

Media Relations

Engaging the Media with Confidence

WDM Groups

Introduction

These 'starter' materials are based on a media relations workshop delivered by The Creative Collective Media for WDM groups in Reading, Leeds and Glasgow. The focus isn't exhaustive by any means, but touches on practical approaches that accommodate the way WDM groups work. Press releases aren't covered as they are primarily produced centrally by WDM. What the materials do focus on is how to engage with journalists in a way that engenders confidence rather than fear. They also aim to assist with making your complex messages more accessible without compromising your goals.

Understand how the media works

Context

Media relations is a subset of public relations (PR). It uses the media as a vehicle to reach your target audience for the purpose of communicating key messages about your services, organisation, products or research. It requires you to engage with the media to inform your target audience about your mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible way.

Making contact with the media should be regarded as an opportunity to educate both the media and the public they inform. Good media relations require an attitude of cooperation and responsiveness while at the same time being aware of the wider climate such as the impact of the recession and people's media engagement habits. For example, an increasing number of people are turning to radio at a time when less traditional formats, particularly social media, is growing in influence.

Impact of the recession

A downturn in advertising revenue has hit all media. Local and regional media are bearing the brunt of the recession with a reduction in staff, closure of newspapers or them being sold (Manchester Evening News). In response, some local media are being even more inclusive of their local communities. In other areas, journalists are more reliant on press releases and tip offs from local groups for their stories as they are working at a greatly reduced capacity and find it difficult to go out into the community to find 'original' stories. All of which is beneficial to WDM groups.

Other changes include:

- ❑ Downsizing of ethnic press (i.e. closure of *New Nation* and *Asian Times*).
- ❑ More reliance on press releases.
- ❑ Fewer resources for 'investigative' journalism.
- ❑ Greater public scrutiny of the media.
- ❑ More examples of media being held to account (Chris Moyles and LGBT prejudice).
- ❑ Greater focus on readership credibility and loyalty.
<http://blogs.pressgazette.co.uk/wire/6229>
- ❑ Rise in and greater reliance on 'citizen' journalism with local and tabloid newspapers calling on local people to send in their pictures and stories 'as they happen'.
- ❑ Increasing focus on the voluntary and community sector as experts and for access to people for the 'human interest' element such as case studies and for interviews.

Despite the current climate, there is a trend among the media to now see 'local' news as 'global' news. It isn't just the local media that relies on local stories for its lifeblood and credibility. Increasingly national media is reaching out to mainstream local stories due to the immediacy and growth in social media and the influence of community and activist bloggers as well as Twitter, which provides wider access to local stories.

Proactive media relations

Being proactive when engaging with the media puts you in a much stronger and more confident position than if you are constantly being 'forced' to react to a 'perception' of WDM in relation to a story that may not necessarily benefit you or your aims.

So what are proactive and reactive media relations?

Proactive media relations is when:

- You initiate the media coverage.
- You pitch a story idea to journalists and editors.
- You plan and prepare for the media pitch.
- You know what to say when a journalist calls.

You use proactive media relations to help:

- Raise awareness of a particular issue, concern or cause.
- Increase understanding of your organisation.
- Build support for a campaign.

- Encourage involvement from the local community.
- Secure commitment among WDM's key stakeholders.

Reactive media relations is when:

- A journalist calls out of the blue and on their own initiative.
- WDM is monitoring media coverage to anticipate potential stories.
- You get an unexpected call from a journalist you haven't worked with before and have to refer them on.
- You get a call from a journalist you are familiar with but who you are unprepared for. In this case, ask if you can call back and do the interview in 30 minutes or an hour's time. This gives you time to prepare your key messages.

When this happens, it is important to determine who should talk with the journalist and then arrange the necessary interviews. You need to ask:

- Which media outlet are you working for?
- What's your deadline?
- What's the angle for your story?
- Have you reported on this kind of story before?
- Who else are you interviewing for the story?
- What can we do to help you with this story?

This process will help you determine if it is best for you to be interviewed. If not, recommend someone else, even if it is another organisation. Don't feel obliged to be part of a story that isn't relevant to you and what you are trying to do.

(See **Media Interviews** section for more information.)

Main formats (print media)

NEWS (and news analysis)

- topical, current and immediate
- factual
- formal in tone
- usually short and to the point; news analysis is more in-depth
- always leads
- shorter deadlines/lead in times
- short, snappy quotes
- linked to current trends, forecasts, gaps in services/policy/practice, identifies unseen trends
- journalist more likely to conduct interview over the phone

FEATURES

- follows on from news in sequence
- more in-depth
- human interest-led
- variety in tone, style and language

- less formal
- longer pieces and more 'colourful'
- less reliant on topicality, more reliant on originality
- longer lead in time – more scope to forward plan
- more likely to be interviewed in person

OPINION/COMMENT/FIRST PERSON

- growth area in newspapers and in broadcasting
- falls under feature category
- writer-led piece
- linked to topical and/or controversial issue
- clear line of argument and conclusion
- takes a position – moral, political, ethical, etc...
- view presented is either personal or organisational
- area that is relevant to WDM members' work

LETTERS PAGES

- personal or organisational
- one of the most widely read section, particularly by policy makers, journalists and voluntary organisations
- cost effective
- immediate
- scope for joint position on topical issue
- initiate debates
- enables feedback and follow up when email address provided (safe one)

Relevant sections – what to consider

Newspapers, magazines as well as TV and radio shows and online media, are produced with particular sections which focus on a specialist area. In newspapers, you have crime, health, home affairs, lifestyle, the arts, true lives, opinion, for example. You also have specialist pull out sections on areas such as education, parenting, social care and health, among others.

Tip

Look at the media you are interested in and/or which you think are relevant to your work and identify which sections are relevant to you. What type of stories are featured? What topics do they cover? What type of people are interviewed or profiled? Who write the articles – non journalists or journalists?

Examples

PRINT

Specialist/Trade
BME
National
Regional
Local

SECTIONS

Health
Women
Money/Finance/Business
Lifestyle
Letters

**Consumer
In-House
Online
Global**

**Opinion
First Person
Parenting
Crime
Social Care/Public Sector
Arts
Policy**

Who are you trying to reach and why?

For you to know which media to target, you have to be clear about whom you want to reach and why. What do they read, watch and/or listen to? Are they more likely to read the local newspaper or listen to community radio? Are there online forums that you need to get your message out to, or websites you can send your press release, campaign aims or an idea too?

What next?

Target audience checklist

- Who will best help you achieve your goals?
- What demographic groups are you trying to reach?
- What do you know about the best ways to reach them?

Target audiences should be described in terms of:

- current behaviour
- level of awareness
- level of knowledge
- preferred methods for receiving information
- motivations/barriers to hearing and believing/accepting the information you present

Primary Target Audience

These are the key people or groups that you want to communicate to directly. You can have more than one primary target audience. This could be funders, local councillors, policy makers and potential WDM members.

Secondary Target Audience

These are people of less importance who you want to receive your messages and who will also benefit from hearing your messages. Or they are people who are in a position to influence your primary target audience now or in the future. For example, targeting youth workers and teachers when you are trying to reach young people.

Tip

The more refined your target audience description, the more precise, effective and tailored your communication will be.

What are you saying?

If you are going to engage with the media the most important question you have to ask yourself is *why?*

The next important question is:

What do I want to say?

Once you can answer these initial questions with an awareness of who you want to target, then you can start your work on your core messages. This needs to be done first so you can engage journalists with confidence. This also needs to take into account the requirements, style and tone of your target publication or show. The choice of media is dependent on 'who' you are trying to 'reach'. (**See *Target Audience*** section below.)