

FIVE REASONS TO NEVER SEND A PRESS RELEASE

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INTRODUCTION

Introduce panelists.

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Session title is misleading – we have six reasons to never send a press release.

We also give a little equal time at the end in defense of the press release.

SIX REASONS

1. RELATIONSHIPS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN RELEASES

Knowing, working with an understanding your principal media contacts is more important than ever and the key to success. A release will not do the trick.

Ed

- ?? People really need to spend time to analyze the newspaper and TV. Who covers different beats? (Education, Family, TV, etc.)
- ?? Send emails to introduce yourself.
- ?? How he cultivated relationships (called organizations and past contacts)

Ellen

- ?? When you belong to different organizations (professional or personal) keep an open eye regarding who belongs to the same organization. If you recognize someone from the media, this is your opportunity to start personal networking.
- ?? Writing notes to reporters and media contacts is key in maintaining the relationship. They are just as touched, as we are when they receive a hand-written thank-you.
- ?? Look for station opportunities that your media contacts can be involved with at the station. These are added opportunities to strengthen your relationship throughout the year.
- ?? Remember the personal interests of each media contact. When an event comes up that they would be interested in attending, make sure they get tickets with a personal note.

2. ONLINE PRESS ROOMS ARE THE FUTURE

The press wants to work on their schedule, not yours. Build a rich online pressroom and reporters will come to depend on it. Something akin to "releases" need to be on the site, but the approach is quite different.

Ed

- ?? Uses online pressrooms for backgrounds
- ?? Other reporters are using them a lot (City Public Service, etc.)

?? Examples: Texas Freedom Network (send periodic emails that have three-four items with one-sentence teasers with links back to their press release.)

Ellen

?? Have your archive to back about two years. If something is really important, keep it in for longer (five years max.)

?? Add history and milestones for your station

?? Include an image library (logos in PDF form)

?? Legislature page

?? Corporate Citizenship (list all the good thing that you do in the community)

?? Examples: HP.com or Southwest Airlines Newsroom

Michael

?? NETA offered an audio bridge teleconference on this topic in October.

?? General advice is to make press room available from your front page and to not use password protection. Things that must be protected (certain photos, for example,) can be handled in a special way.

?? Be sure to include additional contact information with phone numbers, etc.

3. **TARGET PUBLICITY IS MORE PRODUCTIVE**

A lot of our programming is for specialized audiences; so specialized promotion makes more sense.

Michael

?? WPT efforts with gardening audience over the years (since we have a local gardening program).

?? Targeting can also be geographic: hometown contacts have been an especially productive tool for us for history programs,

?? Try to get access to newsletters and e-mail communication of groups that share interest in program topics.

?? Op-eds are a kind of target publicity that can be useful in positioning among opinion leaders (On the verge of Voting, etc.)

Ed

?? This goes back to who covers each beat.

?? Take advantage of the "good" in PBS.

?? The media in general is sympathetic to public television.

?? Confusion about who to pitch to? Try establishing a pecking order. Offer story to one department before moving on to the next.

4. **E-MAIL IS THE MOST POWERFUL WAY TO REACH AUDIENCES**

Many of us are now using e-mail, often driven by membership and fundraising efforts. It's powerful, it's fast and it's cheap. It's a good way to reach the press, too.

Ellen

?? Target Newsletters

?? Reporters are all saying they prefer e-mail these days

Ed

- ?? Younger reporters tend to prefer email. Older reporters still have habits and prefer phone calls and faxes.
- ?? Personally I really prefer it because of my schedule.
- ?? Email allows me to multi-task.

Michael

- ?? Everybody on the net has email; people visit far fewer Web sites than they get email messages.
- ?? E-mail messages are treated as To Do items, while bookmarks are often forgotten. Email is always a call to action.
- ?? Some assert that e-mail is more important than your Web site.
- ?? Use e-mail to drive traffic to your Web site; it's better than on-air promotion.

5. INSTANT MESSAGING IS UP AND COMING

Ellen

- ?? Gives media direct access to you
- ?? They can see if you're at your computer
- ?? Quick & Easy

Ed

- ?? Is a little wary of IM
- ?? Can see the advantages of the technology.

6. GETTING ON TV

Even though we are TV stations we sometimes forget to think of commercial TV as a far-reaching promotion outlet. Of course, TV needs visuals: events, guests, costumed characters, etc.

Ellen

- ?? Contact the TV assignment editors and ask them if they'll be able to send someone to the event. If not, ask if you provide raw footage and the background information if they'll be able to use it on-air.
- ?? Take advantage of your production department who are already on-site during events by providing five-minute beta tapes for them to stick in the camera for sound-bites and raw footage.
- ?? Immediately drop the betas off at each TV station.
- ?? This works especially well during weekends when news departments are so short-staffed.
- ?? Is your event press-worthy? Don't deluge the media with every station activity.

Ed

- ?? If you doing stuff for an event while it's happening – it's old.
- ?? Pitch a health story in advance of the conference to the news department. Have some b-roll available for what ever the "story" is about (example: bacon, New England Journal of Medicine, tie into conference)
- ?? If you have a Spanish speaker on staff/volunteer be sure to pitch to the Spanish media (if applicable).

Michael

- ?? Pitch for pre-event interviews and coverage.
- ?? And speaking of TV, don't forget radio whether you have a co-licensed NPR station or pitch to commercial stations. Radio is often less likely to see you as a competitor.

WRAP-UP

In spite of our session title, there are actually some good reasons to write press releases and, in some cases, even send them out. Here are six arguments in favor of press releases

1. You can't give personal attention to every media relationship. Pick those that matter most and depend on press releases for blanket coverage to smaller dailies, weeklies, etc.
2. Releases can be a useful summary of the program or project. Use them as a background pieces, not as the main event.
3. Releases can put things in your words, emphasizing what you think it important. That may change when used by the reporter, of course
4. Releases can save a lot of time. After you've contacted the print writer, TV reporter or radio host, a release gets a lot of information in one place.
5. E-mail promotion is best when short and punchy. Leave the details to a Web site or Web-based release that recipients can access directly.
6. You've got to have something in your press room ... including releases.