



Engaging the media

A

LIONS CLUBS
DISTRICT 105SC
PUBLICATION

HOW TO GENERATE THE MEDIA'S INTEREST

MEDIA TRIGGERS

It is the media that define what is newsworthy and sadly that a story or feature stems from the local Lions Club is almost always not nearly enough. Nevertheless the media do respond to certain stimuli.

The 'top ten' media triggers can be categorised as follows (although not necessarily in this order):

Children - The media find it hard to resist any story that features children and children's endeavours and achievements although anything that smacks of exploitation, sexual connotations or manipulation must always be avoided;

The Disabled - Similarly stories about the disabled, provided they are treated with due sensitivity, are almost always published;

Heroes - The media love heroes and achievers in all areas of society. Nevertheless heroes can often be found to have 'feet of clay' so this media trigger should always be used with care;

Animals - Stories involving animals are almost always 'good' news and eminently publishable, particularly when animals ape human behaviour;

Flagwavers - Stories appealing to patriotism, the 'British way', etc., whether in the commercial sense or the literal sense are always publishable;

The Environment/Green Issues - These are almost always newsworthy, often for the wrong reasons. It is also fashionable to be 'green' and 'good news' stories stemming from environmental consciousness are always publishable;

Fashion - In the sense of trends, rather than dress. The media tend to follow fashions and trends rather than lead them. The vital thing about using fashion/trends is that they are the fashion or trend at the time you wish to use them;

Sex - The days when media coverage could be guaranteed merely by enhancing a news story by draping a scantily clad female across it have long gone. Although the media tends to shun political correctness (preferring media correctness', i.e. them deciding what is or is not correct), there is still considerable media interest in 'gender-bending', particularly of the *Woman qualifies as JCB driver - man qualifies as midwife variety*.

Heritage - The media are more conscious of heritage than ever before and stories exploiting heritage and history are much more commonplace than they have ever been, so much so that most media now have specific 'heritage correspondents'. However be aware of invoking heritage that is spurious. There are too many scholars, experts, etc. who will take issue and publicly...; and

Surveys (and their results) - The media are fascinated by surveys and their results, almost regardless of the subject matter, and will almost always publish that a survey being conducted and then publish the results.

THE MEANS

The most common means of engaging the media's interest is with a press release. How the press release is constructed and issued is covered by a number of rules;

- ◆ **Every** press release should contain a title which describes its content. It should not be intended for publication because media news editors would rather crawl over broken glass than use a submitted headline;
- ◆ **The whole story** must be contained in the first paragraph regardless of how long the full release is. That way the most ruthless sub-editor will take the easy way out and use exactly what you intend;
- ◆ **Never** send identical releases to different media. What is suitable for the local newspaper is likely to be quite unsuitable for radio, television or on-line. Similarly what is suitable for an in-house publication, e.g. the *105D Times*, is almost always quite unsuitable for the mainstream media;
- ◆ **Keep it brief.** News editors get bored very quickly;
- ◆ **Study** the local media for style - how do they write dates, where do they use capital letters, do they use PC phrases such as chair or chairperson. The less a sub-editor has to do will increase the chances of what is submitted being published. These same rules apply to radio and television and on-line media;
- ◆ **When** providing photographs make sure that they are pertinent to the story, are accurately captioned, are in focus and are free of any copyright conditions. The copyright of a photograph always rests with the photographer (and copyright lasts for up to 75 years after the photographer's death!);
- ◆ **If** you seek simultaneous publication across all the media, the deadlines of the various media must be known and complied with. The danger with haphazard distribution of press releases is that once one of the media has carried the story the others might not want it, particularly if its hard news' content is low. Press releases can contain quotes (which radio or television may want the person doing the quoting to repeat on record or on air) and should always name a contact for further information. Unless there are very compelling reasons, press releases should not be embargoed. While most local media will honour an embargo, they are often missed and early publication by any one of the media may cause the others to lose interest.
- ◆ **When** sending press releases electronically (i.e. by e-mail), address them to yourself and list the media addressees on the Bcc line. That way they will not know to whom you have sent the release.

Most of the foregoing also applies to social media although the prime difference between social and mainstream media is that the former is not subject to the same scrutiny and self-censorship thus, in effect, you can say what you like. However social media, for all its immediacy, still does not have the credibility of the mainstream media nor the benefit of being a 'journal of record'. It is an ideal medium for good news and informal chit-chat.



POLISHING THE IMAGE

WHAT MAKES

A LIONS CLUB

NEWSWORTHY?

Lions Clubs International is the largest community service organisation in the world but it is probably not the best known. Our own colleagues often refer to it as a 'best kept secret'. Stop anyone in the street, ask them the question and they will probably answer 'the Rotary Club'.

How do we put this matter right?

How we do it is called 'public relations'.

It is a common misconception that public relations is all about writing press releases but it is much more than that.

Public relations is defined as generating the maximum empathy between an organisation and its public, to do that we have a number of PR tools:-

- ◆ The brand - the Lions International logo;
- ◆ The style - how the brand is used—letterheads, PR forms, etc.;
- ◆ Managing how the public perceive Lions and Lions activities, ensuring a consistent image;
- ◆ The Lions'/Club's relationship with the media;
- ◆ Introducing the Lions - President, media contact, community service contact, new Lions, etc. People are interested in people;
- ◆ Publicising events - swimarathons (marathons of almost any sort) tend to be newsworthy, jumble sales tend not to be;
- ◆ Employment of media triggers to generate news. The key element of news is 'new'. There is no point in regurgitating stories. That a story emanates from the local Lions Club is not enough;
- ◆ Above the line advertisements (media) and below the line advertisements (posters, circulars, banners, etc.) are powerful image developers but it is important to ensure that the Lions' branding is very clear and even when sponsored, should take precedence over the sponsor's branding.

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