

WHAT IS THE MEDIA?

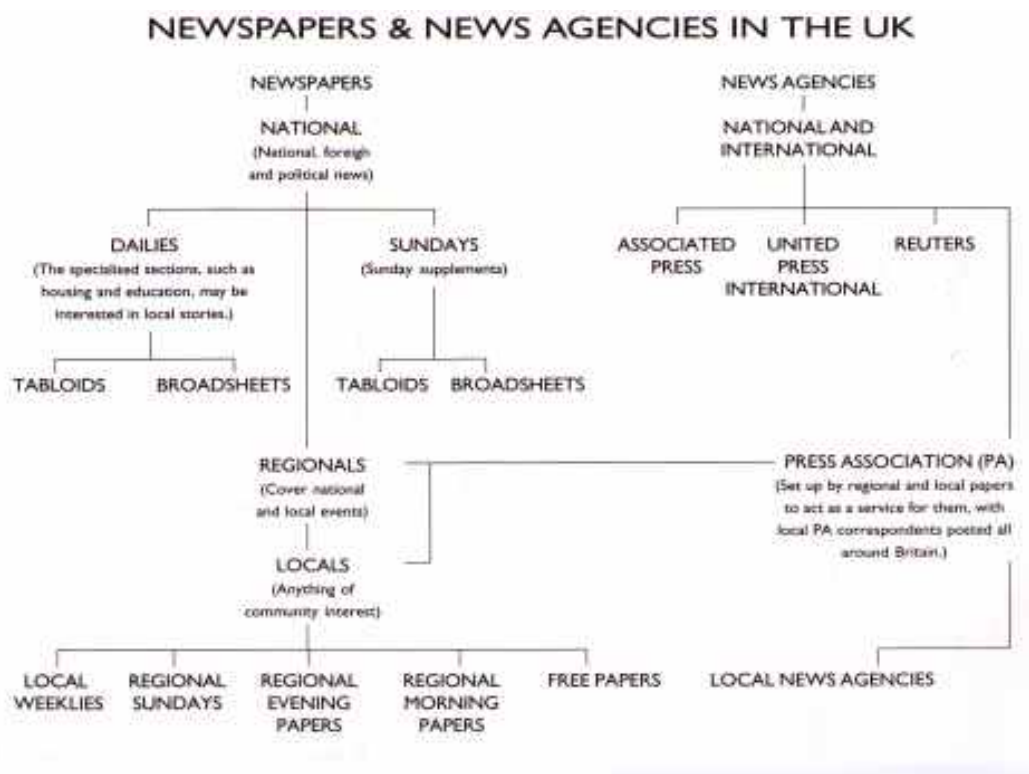
(Note; these materials don't cover web and Internet media, just print and broadcast).

At the top of the list are the national and local newspapers, radio and television stations and news agencies. Then there are outlets for nearly every interest, including general, specialist, education, trade, entertainment, not to mention all the online opportunities.

The media relies on press release and 'exclusive' stories from the public. But it's really important to make sure you know where you are going to 'target' your news release. More about that later.

It really helps to do some research. I'd suggest you:

- Bought all the local publications in the area
- Collect the free newsletters and newspapers around town
- Listen to local radio and television (both BBC and independent)
- Find out if there is any trade press in the area you are publicising (eg Young People Now)
- Make media lists by looking in publications such as The Media Guide (published by the Guardian) or Willing's Press Guide (a subscription guide – have a look online)
- Go to your local library for details of other media publications and local media



WHAT MAKES NEWS?

Research into the news outlets in your area is really important, but the next step I thinking about why you want media coverage and what your angle is. Do you want to let people know that you exist, do you want to persuade people to attend an event, do you want to advertise a service or to influence decisions? And how will you make your story stand out from the thousands of other received each day by the press?

Angles that make headlines

Human Interest

“News is people and local news is local people” (Anon).

It helps to make dry statistics come to life by finding a real person to help illustrate the story.

Surveys and reports

Always embargo reports and surveys so that the media feel they're working towards a specific deadline and to ensure that journalists cover the story at the same time. If your story appears in the paper and on the TV or radio at the same time, it gives a much stronger sense that something is really happening.

The Local Angle

You can sometimes use a national story to tell a local one. When a national story breaks, look for the local angle (and vice versa; with a local story, look for a national angle for coverage in the nationals). Many stories that end up a national headline began life as a local story.

Anniversaries and special days

Forward plan for any annual event or special day held by your organisation (such as its birthday), and then try and create a story on the back of it. Count Me In calendar is an online source of special days of interest, religious holidays and weeks of action and can be very useful.

Controversy and conflict

Emotional and controversial issues nearly always make the news and reporters can never resist the whiff of a scoop. Don't remain silent, but turn the opportunity to your advantage. Make sure you are familiar with your 'line' and then stick by it.

The Broadcast angle

Don't forget to consider how a story will sound when selling something to radio or what pictures will look good on television. Tell them about sounds or pictures that will add atmosphere to their stories.

Recap

Do you have an angle?

Is it topical?

Does it fit the newspaper or programme's brief?

Does it have a simple, catchy message?

Has the issue been covered recently?

Is it relevant/interesting to the readers, viewers or listeners?

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

This is the most important way of trying to get coverage in the press. They will either be 'proactive' eg giving advance notice of a new campaign, report or event, or 'reactive', responding to something which has already happened, eg to cuts to funding or a new government initiative.

About a quarter of media stories come from press releases. But... about 80% of press releases sent end up in the bin! If your press release is ignored, it's either considered to be a non-story or you are not sending it to the right people. But keep in mind that there will always be times when there are too many stories for yours to be printed, or when a major story breaks which takes up lots of news space. If your story wasn't used and you aren't sure why, it's always worth trying to find out why.

Get it right!

Writing a press release requires work and care to make sure your message is clear, concise and easy to read. If possible, it should cover no more than one side of A4 paper. The most important news should be in the first paragraph with further information laid out in decreasing order of importance. And editor will always cut a news release from the bottom up.

The Five Ws

All press releases must contact the five Ws – this is the most important piece of information I can share with you!

WHO: The Community and Voluntary Sector Forum
WHEN: today (06 November 2007)
WHAT: attend an exciting, one off training session
WHERE: at Brighthelm Church and Community Centre
WHY: to help them get the most out of their media work.

If you can, include a quote from someone which brings your press release to life.

Katy McGrory of the Forum said: "There are ten incredibly gifted people from the Forum's membership attending this session. I'm sure their creativity, insight and enthusiasm will set our local media on fire with the stories they have to share".

These are the essences of all press releases; master them and the rest should follow!

Don'ts!

Never use jargon
Never use flowery, descriptive language
Never make ten points when you could make one
Never assume that the journalist will know what you are talking about
Never generalise

When to send it

There are definitely days and times when news is spread more thinly when your press release might get more attention. Non-parliamentary days and days after public holidays are often quieter. Decide on a day and then check the deadlines of the media outlets that you are sending your release to. As a general rule, many magazines and community newsletters

have long lead times where as newspapers and radio or tv stations can be contacted at short notice.

Who to send it to

Wherever possible, your news release should be sent to a named individual. The key person in a newsroom is the **News Editor** who is mainly concerned with what is happening that day. The **Features Editor** will be able to take a more in-depth look at the news and can be contacted further in advance. If you want to target a specialist journalist, such as the social affairs correspondent, always make sure that you duplicate the press release to the news desk and the **Diary Editor** if there is one.

Checklist

Have you...

Typed your press release using wide margins?

Asked someone to double-check the facts for you?

Let other people in your organisation have a copy in case they are interviewed?

Targeted your press release?

Checked the different deadlines?

Made a follow-up phone call?

Monitored the coverage?

Kept all original copies of coverage for future reference?

PRO FORMA PRESS RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

Make sure your news release is on headed News Release paper so that it's not mistaken for a letter

EMBARGO: For immediate release – date

Or Embargoed until – date

Putting an embargo on your release allows you to keep control over when your story is publicised and gives the journalist a date to work to.

CONTACT: Give contact names and telephone numbers of people at your organisation.

Include a mobile phone number if you have one, but remember to keep it on and to hand if you do!

HEADING

The heading should be typed in bold capitals and centred. Keep it short, snappy and to the point, but make sure it sums up your story and refers to your area.

First paragraph Start with a bang! Keep the guts of your story with the five Ws at the beginning

Following paragraphs

Every story gets cut from the bottom up, do remember to make your points in order of importance. The second paragraph should elaborate on the first one. You are essentially telling a story now so you should concentrate on giving the reader the fill picture. Spell out the facts, give statistics and quote names and numbers of people involved.

Quotes

Press release should include a direct quote from the most relevant person involved. A quote instantly humanises a story. It should be brief and provide an overview of the event. Remember to give the person's full name and job title.

More follows...

If the press release spreads to a second page, type 'more follows' at the bottom right hand corner. Never split paragraphs or sentences.

...**continues.** Start the top of the next page with 'continues'.

ENDS

Make sure it is clear where your story ends.

Notes to editors

This is your last chance to give journalists details of how they can get copies of a report, survey, photograph or any further information.

BROADCAST

Speaking on air is one of the most powerful and immediate ways of reaching an enormous range of people. The average person in the UK listens to the radio for 20 hours a week and watches television for 26 hours.

National and local radio and tv can be broken down into many categories. These include news, current affairs, documentaries, features and light entertainment. With some creative thinking, the opportunities for you to publicise your stories are therefore endless.

Make them need you

For you and your organisation to succeed in a world where success is measured in minutes, you must be prepared to make yourself available for a journalist to speak to. Every time you put out a press release, have a good spokesperson ready. When asked for an interview at short notice, always ensure you meet the journalist's deadline. Interviews are usually offered on a first come first served basis. If you're good once, you'll probably be invited back.

Different types of interview

All interviews are either live or pre-recorded, and most take place in a studio. There are some other types of interview to be aware of though, and these include 'on location', when a radio journalist or TV crew come to you, the 'down the line' interview which is transmitted from where ever you are directly to a studio and interviews over the telephone.

How to get your point across

An average news item lasts 10-25 seconds on the radio or 30-90 seconds on television. An in-depth television interview lasts no more than three minutes. If you aren't well prepared you'll be off the air before you've managed to make your point!

Before the interview

Find out what the interview is about, how long it will be, and what context it will be in

Find out who the programme's target audience is

Decide on the three key points that you would like to make

Practice beforehand. Think about how to turn a negative question into a positive answer

Arrive at the studio at least 15 minutes before the interview

Breathe deeply to relax

Ask what the first question will be and have your answer ready

If you're appearing on television, think about what to wear. Look professional but avoid distracting stripes, checks and spots. Dangling earrings never look good on TV!

During the interview

Relax. Remember that you know your subject better than the interviewer

Concentrate on your three main points. Bring each point to life with real examples

Speak slowly. Keep sentences short and words simple and strong so that you can be understood first time

Make sure your organisation gets a mention at the end

Keep steady eye contact with the interviewer

If you don't like the question, there are ways of avoiding it. 'That's an interesting question, but the real point is...' for example

If the programme is being pre-recorded and you answer the question incorrectly, ask if you can do it again.

What not to do

Don't take notes with you. Write down your three key points and memorise them before the interview

Don't use technical language or jargon

Avoid rambling answers

Avoid adopting a public speaking tone

Don't lean back in your chair or slump – remember the BBC – **b**um in the **b**ack of the **c**hair

Don't try and answer a question if you don't know the full facts.

Don't lose your temper or get aggressive

Don't relax or change your body position until you are sure the interview has finished.

MEDIA CONTACTS

Your relationship with the media should be ongoing. As well as sending out press releases it is well worth contacting journalists in person. You should identify the key people most likely to cover your stories, and then ring round them to introduce yourself. The most important thing to remember is that you are an important source of information. They need you as much as you need them and with a little effort, you will learn to trust each other.

Study the local media

Before you contact anyone, make sure you are familiar with the content and style of the different media in your area. Also check how often and when local papers and newsletters are published or what times particular programmes are broadcast to make sure you aren't selling an 'old' news story. If you sound like you've done your research, you and your organisation will be seen in a much better light.

Mailing lists

Remember to look under broadcasting organisations in local directories, as well as 'news and photo agencies' for any news agencies that cover stories for the local press. Media directories such as the Guardian Media Guide will contain information about all major media outlets around the UK. They should help you collate a comprehensive list in your area.

Making Contacts

You should check by-lines to find out which journalist is writing what before you contact them. Write to news editors by name, giving details of your expertise. Don't follow up your letter when journalists are working to a deadline. A good time to ring is usually 10.30 – 11am for a morning paper, early morning for an evening paper and at the end of the week for a weekly. The more you talk in person to the people at your local paper, radio or television station, the more you will get a feel for the kind of story they are looking for. Personal contact is one of the fastest routes to positive coverage.

Person to person

Once you are on the phone, you can find out exactly what kind of stories they cover, what their deadlines are, the best days to send releases and whether they are the right person to be speaking to. Many monthly magazines finalise their contents three months before publication so it's really important to clarify deadlines.

Relationships with journalists

Keep a list of friendly journalists and develop a working relationship with them by offering good 'exclusive' stories. If you are consistently reliable, journalists will come to depend on you and ask your advice on articles related to your field. They are also more likely to listen to what you have to say and come to the phone instantly when you ring. Be sure that they have a mobile telephone number in case of emergencies.

Record conversations

Most journalists will keep notes of work related conversations to refer back to when writing the story and if things go wrong. You should keep a special log form in your office or have a notebook with you when phoning. If anything does go wrong, or you feel you have been misquoted, you can check the details of when and what you said. This puts you on much firmer ground and shows the journalist that he or she is dealing with a professional.

Keeping up contacts

Having made initial contacts, make sure you don't let them drop again. It's much easier to offer an 'exclusive' story direct to journalists you already know. That way, your story will receive immediate attention. If they aren't interested, you'll be able to offer it to someone else without wasting any time. When making new contacts, always make sure you make a note of the name, job title and the kind of stories they cover. Up to date files will help with quick and efficient targeting of stories.