Media Coverage

You want to get your event covered or have your story told to the public. But how do you go about it? What will make the media want to cover you or your event? It's all in the marketing.

First up, don't hound the assignment editors and reporters incessantly. It will only make them shy away from covering your event. While it's fine to check in and make sure that you're press release was received, it can only hurt your coverage if you annoy the person whom you want to cover your story. Next, don't forget to leave a contact number for the day of the event. This can be crucial. If a news organization decides to cover your story at the last minute and they only have your office number and it's Saturday, then you're out of luck. It's ideal to have a pager and/or cell phone so that you can be contacted in case the press needs to speak to you.

1. **Identify what's "newsworthy."** The media will cover just about any event if there's a good hook to it. Hooks are the things that attract the media to cover a story. News media look for interesting hooks, such as famous or important people, an odd or colorful occasion or a timely event. If the story involves certain people, places or things, it can be newsworthy. Even if your story doesn't directly seem to have that newsworthy quality, you can try to pitch the story in a way so that it seems more newsworthy.

   Newsworthiness is determined by a few factors, which are basically the same as the five W's and the H.

   Who—Make sure you tell the media who will be at your event; who is sponsoring your event and who your event benefits.

   What—Tell the media what they can expect if they choose to cover your story. Make sure they are aware of what will be happening. Be sure to specify what the best time is for coverage.

   Where—Be as specific as possible when noting a place of the story. Include a map if necessary, but don't neglect this detail. The media will appreciate your attention to detail and they will be less likely to get lost on the way to your event.

   When—Include details of what time and what place your event/story will happen. A press release without a time and date is worthless. Don't overlook the obvious—be sure to include all the times, places and dates.

   Why—What is the purpose of your story? Are you hoping to accomplish a goal, like raise funds for a charity or raise awareness for an illness? The "why" part is what reaches out to the media's audience.

   How—Tell the media how your story will be told. Make the technicalities of your story known and let the intricacies of your event shine through.

2. **Develop written materials,** such as press releases and/or fact sheets.

3. **Develop a targeted media list.** It is important to think about which reporters will be interested in your story. Are they reporters who cover health?, entertainment?, etc. Is it a story that's good for newspaper, radio and/or television? From there, develop a list of reporters' names and numbers to call.

   Some media don't have reporters who cover specific topics, and editors will simply assign a story to a general assignment reporter who covers all sorts of topics. If you can't find specific reporters, address your communication to an editor or the news desk. It's their job to direct your story to the appropriate person. If it is possible to reach specific reporters, get as much contact information as you can. At a minimum you will need the reporter's name, publication/station affiliation, phone number, fax number, and email.

4. **Be by a fax machine and / or email.** Send the press release, etc. out to targeted reporters via e-mail and/or fax.

5. **Identify strategic spokespeople.** The messenger is often just as important as the message when it comes to the media. It is important that spokespeople are articulate and knowledgeable on the issue, and easily reachable by reporters on deadline. (Not having a cell phone can sometimes mean not being included in a story!!) Having experience speaking to the press is always a plus. Remember - reporters are not your friends. Be careful and strategic when doing interviews.

6. **Practice your telephone pitch.** A press release alone may not get reporters to cover your story. After sending out a press release, it may be advantageous to follow up with a phone call. Reporters get hundreds of calls a day. What's likely to make a reporter not hang up on you, or immediately delete your message, is if you develop a well-focused, 30-second pitch that highlights the essence of your news story. Once you "hook" them, you can describe in more detail why you are calling and how you can get them more information. Don't forget to leave your phone number if you leave a message.

   Don't get insulted if media people are brusque. When they're on deadline, they can't chat with you. But if you have a story that sparks their interest, they will get back to you.

7. **Don't take no for an answer.** If a reporter says no, try another reporter, or call them again when you have a different story. If you get one out of ten reporters to write about your story, that is a huge success! Remember, one reporter can represent thousands of readers, listeners, or viewers.

8. **Say thank you.** Developing friendly relationships with reporters is helpful when trying to pitch news stories. If a reporter writes a story you like, call them up and say thank you. They appreciate it and will be more likely to return your phone call the next time around.

9. **What if I do all the above and nothing happens?** Don't assume you've failed if you just don't hear anything. Sometimes newsworthy stories may get passed over if there are many other things happening that day/week. Besides remembering to be patient, remember the old saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" – with a fresh angle.

Okay, You've Got Coverage – Next Up: Interview!

Here are some tips when speaking with members of the media during an interview.

- Brainstorm questions you may be asked and prepare answers for them.
- Speak slowly and give brief answers to questions.
- Tell a reporter what you think is the most important point you've made.
- It's okay to be nervous; anxiety can actually add vigor and clarity to your thoughts and remember: Everybody Gets Nervous!
- Refer to concrete examples, personal experience, and clear images.
- Remember that reporters want stories, as well as data.
- For television, look at the reporter or camera operator — not directly into the camera.
- Warm up your voice before your interview.
- Never assume journalists agree with you, though they will often act as if they do.
- Eliminate insider jargon and acronyms from your speech.
- If you don't want to answer a hypothetical question, simply say so.
- If you don't have an answer to a question, say so and try to track down an answer later.
- Be yourself.