

Media relations

KEY POINTS FOR MANAGEMENT OF GOOD MEDIA RELATIONS



The operating principles of the media

These are the basic principles that govern the functioning and choice of the media. If the information provided to the media responds to one or more of these principles, the more likely the event will be covered.

- ▶ **The Principle of Timeliness:** The media gives preference to current news in relation to its timeliness, information that could “get out” the same day rather than the next day or the following week.

Try as far as possible to find a news angle to the information and the messages.

- ▶ **The Principle of Proximity:** The space given and/or the decision about whether or not to cover an event or not is proportional to its proximity. Geographical proximity, for sure, but also cultural, social, political as well.

The media and people in general, focus more on someone from their community, their country, to something happening close to them and concerning them.

- ▶ **The Principle of Visualization:** The media tries to generate and share ideas through facts and to illustrate these facts through human interest.

Propose facts, testimonies, quotes, interviews.

- ▶ **The Principle of Novelty:** This is not to be confused with current news. Current news may not be something that is new, or a novelty. For example, a story on the Back to School period; Independence Day, etc. The media loves the “New.”

Promote the aspect of the “new” in the information but not so that it is fake.

- ▶ **Fact Checking and Confirmation:** The media must be able to rely on facts, evidence, and proof, in order to confirm and verify the information, cross-checking with sources, in order to have different points of view.

To present the information differently, the messages should be tailored according to the media addressed (see the Press Release Worksheet). This is what is referred to as “The Pitch.”

- ▶ **Catering to its audience:** Each media thinks about its readers, viewers, and listeners. These differ according to the media. This implies a specific editorial line and that topics are treated from different angles, e.g., a popular general interest daily newspaper will not treat information in the same way that a specialized monthly magazine would.

Bring to the media as many factual elements as possible, the possibility to verify, offer independent sources.

Trends

It is important to be aware of “Trends” and how the media functions and get adapted:

- ▶ **Immediacy:** Implies being reactive, quick to provide answers to journalists.
- ▶ **The “Scoop”:** The aspects of novelty, new, exclusivity are really powerful motors for fueling interest from the media.
- ▶ **Economic Aspect:** A “sensational” topic will be more favored by the media. This logic could explain why your information doesn’t get covered or broadcast or else is delayed because of another story that is deemed as one that will sell more newspapers or get more views to tune in. That said, if you regularly buy advertising space in the publication or media outlet, you might be treated with more regard in this respect.
- ▶ **“People-ization”:** For the media, news about “personalities”, their lives both public and private, sells, with the repercussions that implies. However, let’s look at the positive side of this: If you can link the message, the organization, to a personality, a well-known public figure (not a controversial one), it could assure more visibility.

The Main Principles to Respect

- ▶ **A long-term policy.** Good media relations can be envisioned over the long-term. This involves building a network, getting to know the media organizations and journalists, and to be known by them, and on that basis, build a relationship based on trust. This can take years.
- ▶ **A Code of Good Behavior:** This is about the organization’s image! Keep its word, the “Exclusives”, deadlines, be honest and do not lie, do not make premature announcements nor make promises that are impossible to keep.
- ▶ **Create a Trusting Relationship, a spirit of collaboration, be a teacher.**
- ▶ **Build a Network:** Identify the key media, the journalists and get their contacts. Maintain the networking by calling them from time to time, something that will make it possible to learn whether any special projects or supplements are in the works or planned, and then taking advantage of these opportunities.
- ▶ **Create a Press File:** This is one essential tool for managing media and press relations. This consists of creating a file documenting the different media by function of its purpose (general, specialize); strengths (print runs, distribution, circulation, readership (for the print media this is the number of people who read a single copy) the quality of the information (quick, serious, breaking news or following), the most popular journalists, traditional, innovative, objective, partisan, critical tone. Also list its operating hours and days when it is closed and the editorial conference time. After getting the information about the media organ, then do the same for the journalists, noting their contact information, coverage specialty and their tastes or preferences for stories. Where to find this information? Start with the publications/media organs, looking for journalist names/bylines; the look on the Internet for sites such as LinkedIn, Viadeo, Facebook, and Twitter for information about media and journalists; also check some directories. **Update regularly.** NB. Each engagement with the media is a good opportunity to review and refresh this file.
- ▶ **Be effective and responsive.** Give the maximum of information in the minimum amount of time. Respond as quickly as possible to media requests.
- ▶ **Promote to the maximum the positive elements:** “New,” “Remarkable,” etc. But don’t slip into advertising.
- ▶ **Emphasize the most important points.**
- ▶ **Make sure that the messages been well distributed. Send out reminders.**
- ▶ **Do not ask for a correction or a right of reply unless it is regarding a matter that is so important it could seriously damage or undermine the organization’s image.**
- ▶ **Share the information widely:** Think about the different tools that are available for communicating messages, i.e., Press Releases, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Viadeo, websites, blogs, etc. Also, do not forget Internal Communication! However, for reasons having to do with controlling the information, partners might sometimes receive information after the journalists, something that is sometimes a point of contention.

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COMMUNICATION ADVICE WORKSHEET

In terms of chronological order, the information should be shared in the following way:

- 1) To the Media/Journalists, by Email
- 2) On the Organization's Website
- 3) via Twitter, in particular to the media (with a link to the website)
- 4) On the Organization's Facebook page (with a short summary + link to the website),
- 5) Blogs, other Social Media networks
- 6) To Partners, Collaborators, via Email, Intranet, Postal Mail

NB: The first steps, #1-4, should take place within a span of several minutes; Step #5, in the maximum of a few hours. The Tweet and the Facebook Page should direct people to the information posted on the organization's website in the "Press" or "News" category. The blog will allow for discussing the information shared in more informal way.

NB: It should be noted regarding Internal Communications, internally communiqués are generally shared in relation to management hierarchy, by Email or the post. Also, doing a Press Review is an excellent way to share with collaborators the impact of the media coverage.