KEYS TO WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Media know about bad news, but they don’t know about good news unless you tell them. Here are some tips for working with the media.

1. Know your local media. Identify reporters who might have an interest in your story. Make contact with the media and let them know you are available to be a source....the best time to get to know a reporter is before you have a story.

2. In order to break through the clutter of news stories, your story must have an angle. Do something unique, a first, or can be a model for something that others can do.

3. Make sure to get your news release sent ahead of time, but not too far ahead. Newsrooms generally have “day files” where they put releases and then pull them out when they are ready to start preparing the news for the day. Timing is everything. Don’t drop off a press release the day of the event...it’s usually a good idea to send it somewhere between a week to 3/4 days ahead of the event.

4. Understand that there are appropriate times to pitch a story. Keep up with events of the day and don’t try to pitch a story when there is major breaking news or events occurring that you know will be heavily covered. Sundays are often slow news days, so if you can schedule an event on a Sunday you may get better coverage (although you also need to realize that staffing is lower then too).

5. Think visually. Newspapers and TV are always in need to visual elements, so think about where and what you can show. For radio, think about audio...either experts who can be quoted or background sounds that will enhance the story. But make sure that you can access what you promise and that prior consent is important.

THE 10 DO’S AND DON’T’S IN A MEDIA INTERVIEW

10. Never make a reporter wait. If at all possible, provide quick response to requests for information. Always call a reporter back.

9. Develop a clear and concise message. Avoid using technical jargon. Try to avoid “you know” and “umm” when speaking.

8. Listen to the entire question and pause before answering.

7. Don’t over manage. Don’t ask the reporter for story approval.

6. Provide a positive answer. Don’t get angry or defensive. Stay calm and try not to get provoked.

5. Listen to the entire question and pause before answering.

4. Never go “off the record”...assume everything you say is “on the record.”

3. Never say “no comment.” If you can’t comment, find someone who can. Don’t guess...if you don’t know the answer, say so (then follow through with an answer if possible).
2. Follow through after the story is printed or when it airs. If it is inaccurate, the reporter needs to know. You should always call the reporter first if there is an error. If you don't get satisfaction, then contact the editor or manager. If an error is serious enough, ask for a published or air correction.

1. Make sure you identify your organization.

For more information on your local broadcaster: www-ne-ba.org

INGREDIENTS OF A GOOD NEWS STORY:

1. WHO. This may be the name of a person, an organization or a collection of individuals.
2. WHAT. Give the action
3. WHEN. The date and hour should be given for future activity, although the precise hour may or may not be needed for follow-up stories.
4. WHERE. Where does the event take place? Where is the information available?
5. WHY. This may hinge on the type of story. Why is the information important for the public to know? If it is obvious why the story is important, then don't restate it. You are wasting space.
6. HOW. Again, this information may be essential or obvious. How something came about may be pertinent to the story, but if how is obvious to the audience, then this is again a waste of space.

The order in which the information is presented is dependent upon the type of story. The best rule of thumb is to choose the most important/most interesting information to begin the story, then prioritize the information that follows. Sometimes a significant quote can make a good lead...sometimes the event or action should be precedence.

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(Lincoln, Nebraska – Governor Dave Heineman announced today Nebraska is the recipient of federal funding to target substance abuse in youth. Approximately, nine million dollars will be awarded to Nebraska through a State Incentive Cooperative Agreement (SICA) in a partnership between the Nebraska Governor's Office and the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

"This is tremendous news for Nebraska because this funding will allow for a new level of collaboration between communities and the state as we work together to reduce substance abuse by 12 to 17 year old Nebraska Youth."

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Recommended form for News Release

(Your Letterhead)

For Release: Immediately or the date. (Use specific date only when something in the copy should be held back until a particular time.)

Your Name:

Telephone Number/Email Address:

(Location of release) – Indent paragraphs and be sure double space. Generally releases begin about one-third down on the page.

When writing a release, the first sentence is most important. It should be 25 words or less and summarize what the story is all about first. That way if a release is edited, you get your story out. If possible, keep the release to one page. If an editor sees a lengthy release, it may get tossed. Keep your sentences short and concise. Check spelling and grammar, and if possible have someone else in your office read the release to make sure the information is clear.

Learn where and how to direct your releases. Furnish only good solid stories. If an editor sees a release from you too many times, it will decrease the effectiveness of your information. That may mean that all your releases, even the solid ones, end up in the editor’s wastebasket.

The last paragraph should be 2-3 sentences about what your organization is all about.

(Always use #### to indicate the end of the release.)