert - Issued only in preparation for media events; serves as an informational invitation that helps break down the elements of a media event which will highlight your program in a newsworthy fashion.
- Media Kits - Relevant and concise packet of program information used by the media as a resource to develop their story; also establishes appropriate contact persons from your program.
- Follow-Up - After sending all written materials, follow-up with the journalist to ensure receipt and answer questions.

Staging a media event

As mentioned previously, a media event is an extremely useful (but not required) tool for drawing media attention to generate publicity and awareness around your

campaign. Media events are like press briefings, with the added responsibility of providing compelling visuals (e.g., photo opportunities, interviews, demonstrations, etc.) to appeal to a variety of media types. In addition to any one-on-one press briefings, a media event is an efficient and quick way to achieve multiple impressions across several mediums.

One to three days before:

- Create an agenda
- Detail the entire media event, including preparation time, participants, etc. so that there is no confusion about the day's events.
For example:
 - Event Date: Month XX, 200X
 - Location: Exact site for press
 - Spokespeople: Same as included in media kits

Event schedule

8:30 AM:

- Business representative arrives to begin preparation.
- Spokesperson 1 and 2 arrive to help program volunteers with set-up. (Note: Volunteers will bring final press kits.)

9:00-10:00 AM:

- Representative from school district arrives.
- Program volunteer reviews messaging and event agenda with business representative and program spokespersons.
- Spokesperson 1 does a practice run of the demonstration.
- Spokesperson 2 and school representative decide on location for interviews.

10:30 AM:

- TV stations arrive (typically not at the same time) and primary program volunteer presents press kits, coordinates interviews, and introduces visuals.

Send reminders

- Confirm media event date/time with all program participants, spokesperson(s), and media contacts.
- Send and review agenda with program representatives.

Day of event

- Arrive early - Plan for unexpected surprises; arrive early to begin set-up and briefing of all participants well in advance of media arrival.
- Practice run - Conduct a mock run-through of any demonstrations, speeches, or program activity that will be shown to media.
- Review message - Reiterate with spokesperson(s) key messages and program statistics to highlight during media event.

IV. Program follow-up and recap

Again, the follow-up process is important to maintain constant contact with media as well as solidify the focus of your story. Even after you have successfully pulled off a great campaign, it is imperative to keep in touch with media contacts and monitor your progress with a program recap.

Final media follow-up

This is the last chance to secure coverage for your program. Your contact should be:

- Timely - Wait no later than a week following your media event.
- Informative - Provide any additional information to media.
- Concise - Journalists appreciate brevity and clear information.

Program recap

As news and feature stories begin to appear, begin to catalogue media coverage and create a document that traces the progression of your media campaign.

Clipping service

A media clipping service can be contracted with to capture articles and stories, depending upon the number of articles that you plan to place. It is an easy way to thoroughly monitor any media coverage that you have obtained from countless pitching efforts. A cost-effective alternative is to simply search for articles you know have been printed; this can be confirmed through final media follow-ups.

Archives

An archive of media materials and tracked coverage should be developed for future use and reference for your program.

A basic outline for a recap document will include:

- Your program description
- Success of media event, including results compared to initial objectives
- Media campaign objective
- Media coverage report
- Press contacts you made
- Future efforts for program