

## Some Key Steps to Successful Earned Media Coverage

### Build Relationships with the Media

Good media contacts and relationships are often the key to good media coverage. Get to know key journalists and make sure they know you. Then use these relationships to help you secure steady coverage for your organization. Recognize that a good relationship should be mutually beneficial. Always try to be helpful to journalists, return all calls promptly, learn and respect their deadlines, and always be honest and forthright with them when you want to be helpful to them, particularly in those times when you must explain why you cannot.

### News Releases, Advisories and Announcements

A release is simply your story written up in a journalistic form. On receiving your release, news editors will glance at the headline or the lead (the opening paragraph) of the release to get the gist of your story. If it fails to attract their attention or interest, then the release will get discarded. The most effective releases typically seek to convey only one central message or point with enough appropriate information to support that message.

To generate an attention-getting release that will stand out from the hundreds of others editors see daily, make sure your story is timely, unique, interesting, informational, unexpected or even a little controversial. Make sure it speaks to the interests of the editor's readers/listeners/viewers. And make sure it always covers the journalist's five Ws—Who, What, When, Where, Why—and whenever possible, the "How" as well. Be sure to cover all of the facts, but keep your releases simple and succinct.

Unlike more fully developed news releases, media advisories are sent out in advance of events, announcements and press conferences to provide just enough information about the five Ws to invite and facilitate press attendance and coverage at the event. Advisories and releases always should carry a contact name and phone number as a reporter's point of contact for questions and follow up.

### News Conferences

Consider a news conference to announce important events, results or achievements. The press conference has an air of importance and credibility because it uses a news format to present important information. But be sure to arrange a press conference only when your news is of significant importance, likely to generate sufficient media interest, or is visually interesting resulting in better television coverage.

The goal of a press conference is to bring all of the key players together to publicize your announcement, to share dramatic visuals, and to deal with any questions for follow-up at the same time. But organizing such an event can be very time-consuming, so if issuing a news release can do the job just as well, then opt for the news release.

### **News Interviews, Editorial Boards, TV and Radio Talk Shows**

Inviting members of the media in for one-on-one interviews, going to a newspaper for an editorial board (a group interview with perhaps a number of editors and reporters), or scheduling a local TV or radio talk show interview can be very effective ways of explaining and promoting more complex announcements, trends or stories.

Reporters or interviewers generally ask questions to get the interviewees to respond in an interesting, illuminating, lively or even entertaining way. Consider in advance how to respond to all of the basic or difficult questions you expect to encounter and practice your answers. Identify your core messages and concentrate on getting those points across. Think through the real “news angle” of your message by putting yourself in the minds of the media outlet’s readers, viewers or listeners. Even if the questioner tends to stray, try to reinterpret any difficult or “off-the-wall” questions to get your point across.

### **Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor and Blogs**

Another very effective way to generate press interest about key initiatives and announcements is to submit a guest editorial, commentary or letter to the editor to newspapers, blog post for publication. NOTE: these typically need to be directed to the newspaper’s opinion page editor and not the standard news reporters you may usually deal with. Strong op-ed pieces or “Letters to the Editor” need to be informal, persuasive, and entertaining, yet succinct and to the point.

### **Feature Stories and Testimonials**

The news media love to share these kinds of human-interest stories with their audiences.