



## Chapter 2

### *Media Outreach Strategies*

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In addition to breaking news and feature stories detailed in the last chapter, there are a number of other strategies for getting news coverage. Knowing about various types of outreach strategies will offer you more opportunities to get your issue covered and improve your chances of success.

In this chapter you will learn about:

- *Evaluating Your Media Opportunities*
- *News Release Strategies*
- *Editorial Boards*
- *Letters to the Editors*
- *Columns*
- *Op/Ed Pieces/Commentary Pieces*
- *Paid Advertisements*
- *Talk Shows/Public Affairs Shows*
- *Media Strategy Summary*



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Evaluating Your Media Opportunities*

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### •Step 1: Decide on audience

- Who is your audience?
- Who do you want to reach with your message?

### •Step 2: Choose media outlets

- What outlets reach your target audiences? What types of stories do they write about? How will your story fit within their approach to news?
- Notice the bylines of the reporters who write on the issues that are most important to you. These are the reporters who are most likely to be interested in the stories you pitch.
- Consider all the techniques suggested in this chapter (editorial, columnist, etc.) and determine which are most appropriate to your issue or story.

### •Step 3: Contact media outlets

Who do you contact?

- **Local media.** In Chicago purchase the Community Media Workshop's *Getting on the Air & Into Print*. For media outside of the Chicago region, use Newsclips' *Illinois Media guide*. Develop a "Quick List" of all local television planning and assignment editors, radio news directors, beat reporters (reporters covering your issue) and news desk editors at key print outlets. This list should include names and contact information (phone, fax, email and cell) for community and citywide press, as well as key talk show producers and reporters who cover your issues/events.
- **State, regional & national media.** Both hard copy and online media guides are available for almost any region in the country, but they can be expensive. If you create lists from national directories or get a list from another organization, always call through the list before your press activity to make sure it is current, as any printed list goes out of date quickly.
- **Prioritize your list.** Prioritize your list by lead time needed to place story and importance. For example, national print needs a significant lead time, as do magazines, but local television and radio require very little lead time. Make sure you get to the reporters who are most important to your story early. If you reach them soon enough, you may be able to make adjustments to make the story more interesting to them.

- **Include appropriate contact information.** Include as much information as needed for your specific media strategy. Name, address, phone and fax numbers, email addresses, etc. Give best times to contact, if known, and other information, such as whether the editor/reporter is bilingual, etc.

#### **Step 4: Keep list current**

- Contact information for reporters and editors is constantly changing and becoming obsolete, so it is important to keep your list current. Make changes and issue new lists regularly.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *News Release Strategies*

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Once you have decided on a media story, you need to decide *who* you are going to release your story to, *how* you are going to release it and *when* you are going to release it. Below are the pros and cons associated with media events, exclusives and embargoes. Experienced publicists usually use some blend of these strategies in each situation.

### Media Events

Media events generally occur at a specific time on a specific day, and all available media are invited.



#### **PROS:**

**Efficient.** A media event can be an extremely efficient way to reach a large number of media simultaneously, especially if the individual or organization is in high demand by the media or is in the middle of an important breaking news story.

**Morale builder.** A successful media event builds good will and confidence and is tremendously energizing.



#### **CONS:**

**Media skepticism.** Media are increasingly reluctant to attend events created especially for them. A media event that no reporters attend can be more destructive to an organization's morale and leadership than not attempting to get coverage at all.

**Loss of control.** It's very difficult to be certain of media interest until the media actually show up, and you have no idea of the story they will write until the next day. Bigger stories can easily scoop your event if it is not a major story. And if the topic is controversial and your speakers are not extremely skilled, negative questioning by reporters in a group can easily get out of hand, causing you to lose complete control of your story.

**Resources.** Media events require a tremendous amount of organizing and resources. Make sure the payoff is really going to be there before committing the time and energy.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Exclusives and Embargoes*

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### **Exclusives**

An exclusive is a story offered to one reporter/publication in advance of all other reporters. **The exclusive gives one reporter/publication, and one reporter/publication only**, exclusive rights to a story for a particular day and time. After that time, all other media have an equal opportunity to run the story.



### **PROS:**

**Increased visibility.** Exclusives create a sense of ownership in the reporter covering the story. As a result, media that have an exclusive are more likely to promote or prominently feature a story they know no one else has.

**Leverage.** High visibility in print can trigger additional television and radio coverage.

**Story quality.** Complex news stories sometimes work better as exclusives because then the reporter really digs into the meat of the story. The exclusive also gives you a great deal of control over the story because you determine how the first version of it is told.

**Enhanced story.** An exclusive can't – by itself – encourage a reporter to run a story that he/she doesn't like, but it may encourage them if they are on the fence.



### **CONS:**

**You underestimate the value of your story.** Don't underplay the story. You may underestimate the importance of your story and limit yourself to only one media outlet when, in fact, several might have been interested.

**The exclusive may not yield the intended results.** For example, another competing, bigger story may take precedence over yours, or your story may not get the prominence you hoped. Other media now no longer

think it's important because print didn't play it up, you didn't contact them and/or the news moment has passed. You may have done better to seek a little coverage at a lot of different outlets.

**Media wrath.** If it's truly a big story, the media that didn't get the story may be angry that you didn't give the story to them as well. Or even if they aren't angry, they may not want to "follow" media they consider to be competitors.

**Leaks.** If the story somehow mistakenly gets out, the person who thought they had the exclusive will be furious at you.

## Embargoes

**An embargo is a story offered to several media outlets at the same time with the agreement that it cannot run before a specific day and time.**



### PROS:

**Multiple hits.** If successful, your story appears simultaneously in multiple publications all at once instead of just one.

**Increased visibility.** Prominent coverage in a number of publications all at once usually results in additional interest by other publications and the electronic media.

**Increased control.** You control the timing, reducing the likelihood of being upstaged by some other external event.

**Media happiness.** If all the major media have equal access, all are happy.



### CONS:

**Give up leverage of exclusive.** Basically, you give up the leverage of giving a reporter a story that only he/she has (the exclusive). Editors may run the story, but it may be small or poorly placed. To get good placement, media have to feel that it's a big enough story that if they don't run it prominently, they will be upstaged by the competition.

**Potential to damage relationships.** If you leave someone out who thinks they should have had the story, they will be furious with you.

**Media wrath.** If someone breaks the embargo, i.e. runs the story before the agreed upon date, all the other media will be extremely angry with you. If you do embargoes often enough this will undoubtedly happen to you at one time or another. Of course, you can never predict when.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Editorial Boards*

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An editorial is an opinion piece that appears on the newspaper or other periodical's editorial page, written by and presenting *the opinion of the publisher and/or editor*.

Organizations seeking an editorial meet with the editorial board in their offices or talk on the phone with an editor from the editorial page to explain why their issue is important and to make a persuasive case for their viewpoint.

Media editorial page departments are separate from the news divisions and, generally, favorable coverage in one area does not necessarily result in favorable coverage in the other.

- **Step 1: Make sure you have the elements for an editorial**

- A clearly stated viewpoint on an issue currently in the news.
- Represent a clear perspective that is important to have represented in the discussion.
- A rock solid case for the position you wish to make, professionally written materials and articulate spokespeople.
- An understanding of past positions the editorial board has taken in your subject area and how your views support or differ from those positions.

- **Step 2: Contact the editorial board**

To request a meeting with the editorial board, call or email the editor who usually writes on your issues.

If you don't know who covers your issue on the editorial page, you can call the editorial board office and ask who is appropriate; ask a reporter with whom you have a relationship to recommend an editor to contact; or look on the outlet's web page.

Once you have contacted the editor, outline the issue you would like to have covered on the editorial page. Tell the editor why it is important to editorialize on this issue and what viewpoint you believe the paper should have. Back up your statements with facts and generally be knowledgeable about the issue.

Suggest an editorial board meeting when you are involved in a major issue that has an extremely high profile, and/or you can offer very high profile guests or guests the editorial board might not normally hear from.

Suggest an editorial based on your phone or email conversation when the issue is consistently reported on, there is no particular value in meeting face to face, and/or the editorial writer is already very familiar with you and your issues.

If the editor is interested in the issue, he/she may ask you to send written materials to review the issue in more depth. Send promptly and offer to check back in a day or two.

You will be most successful in getting an editorial if there is some date by which the opinion can potentially make a difference, an important vote, for example, or a deadline of some kind.

### • ***Step 3: Confirm the meeting***

If the editor agrees to meet with you, be sure to confirm the date, time and place of the meeting, along with whom will be there. Follow up with an email to the editor including meeting logistics.

Send a brochure about your organization and a background paper or other document that lays out the information you think is important for the topic. If you are sending hard copy, be sure to send enough copies for everyone who will attend.

### • ***Step 4: Prepare for the meeting***

Talking points: Prepare talking points before the meeting that clearly outline your position. Everyone from your organization who will be attending should receive a copy of the points.

Materials: Bring additional copies of the materials you sent ahead of time.

### • ***Step 5: Attend editorial board meeting***

- Decide who should attend the meeting and who will speak. No more than one or two people should make the presentation.
- Be prepared to present your issue clearly and concisely. Your presentation should last between 10-15 minutes. Practice your presentations ahead of time.
- Make sure your presentation reflects an awareness of how they have editorialized in the past on your issue. Demonstrate how your

approach is consistent with previous editorials or, if it differs, explain why you think the editorial board should re-think the issue. Take differences head on!

- Be prepared to answer questions and criticisms.
- Distribute any necessary media materials. Make sure to include your contact information on these materials in case they need to follow up with you.
- Ask the board if they are interested in writing an editorial. Thank them for their time.

**•Step 6: Follow up**

- If the board expressed interest: Call the editor and ask if they need more information from you. Ask when you can expect to see the editorial published.
- If the board is not interested or noncommittal: Ask what they are thinking or if there is a particular reason why they're not interested. They may not think it is editorial material or they may disagree with you. Ask them why not. Listen carefully to the reason and, if you can, answer their concerns. Thank them for their time.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Columnists*

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- **Step 1: Read columnists regularly**

Most newspapers have at least one columnist. Daily newspapers usually have several reflecting different interests and topics. It is important to be familiar with a particular columnist's work before approaching them with an idea. Read several columns to familiarize yourself with the columnist's style and areas of interest.

- **Step 2: Determine if any of the following applies to the story you want to offer a columnist:**

- Subject matter fits with a particular columnist's area(s) of interest and meets their requirements.
- You can offer the columnist an exclusive (story not being offered to other reporters).
- Story is timely.
- Story doesn't have a strong news hook, but there is an interesting story to tell.
- There is a strong human interest angle to the story.

- **Step 3: Contact the Columnist**

Most columnists want a well-written pitch letter or email. Describe the story you think the columnist should write. Provide supporting details; tell stories of actual people impacted; fit the story into a larger context that shows why people should care. If it's not obvious, try to demonstrate how it fits into issues the columnist has written about in the past. Finish by asking if this is topic the writer is interested in.

Don't send the same column idea to two columnists at once. Columnists want the story to themselves, so you have to approach them one at a time, even if you think there might be more than one with an interest in your issue.

Let the columnist know the timing on your issue – when will it be coming to head; why is it important to write now. Columnists don't want to write in a vacuum, but they don't mind being the first to point out an emerging issue that is getting ready to heat up.

Effective pitches:

- Use the subject line of an email to compel interest

- Tell a story that demonstrates why an issue is important
- Has a human interest component. Remember the person must be available to speak to the reporter
- Demonstrate why the story is important to tell now
- Include supporting materials that help flesh out the detail, context or impact

• **Step 4: Follow-up**

- Follow-up an email or letter pitch with a phone call.
- Ask if they are interested: “Do you think you might be interested in writing a column on this subject?” Offer more information: “I have some background information and I can connect you with \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss the topic in more depth.”
- If they are interested, ask or suggest a timeline for publication. If they are not, ask them why not and really listen to their answer. If their reasoning seems wrong to you, tell them why you were thinking this was a good column. Listen to their reaction.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Op/Ed Pieces/Commentary Pieces*

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OpEd (opposite.editorial) pieces generally appear on the editorial page and are often written by syndicated columnists. These usually run between 500 to 800 words in length and express a viewpoint on a particular subject. However, many papers also will publish unsolicited commentary pieces.

The most important attribute of a commentary piece is that it expresses a viewpoint, is thoughtful and well written and speaks to a topical issue. It also helps if the author has special expertise in the subject matter or is associated with an organization with special expertise.

### •**Step 1: Ask yourself: When is an opinion piece appropriate?**

- A perspective about a current event or trend.
- A response to another editorial piece or column.
- To support a media outreach campaign or upcoming event.
- A prominent or unusual person willing to author a piece.
- You are an expert on an issue featured in the news.

### •**Step 2: Write the piece**

- Find out appropriate word count and other guidelines by calling the editorial page editor first or looking online.
- Determine who should author the piece.
  - A well-known individual or head of a well-known organization.
  - A leader in a particular field or area of work.
  - An unexpected or unusual supporter.
- Write an op/ed piece that includes the following:
  - A clearly articulated opinion, position or argument.
  - Supporting statistics or facts.
  - Interesting points and opinions that contribute to the broader discussion.
- Proofread.

### •**Step 3: Follow-up**

After sending in your commentary, follow up with a phone call to find out if it has been accepted. If you are rejected, find out why. You may be able to rewrite it and resubmit it. Ask when it will appear if it has been accepted.

### •**Step 4: Evaluation**

- Track response to the piece



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Paid Advertisements*

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### • **Step 1: When is a paid advertisement appropriate?**

- When it is the most effective way to reach a target audience
- When the potential results can justify the costs
- When you want to speak directly to target audiences without the mediating influence of the media.
- When you have the resources to make sure it is highly visible and/or repetitive
- To maintain visibility and show support for other organizations (ad in community newspaper, ad in organization program book, etc.)
- When you have been unable to get media coverage for an issue.
- In order to spark controversy or “free” media—only controversial ads will do this.

### • **Step 2: Determine audience and budget**

- Whom do you want to reach with the ad?
- What are the best publications to reach your target audiences?
- Research media outlet’s advertising rates and policies. Nonprofits often receive a discount.
- Decide on size of ad (ask media outlet about volume or run-of-publication discounts).

### • **Step 3: Determine strategy and messages**

- What do you want to say?
- What is your advertising budget?
- What results do you want to see from the ad?
- What do you want the ad to look like?

### • **Step 4: Contact outlets**

- Decide on response mechanism, if needed (i.e. how will you respond to phone calls for more information).
- Prioritize outlets based on target audiences, budget and resources available for project.
- Decide when and how long the ad will run.
- Execute contract with outlet.

### •Step 5: Create advertisement

- Draft copy.
- Design ad (ask if media outlet will assist you in creating ad or hire a professional designer).
- Finalize design and copy.
- Sign off on completed ad.
- Send to media outlet (find out if ad should be submitted camera-ready, on disk, or if outlet will create camera-ready art).

*If you are working with a designer, production house, and/or copywriter, be sure to execute a contract, which details the type of work to be done, time frame and deadlines, and payment.*

### •Step 6: Evaluate results

- Track responses (ask respondents how they heard about your program, event, etc.).
- Evaluate success of ad against goals of marketing and/or media outreach campaign.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## Talk Shows/Public Affairs Shows

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Some radio or television stations sponsor talk shows that focus on local events or issues in the news, although there are many fewer of these shows than there used to be.

### •Step 1: Pitch your topic and proposed guests

### •Step 2: Develop a pitch

- Identify a couple of people who can talk about your issue.
- Prepare a short, straight forward pitch about your story idea.

#### Sample public affairs show pitch:

*Hi, my name is Lisa Smith with the Illinois Asset Building Group. I'm calling to suggest a guest for your show. Do you have a minute?*

*The Governor of Illinois recently signed into law a bill that will start the process for developing savings accounts at birth for every Illinois child.*

*As you may know, there is growing support around the country for helping children establish savings accounts at birth. This is particularly important in Illinois.*

- *Illinois has the lowest homeownership rate in the Midwest.*
- *Post-secondary education is becoming more expensive everyday, but public grants and loans are being cut back.*
- *Almost no one has sufficient funds for retirement.*
- *Yet, only 57% of Illinois households have a savings account.*

*The measure in Illinois passed unanimously in both houses and mandated the development of a plan by 2008.*

*We are wondering if you would like to have a guest on your show from our organization to talk about the value of children's savings accounts? There also is a school in Chicago that has set up a childrens savings program where the children have saved more than \$50,000. Perhaps you would also like a child or teacher from that school*

*Does this sound like something you'd be interested in?*

### •Step 3: Pitch your story idea

- Call or email your local radio and TV stations to find out if they have any public affairs shows. Find out who the contact person is for the show. It's usually the producer or host.
- Once you have your materials and possible interviewees identified, call or email the appropriate person.
- If the producer or host wants to book, get the details on the show
  - What time should the guest arrive?
  - Where should they go when they get there?
  - What should they wear (TV)?
  - How long will the show be?
  - Who is the audience for the show?
  - Is the show taped or live? If live, will there be call-ins?
- Provide this information in writing to the guests, along with the phone numbers of the producer and host.
- Send the producer and host an email confirming the date and time and who will appear on the show. Provide the host with the guest's phone numbers.
- If you leave a voicemail or don't hear back on your email, follow-up in two days to find out if he/she is interested.



# Media Outreach Strategies

## *Media Strategy Summary*

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Type of media placement	You have this story when...	Media materials needed	Action steps
News Story ( <u>citywide media</u> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Newsworthy story.</li> <li>▪ Time peg.</li> <li>▪ Citywide impact (e.g., a trend impacting many neighborhoods).</li> <li>▪ Human-interest angle (helpful).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Press release highlighting a citywide impact.</li> <li>▪ Media advisory</li> <li>▪ Profiles, if appropriate.</li> <li>▪ Background materials: fact sheet, study, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Decide on media outlets to contact.</li> <li>▪ Create media materials.</li> <li>▪ Create telephone pitch.</li> <li>▪ Conduct media outreach (call, fax, mail).</li> <li>▪ Send media materials.</li> <li>▪ Conduct follow-up outreach.</li> <li>▪ Track responses.</li> <li>▪ Evaluate.</li> </ul>
News Story ( <u>community media</u> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Newsworthy story.</li> <li>▪ Time peg.</li> <li>▪ Community-wide impact/interest.</li> <li>▪ Human-interest angle.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Press release highlighting local impact on the specific community.</li> <li>▪ Media advisory</li> <li>▪ Profiles, if appropriate</li> <li>▪ Background materials: fact sheet, study, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Decide on media outlets to contact.</li> <li>▪ Create media materials.</li> <li>▪ Create telephone pitch.</li> <li>▪ Conduct media outreach (call, fax, mail).</li> <li>▪ Send media materials.</li> <li>▪ Conduct follow-up outreach.</li> <li>▪ Track responses.</li> <li>▪ Evaluate.</li> </ul>
Column	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Newsworthy story.</li> <li>▪ Time peg.</li> <li>▪ Human-interest angle.</li> <li>▪ Subject matter of interest to columnist.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Telephone pitch.</li> <li>▪ Short pitch letter or press release.</li> <li>▪ Participant profiles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Know columnist's work.</li> <li>▪ Offer exclusivity.</li> <li>▪ Create telephone pitch.</li> <li>▪ Follow up with pitch letter and participant profiles.</li> <li>▪ Track responses.</li> <li>▪ Evaluate.</li> </ul>

<b>Type of media placement</b>	<b>You have this story when...</b>	<b>Media materials needed</b>	<b>Action steps</b>
Letter to the Editor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You have an opinion to express on an issue.</li> <li>▪ You want to respond to an article it disagrees with or to add detail to a story that has appeared in the news.</li> <li>▪ Your issue or program relates to current topics being covered by the media.</li> <li>▪ You would like to highlight support for a campaign, possibly by an outside or unexpected supporter (e.g., local alderman expressing support for your program).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Letter that follows paper's guidelines and clearly expresses a position or opinion (approximately 250-300 words).</li> <li>▪ Contact information for author.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Call outlet for Letters-to-the-Editor guidelines and contact information.</li> <li>▪ Draft and edit letter(s).</li> <li>▪ Send to outlet.</li> <li>▪ Follow-up call with editor.</li> <li>▪ Track response.</li> <li>▪ Evaluate.</li> </ul>
Op/Ed Piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You can offer perspective about a current event or trend.</li> <li>▪ You want to react to another editorial piece or column, if appropriate.</li> <li>▪ As a support to a media outreach campaign or upcoming event.</li> <li>▪ A prominent or unusual person willing to author a piece.</li> <li>▪ You are an expert on an issue featured in the news.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Op/Ed piece that meets length requirements of outlet and clearly makes an argument or supports a position.</li> <li>▪ Signator.</li> <li>▪ Telephone pitch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Call outlet for Op/Ed guidelines and contact information.</li> <li>▪ Draft and edit letter.</li> <li>▪ Sign off from signator.</li> <li>▪ Telephone pitch to editor.</li> <li>▪ Follow-up phone call to editor.</li> <li>▪ Track responses.</li> <li>▪ Evaluate.</li> </ul>