

## **Anchors/Links**

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## **Communications Tips & Techniques Series**

### **A Variety of Methods for Communicating With the Media**

#### **Tip Sheets/Fact Sheets/Questions and Answers**

Tip sheets, fact sheets, and questions and answer sheets can be one- or two-page supplements to your news releases. A tip sheet is generally a how to instruction list. A fact sheet may contain historic or general information about your organization or about a particular project. A Q&A sheet is a fact sheet in a question-and-answer format. It is often used successfully to correct misconceptions about your organization or project.

Here's the type of information you might use in a fact sheet about your agency:

- Your director's name
- Your agency's mission
- The history of your agency or project
- Partners, customers
- Information about your project, including its budget and staff size
- Who you are; what you do; how long you've been around; notable accomplishments
- You can also use a Q&A to define common terms a reporter might come across when doing a story about your agency. These supplements should be no more than one page with an open layout that is easy to follow (bold section headers, bullets, and indents). Stay focused on one topic in each fact sheet. Fact sheets should complement the news release. Make sure fact sheets include your Web site address as well as contact names and phone numbers.

#### **Background Papers**

Background papers can be useful tools to get additional information to reporters and correspondents. Background papers delve more deeply into a subject area than news releases. You will increase your chance of media coverage if your pitch and materials are interesting and

easy to understand. If you make your message consistent and accurate, you'll stand a better chance of being the media's primary source. Don't let your background paper read like an academic paper or technical document, laden with acronyms and bureaucratic language. It should read more like a story—easy to read and understand. Make the reporter's job easy and you'll get better media coverage.

### **Earned Media—Coverage on a Shoestring**

Can't afford to buy advertising? Then earn media coverage.

The best way to implement your communication strategy is to keep repeating your message to a target audience. When you buy advertising—online, radio, TV, print, outdoor, or any other media the ad industry creates—you know what you are getting. You control the message, you control the medium, and you know approximately who your audience will be. But it costs a lot of money to buy advertising. Most government agencies are prohibited from doing so with appropriated monies.

The good news is that you don't have to buy space and air time for news and feature articles—all it takes is a little savvy and a lot of determination to get those articles placed. You can earn media coverage by developing contacts with reporters, writers, and news directors, as well as by pitching news story ideas, holding news conferences, and using other creative techniques to get their attention. All this effort makes it earned media rather than paid-for publicity.

**Make Your News Newsworthy:** The biggest challenge with earned media is that your message must appeal to the media's audience. Often, what we think is newsworthy and exciting just makes reporters yawn. To get their attention, you'll need to frame the issue in an appealing way. Try to find a current news issue, event, or other news hook to hang your story on. Don't forget to provide a media link from the home page of your agency's Web site. If your Web page is updated daily, reporters will come every morning to check for news leads.

**Get Your News to the Right Person:** Make sure your information is getting to the right person at the newspaper, magazine, or broadcast station. Don't just fax news releases out and assume they'll get to the right person. Check media reference books to target your information. Call the media to see which reporter covers your agency or would be interested in your issue. When you send a news release, direct it to the right person. Follow up with a call to see if the reporter needs more information. Better yet, offer an additional bit of information of special interest to that publication's readers, listeners, or viewers.

### **Other Ways to Earn Media Attention**

- Submit an opinion editorial (Op-ed) with your position to the newspaper.
- Write a letter to the editor.

- Create a PSA (public service announcement).
  - TV stations often run video PSAs free.
  - Radio stations run audio PSAs.
  - Magazines often give free ad space for print PSAs, especially if your PSA is visually interesting, professionally done, fits the magazine's format, and if your message is relevant to their audience.
  - PSAs that have a local slant are more apt to be aired than national themes.
  - Check out [www.psaresearch.com](http://www.psaresearch.com), a web site devoted to PSAs.
- Use banner ads to promote your Web site. Place these ads on sites that cater to your primary audience. Many big-name sites provide free banner ad space for non-profits.

### **Tips for Producing PSAs that Get Used**

- Learn the latest PSA trends.
- Understand what the media needs.
- Provide the material in a flexible format.
- Get professional, experienced help for production, distribution, and evaluation.
  - Develop creative, intrusive packaging.

### **Freebies: Don't Forget Your Community**

Your community may have many media resources available to you that are free:

Many cable companies provide free production facilities and air time on their public access channel. For very little expense, you could develop programs on many topics.

Local radio and TV talk shows are always looking for guests with interesting stories.

Public transit systems often offer free PSA space on their buses or subways.

TV stations may be willing to work with you to create and air an ongoing campaign, which gives your message better exposure than if you had done your own PSAs.

Businesses might co-sponsor your campaign.

Supermarkets might put your message on their grocery bags or milk cartons.

Fast-food restaurants could put your message on their place mats, especially if the material is educational.

Be creative and don't be afraid to ask for what you want. The worst they can say is "no." More than likely, though, they'll say "yes."

## **Satellite Media Tours**

Half of all Americans get all their news on TV. Since these folks don't read newspapers or magazines, you can't reach them through words—you need pictures, video footage, and broadcast interviews to reach them. A satellite media tour can help you deliver your message in a timely, credible, and cost-effective way.

Rather than having your spokesperson spend days or weeks on the road meeting your target media face-to-face, you can schedule all the interviews on one or two days from one local TV studio, for a fraction of the cost of air fare. By making sure you have a timely, interesting subject to discuss, some in-studio visuals and/or B-roll footage, a satellite media tour can reach a vast audience. And, unlike video news releases, station bookings let you know your results in advance. Local TV stations like satellite media tours because their own anchor or correspondent gets to interact personally with your spokesperson. The stations can broadcast the interview live or tape it for later use. A typical satellite media tour can cover 12 to 20 stations in two to three hours.

Here's how it works:

Several days before your scheduled satellite media tour, you tell TV and cable stations about your topic and spokesperson.

Stations can then reserve time to do a brief 3- to 10-minute interview with your spokesperson via satellite during a window of time.

During the satellite media tour, your spokesperson remains in one TV studio while TV stations across the country are beamed in electronically to do their own interview.

You can transmit a video news release or b-roll footage during your media tour.

You can beam in spokespersons from several locations around the country.

You can include a live demonstration of your product or service.

Be creative in setting up your media tours to make the best use of your time and financial resources. Also consider setting up radio press tours.

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