



Creative Lives

Briefing #74

Publicity Explained

Voluntary arts organisations need to promote themselves and their projects in order to increase their membership, encourage people to participate in their activities and events, increase their audiences, build a good reputation and gain credibility for their work.

This can seem like a daunting task especially if you've never done it before. This and the other Voluntary Arts Briefings on Publicity & Promotion offer a step-by-step guide to making the task easier and more manageable no matter what size organisation or group you are.

One of the best ways to get free publicity for your group is to use the various media channels that are available as media coverage. These are often free, very influential and can reach a large number of people.

In this briefing we concentrate on how you can get the best out of a relationship with the mainstream media. There are also many opportunities through social media to promote your group and activity at little or no cost which is best covered by Voluntary Arts Briefing 168: Creating engaging content for social media (plus links to two videos – creating events on Facebook and using a social media volunteer).



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So, how do we do it?

STEP 1: Identify Your Team

Choose your PR person

It makes life simpler if you are able to assign someone in your organisation to specifically be your media representative or PR person. This person should be articulate, friendly, well informed and easily reachable (i.e. they won't be much use if they are always in meetings or on trains). S/he will be your spokesperson and be available for press interviews (remember, this will not necessarily be your chief executive or a senior manager or Chair).



Tell the media

Once you've decided on this, it would be good policy for the newly assigned officer to circulate an email to the media introducing themselves and providing full contact details. It's often worth giving out an alternative contact number as well (home or mobile). This may sound alarming but you are only likely to be called at home in exceptional circumstances and being accessible out of office hours may prove the difference between a story going ahead or not.

STEP 2: Build Your Media List

Research, research, research!

Keep your media list up to date. This is a vital job and although it can take some effort it's worth allocating some time each month to building the list up. Take it one step at a time, starting with identifying the key media outlets for your locality and activity. There are a number of ways you can do this:

- Go into local supermarkets/newsagents and take a note of the papers being sold to your potential local audience members, and possibly any magazines relevant to your area of activity. If it's within your budget it could be worth buying a copy of each to get a feel for their content as well as the appropriate contact details. You can also look at their online presence to gather the relevant contacts
- Collect any free newsletters, newspapers or magazines that you see being distributed around the place. Again have a look through to see if they appear to be relevant to your group and activity and to get contact details.

- Don't forget to make a note of any local broadcast media or local stations associated with national providers such as the BBC or ITV plus any community run radio stations.
- You can search online for details of relevant publications and news agencies (national ones such as the Press Association & Reuters or local ones). Websites like Hold The Front Page and Brad Insight have useful UK media directories.
- There are also offline directories like Benn's Media Directory UK & Ireland which you can pay for (but may still be stocked in some public libraries). These could be a worthwhile investment if you are doing intense media work and do not want to spend a lot of time searching out up to date details.
- There are also some services that can help supply your press releases to multiple media outlets all in one go such as All Media Scotland. Again these usually incur a cost but can be worth the time saving.
- When online you should note any appropriate websites or bloggers that may take news items from local groups plus listing sites that you can post your activity or event up on – it all helps with your free publicity.

Be accurate

Once you have put together a list of media, check that the names and titles of press contacts are correct. Start with a phone call to the newspaper or broadcaster.

You shouldn't address things simply to 'the Editor' as there may be one in each department (an Arts Editor, Features Editor, News Editor) and your press release may never find its way to the right desk.

Ask to be put on their own mailing list or sign up to their social media feeds to be kept informed of new personnel or programme changes.

Make contact

Try to make a good impression. The very first time you call a reporter, introduce yourself and ask whether it is a good time, or if it would be better for you to call another time.

Once you have them listening, ask about their deadlines – when do they go to press, when do they have a news meeting, when would they like to be contacted?

Ask what kind of stories they are interested in – and take note. Make sure you get their direct phone line if they have one, and their e-mail address.

And then be ready to email them immediately with your press release or another clear, snappy document. They are unlikely to wait around for you.



Keep track and stay in touch

It's important to keep a record of the journalist's responses each time you call. Every time you call again, remind them what you discussed before. This helps build the relationship. They then get to know that you are efficient, reliable and on the ball.

Invite them to any event your organisation might have

Meeting them face-to-face will increase your chances of being remembered! If you get to know a journalist personally, make sure you call them before you call others, and offer your story or ask their advice about placing it.

Stay informed

It's a good idea to read the publications or watch/ listen to the programmes you want your story to appear in so you get an idea of their style and content.

Collect newspapers' media kits for advertisers – they tell you all the key information about each paper, including target markets, circulation and readership.

It's also important to check the key newspapers everyday to monitor the media for your 'clippings' i.e. your stories. (If you can't afford to buy all the publications, you may be able to find them in your local library and make copies or the relevant articles or look and see if they have been published online). Clippings are very useful to show your board, funders, and for your future press packs or quotes for brochures. Some newspapers have clippings services available, but these can be expensive, so make it your job to collect them.



Categorise

Organise your list of press contacts into groups. You might want to think about using the following categories:

- reviewers (by art form);
- free listings editors;
- news editors;
- columnists/feature writers;
- photo editors;
- freelance journalists;
- news websites.

STEP 3: Make a Publicity Plan

Identify your message

First you will need to agree on the key messages you want to get across using the media. These should fall in line with any concepts you have in your marketing plan (if you have one). (See Voluntary Arts Briefing 75: Getting started marketing for more information).

Find your story angle

Then, you need to think creatively about ways to turn your message into something that the public will want to read. The journalist will turn your press release into a story – so make their job as easy as possible by getting the story potential or ‘angle’ to leap off the page. There are three main types of story, so consider each one and try to see if your message can fit one of these:

a) News

A news item is one that is linked to a specific date, a one-off event or a new piece of information like a forthcoming event, the opening of a new venue, a problem affecting

your members, or the participation or endorsement by a celebrity of an event. In short, something that will be new to readers. Know what’s in the news today and what the current issues are – often being topical is a good way to turn your story into news.

b) Features

Features come in all shapes and sizes and cover all sorts of themes:

- a human interest feature is a personal story, perhaps a triumph over tragedy. It can be anything that is centred on a person or people who have experiences to which readers can relate;
- an analytical feature could be an opinion piece, a review, a report based on in-depth research, or a look at the background to current statistics. Feature articles depend more on personal contact and personal issues. They have to catch the imagination of a journalist or an editor and be something they can get their teeth into. Ideally the journalist/editor you work with will be someone you have spoken to before and whom you know to be interested in your work.

c) Event listings

Print: when you want to promote a forthcoming event try to make sure it is mentioned in the ‘what’s on’ sections of all papers. Note that when sending a press release some free listings just run the W’s (who, what, where, when) whereas others may run your whole release. Make the job of the listings editor easier by including all the important details: contact details, venue, date and time, ticket prices etc.



Radio/TV: contact local radio or TV news stations too as they will often cover an event if they know about it in advance and can send a reporter down. They are much less likely to cover an event retrospectively.

Online: many websites allow you to put up your own events directly onto the site. Look out for any offers to be featured or highlighted as a news story as well.

Establish a timeframe

You will need to include a timeframe in your plan. Knowing the deadlines for sending copy to the relevant journalist is essential. This will ensure that you get your story published, and you gain a reputation as a reliable professional – one that the journalist can trust to use again.

- Decide when you want your story to be published
- Find out when the media deadlines for publishing/broadcasting are for the date you have chosen.

Often the larger, national & Sunday papers or monthly magazines have copy deadlines of up to six weeks-two months. Local media outlets are more likely to work on a weekly/fortnightly basis. Listings editors usually have a specific date each month as their deadline.

Target the right media

Once your ideas have been divided into these three categories (news, features, events), decide which paper, TV/radio station or publication each story would be most suited to. Consider their deadlines and their readers' interests. There is no point sending out something unless it will be relevant; you will only waste the journalist's (and your own) time.

For example, if you want to generate publicity for a local weekend event, start by sending your press release to your local radio stations and local papers (especially those with an events listings section). Don't waste your time sending it to national papers unless they have regional events listings and you can still make their copy deadline. (Or possibly if you think that the story is really newsworthy and relevant to a national audience, perhaps tying in with current headlines). So – start by targeting the journalists most likely to use your story and work backwards in order of importance, making sure you address the most appropriate contact from your media list.

STEP 4: Produce a Press Pack

A press pack should contain:

- a press/media release;
- background information;
- the flyer for the event;
- images – photographs or discs with images or logos

Note: If you are worried that sending several press packs out may be expensive, consider just sending a press release which ends saying: 'for further information, images or a press pack please contact...') or put it up online and email a link to it.



The Press/Media Release

This is the foundation of any publicity campaign and so it's really important that your press release is well written and well presented. It should give the editor of the paper all the information they need to publish the story, or follow it up with a reporter. It answers the questions who, what, when, where and why in the opening paragraph and gives a contact name and telephone number for further information. It is usually short – about 250 words – and made up of short paragraphs of short sentences. It finishes with information on who to contact for more information. (See Voluntary Arts Briefing 77: How to write a press release for more information).

Background information

This gives extra details to supplement the press/media release – and can help to point out to the journalist the many news and features angles in your event – which means they don't have to look for them. Make sure the information on the sheets is succinct and clear – perhaps using bullet points or tables where possible. Examples could include:

- a fact sheet with a list of 'points of interest' or 'notes to the Editor';
- a list of all the artists involved in an event;
- biographies of the key players;
- short profiles of the organisations involved;
- maps;
- a brief history of the project
- details of sponsors/funders

Flyers

Your flyer acts as a mini poster advertising your event or activity. An attractive, eye-catching flyer with a bold heading will help to grab the journalist's attention. (See the section on designing an effective flyer in *Creative Lives Briefing 76: A guide to good design* for full details).

Images

The photographs used in your publicity campaign can shape the public's perception of your event.

- If you can, try sending different images to competing papers.
- Some publications only print their own photographs – so be sure to notify them of photo opportunities. Just in case they can't come, arrange a photographer yourself.
- Build up your collection of photos – like newspaper cuttings, these can be very useful for future marketing. For more information, see *Creative Lives Briefing 77: How to write a press release*.



Send out the press pack

The press like to be the first to hear about an event so make sure your press pack goes out before your flyers are circulated widely. There are different ways to send it:

- by post;
- as an email attachment (use the latest .docx file format which is less likely to carry viruses than RTF, DOC or ZIP files);
- by posting it on your website and email the press with a hyperlink to the release.
- Post it up on your Facebook or Twitter or other social media and share the link with relevant media outlets

Send out the press pack

If you can't or don't know it's best to find a general email to email or give them a phone.

Follow it up

Always follow up the press pack or press release with a phone call, checking the correct person received it. This is a great opportunity to really make a pitch for the story and to make human contact with the journalist. Unless s/he wants to chat, keep the call short and to the point. If you are hoping to get a feature, outline the idea and explain why you think readers might find it interesting. Trim it down to the interesting, attentiongrabbing essentials.

STEP 5: Evaluation

We know evaluation always feels like a pain to do! But how else can you judge whether your efforts have been a success? Plan time for this on a regular basis – even if it is simply a matter of gathering and filing press cuttings and keeping a log of the number of inquiries you receive. Done regularly you will start to notice if things are not working as you hoped. This is a great early warning system that will enable you to change your strategy if you need to.

A Final Word

Following these five simple steps should take some of the stress out of publicising yourselves and your activities. However, it's worth remembering that you cannot control what the press will say, and that bad publicity can be very damaging. You need to be a bit media-savvy. This requires building a good working relationship with journalists and being creative in thinking up interesting stories to feed them.

You have to be realistic about what the media will be interested in – stories that will interest their readers (the people you also want to interest) and sell their papers or make them listen or watch or visit their website.

Of course there is always the option of bypassing the mainstream media altogether and concentrating on social media options alone, but it can be worth trying to get some coverage as it may catch the attention of people who don't use social media as much as others for example.

Further resources

Other Briefings available on the Creative Lives website: www.creative-lives.org

- *Briefing 75: Getting Started with Marketing*
- *Briefing 76: Guide to Good Design*
- *Briefing 77: How to Write a Press Release*

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