

Elements of a PR Plan

Press Releases

These are a fundamental tool of PR work and will help you establish a reputation as a source. A press release, also known as a news or media release, is simply a written statement distributed to the media. They can announce a range of news items: scheduled events, personnel promotions, awards, new products and services, etc. They can also be used in generating a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a release.

How you could use this resource: To promote an award the organization received, or to publicize new programs.

For more info see: Writing and Using Press Releases

Feature Story Releases

They are written in the same format as a press release. Although a feature story must be newsworthy, in the broad sense of the word, it is also timeless. It can run in today's paper or tomorrow's or next week's. Unlike a news story, a feature can have a point of view, an "angle," and is often longer than a hard news story.

How you could use this resource: These are especially valuable to promote consumer or mental health worker personal stories.

Letters to the Editor and "Op-Ed" Articles

These are both opinion pieces, and in that sense are very similar. The differences are often cosmetic. Letters to the editor are generally printed in the editorial page. "Op-Ed", which is short for "opposite editorial" means the page is physically opposite the editorial page. A Letter to the Editor is short – 200 to 300 words. An Op-Ed is a longer piece – 750 to 1000 words. A Letter to the Editor can be in reaction to a day-to-day or a larger issue. An Op-Ed should generally be about a larger issue. As a result, there can be many Letters to the Editor on a single topic. Here is an important difference – a Letter to the Editor is generally a reaction to an editorial or an Op-Ed or a news item. An Op-Ed on the other hand, often addresses issues introduced by the writer.

How you could use this resource: Employees or constituents could write a response to an article with misleading or wrong information about the organization.

For more info see: Writing and Using Opinion Pieces

Develop Media Lists

Establish a media contacts sheet with names of various newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations in your area with key contacts at each – i.e. feature reporter, assignment editor, city reporter, etc. This will allow you to avoid the shotgun approach of sending every piece of your news to every contact and allow you to target your distribution. This listing needs to be updated regularly as people leave positions, phone numbers/fax numbers change. Taking the time to do a little research can produce greater results for your efforts once you are ready to send something to the media.

How you could use this resource: Once you get ready to submit a press release, feature story release, Op-Ed article, or community calendar announcement, you will have an established list of media contacts in your area instead of having to take extra time to search for this information.

For more info see: Media Coverage

Fact Sheets

When you have more details and facts and figures than can fit in a one-page press release, you need a Fact Sheet. However, these can be used for other purposes than just the media – they can be used for public handouts, community meetings, etc. It can be just one page, or several pages long, and can include historical perspectives, anecdotes, and data. They are often done in a bullet point format with bold headlines for differing sections to keep the attention of those with a wandering eye. In addition, they usually have a "pitch" or introductory paragraph and a summation. They can have photos, charts, and graphs but they should only be used to illustrate truly important material.

How you could use this resource: To give details to the public about a certain program or special initiative at your organization.

Community Calendar Submissions

Community calendar listings are similar to PSAs – generally used by nonprofits and community organizations – except they usually promote an event rather than a cause or service. Newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations generally have community calendars, and will list the format for submissions in their publication or on their Web site.

How you could use this resource: To publicize a special event or public meeting that the organization is hosting.

Quarterly Newsletters

Another way to keep your strategic messages in front of your target audience is to communicate via a quarterly newsletter. A newsletter is an excellent place to recap the coverage you have received in the media. Not everyone in your target audience will have seen all the coverage your organization has received. When it is reviewed in its entirety the sum becomes greater than its parts. Newsletters can be either mailed or e-mailed to your contact list.

How you could use this resource: To provide a wide array of information about your organization's programs/initiatives, stories from consumers, etc.

Annual Reports

Annual reports are usually associated with public companies. They can, however, be used by any organization with enough to say. Annual reports not only report but they are an important place to publish your strategic messages.

How you could use this resource: To highlight for the community what your organization has accomplished for the year.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

PSAs are among common types of publicity for non-profit organizations. Since they are short, broadcasters run a lot of them and they are easier to get than specials, interviews, features, or news coverage. You can say a lot in 20, 30, or 60 seconds and since it is likely to be repeated several times, your message will have multiple impact. The least expensive kind of PSA is "live" copy, where the announcer reads your material live. You may also submit pre-recorded material, if you have a production budget. Live copy to TV stations should include visual material. And there are several different formats to be considered if shooting or producing your own PSA – you'll need to find that out in advance.

How you could use this resource: Partner with an advocacy group in your area to publicize what your services are in order to reach a broad group of people on a lower budget than purchasing media advertising.

Community Relations

Community relations refers to the various methods organizations use to establish and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the communities in which they operate. The underlying principal of community relations is that when an organization accepts its civic responsibility and takes an active interest in the well-being of its community, then it gains a number of long-term benefits in terms of community support, loyalty, and good will.

How you could use this resource: Host a blood drive for the community at your facility.

For more info see: Community Relations

Crisis Communications

Crises are not always necessarily bad. An emergency or controversy may give you the opportunity to reach large numbers of people with your company's perspective. "No comment" is often the worst comment implying evasiveness or guilt. Be prepared with a response to media inquiries or, if unable to answer, let the media know when an answer will be available. In other words, be prepared and forthright.

How you could use this resource: Be prepared to answer questions from the media on sensitive topics.

For more info see: Crisis Management and Communications

Develop a Style Guide

Any organization that produces external publications (brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, Web sites, etc.) can benefit from a style guide. Style guides help to make your publications consistent, clear, and identifiable as coming from your organization by enforcing a similar sound, look, and feel.

How you could use this resource: Breed confidence and save time during the creative process.

For more info see: Style Guide/Manual