

Media

Creating an effective media campaign

The aims of this chapter

This chapter of the Activist Training Manual provides information about why the media is so important to your campaign and how to work with the different media.

The chapter is divided into three key sections:

Section 1. Understanding the importance of the media

Section 2. Creating an effective media strategy

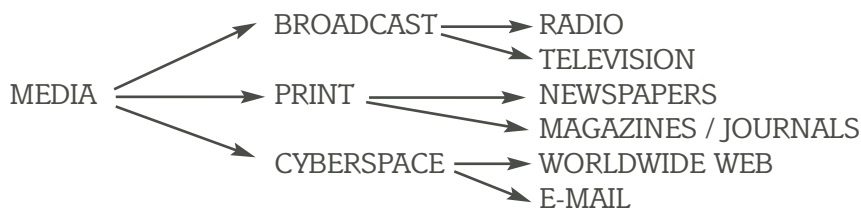
- 2.1 Building a relationship with the media
- 2.2 Grabbing the headlines
- 2.3 Press releases – why, when and how to use them
- 2.4 Photocalls and press conferences
- 2.5 Video news release

Section 3. Your media checklist

SECTION 1. UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEDIA

What is the media?

Media includes all the different means of mass communication. The diagram below highlights in a simple way what we mean by media:



What is news?

News is anything that other people are interested in. Being newsworthy consists of letting journalists and reporters know that you are doing something of interest – having an event, supporting or opposing an issue or releasing new information. You can create news.

The media and effective advocacy

The media is extremely valuable in successful advocacy. Effective media work can enable you to reach massive audiences with your message and information. Moreover, politicians, international organisations and multilateral agencies – like the United Nations and World Bank, businesses, multinational corporations and the public are all very receptive to what the media has to say. By creating an effective media campaign strong and compelling messages can be sent to all of these different audiences, changing the way they look at issues.

By using the media you can turn your issue in to a local, national or international concern. You can attract the interest and concern of powerful individuals, organisations, companies or governments.

You can also “target” specialist audiences through specialist publications and media such as health care experts, environmentalists or scientists.

Reports in the media in some way influence almost every major political, economic or business decision that is made – and it can be your information that is reported.

SECTION 2: CREATING AN EFFECTIVE MEDIA STRATEGY

2.1 Building a relationship with the media

Building a good relationship with journalists can be the basis of effective media relations – they rely on you for good stories and crucially they are your means to reach a wide, perhaps even global audience with your issue. Journalists and their editors have the challenge of filling newspapers, magazines and news programmes every day of the year. By presenting them with a good story you are making their life easier – you can become their ally:

- Provide them with news
- Provide them with good quotes and visual materials
- Always make sure that your facts are correct

If you are part of an organisation always try to have someone on hand who knows how to work with the media and who can respond to any enquiries that may come in. Make sure that the media you are in touch with have up-to-date contact details for you – they don't have time to wait around and if they cannot get hold of you or your organisation, they will go elsewhere.

Keep track of what is going on in the media, particularly in those papers or programmes which may be interested in your issues or similar stories. Listen to the radio, buy the papers, watch the television news. Always keep a look-out for an opportunity to raise your issue with the media.

TIP Remember that if you build a good relationship, then journalists will often come to you for stories – can you make yourself a spokesperson for a particular issue or range of issues? Be ready and prepared to help whenever you can.

The Golden Rules Planning and preparation

Careful planning and preparation are essential to an effective media strategy. Plan what you are going to do well in advance, always be prepared before contacting the media and think creatively about how you present your information or comments to them.

But, even the best planning cannot predict the future – be on the look-out for unforeseen media opportunities and be ready to make the most of them.

And remember – always check your facts.

How to approach journalists

Whenever you contact journalists make sure that you present your information with authority – be accurate and confident in what you say and always have your facts to hand.

Journalists are very busy people and they have tight deadlines that they cannot miss. They receive many stories every day. They are approached by individuals, NGOs, companies, scientific and health experts, governments and international organisations and everyone else in-between – so be prepared to work hard to gain attention for your important news stories (see *Grabbing the headlines* below).

Think through all the questions that they might ask you – remember that a good journalist will always try and get the other side of the story. Think what your ‘opposition’ will say and what you can do to counter their arguments?

Meet journalists and find out whether they are interested in your issue(s) and how they would like to receive information (by mail, email or fax?). Note, however, that approaching journalists too regularly can prove detrimental to your work – unless you have a good story think carefully before releasing a press release or other material. Journalists will come to recognise your logos or letterhead and eventually they may not even bother to read any of your material.

The Golden Rules Ensuring factual accuracy

It is vital that you always ensure factual accuracy and can verify any statements you make to the media (or anyone else). Failure to do this can critically undermine all your work, your organisation and even other organisations who are working to achieve the same ends as you.

Always check and double-check your facts.

2.2 Grabbing the headlines

Always take time to review and consider what has been covered in the media in the past – and what is new in your own story. Journalists are always interested in a good story with new information and visuals or a new angle on an issue. Conversely, they will often not be interested in:

- covering very localised issues. Think how can you put a wider context on your issue making it relevant to a national or even international audience?
- new information on an already well-known issue (e.g. if a corruption trial has been covered extensively in May, it is more difficult to make a news story in June simply by releasing more details unless they are new to the case).

Target your approach

Contact the international media if appropriate but make sure that your story has international interest. For example, is a foreign multinational company causing pollution or damaging natural resources or is a product – such as timber, fish or wildlife – being over-exploited for an export market?

Target your information to the appropriate journalists and/or editors - the major international media have correspondents covering environment, health, science, home affairs, business and foreign news. They may also have correspondents in your country who deal with all news coverage regardless of the issue.

Example

The major news wire services such as Reuters, Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and so on have bureaux in many major cities.

For example, in the Asia-Pacific region, Agence France Presse (AFP) has fifteen main bureau, in Bangkok, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, New Delhi, Noumea, Beijing, Seoul, Singapore, Sydney, Tokyo and Taipei and eleven secondary bureaux, in Phnom Penh, Yangon (Rangoon), Colombo, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Mumbai (Bombay), Bangalore, Kabul, Karachi, Shanghai and Wellington.

The major television networks and internationally distributed magazines such as Far Eastern Economic Review will also have national or regional bureaux. It is extremely useful to find your nearest media 'centre' (e.g. Bangkok and Singapore are the base for many correspondents to cover much of the news in Asia) and contact the journalists and editors based there.

2.3 Press releases - why, when and how to use them

A press release is a highly effective means to deliver your story to a wide audience. You need to provide detailed explanation that makes it clear why the story is important to the reader or viewer.

Why is your story newsworthy?

Think about the most important points to convey and the issues that will make your audience take notice and take action.

In particular, write your press release to fit your audience and highlight the international angle if it is the international media that you are approaching with your story. It is possible to write variations of your press release for your different media audiences – but ensure that you don't send 5 different versions to 5 different journalists at the same newspaper or magazine. Talk to them and see who is most interested in receiving your information.

Be clear as to what you are calling for – whether it is a change in government or company policies or enforcement and implementation of existing laws and commitments. Remember to highlight your goals and demands.

Why are you releasing the news now?

Are you publishing a report with new information or hosting an event such as a workshop or meeting? Is there an international or national meeting that your release coincides with?

It is possible to design an event to highlight your issue, for example:

- a 'photocall' with a local or international celebrity
- a public rally in support of your work

TIP Consider whether you can get a spokesperson such as an academic expert, celebrity, politician or community leader to speak at a press conference.

How to write a press release

The following guidelines will help you to write an effective press release:

- A headline that gets to the point - you need to grab the attention of the journalist or editor in ten words or less. It needs to be exciting and dynamic - what is the key point of your message?
- Opening paragraph – this is critical and needs to explain the “5 Ws and 1 H” of the story – the **who, what, where, when, why** and **how**. It must summarise the press release (in effect, your message) with the following paragraphs providing the detail.
- The body text – the remainder of the press release should be written with the most important information and quotes first (if editors need to cut the story they can do so without losing the key information)
- The Closing Paragraph needs to repeat the critical information.
- Always include a contact name, telephone number and email address and make it clear on which organisation/s behalf the press release has been sent.
- Editors notes should include any background information that is not essential to the story but that journalists may require. For example, if you are referring to a number of places, species, people or products, don't try and name them in the main text but include them – if needed – in the editors notes. Some NGOs also include a brief background to their organisation and their web address.
- Remember to mention what visual material you have available – a video news release, film clips or photos as well as any report or briefing that you are producing.
- Keep the press release as short as you can – no more than 2 pages including editors notes (500 words in total).
- Always check the spelling and the facts in your press release.
- Include a date and an embargo time (when the information in the release can be published by the media) if you need to – newspapers will not run stories that have already been covered by their competitors.
- If you email your release, format it so that the title is clear *and* the fact that it is a press release! Do not send attachments – journalists will not usually bother to open them.

The Golden Rules

The Golden Rule of press releases is to **tell your story, tell it again and tell them what they already heard!**

☛ **REMEMBER**
to put your press release and any accompanying materials and visuals on the internet – on your or other organisations' websites.

☛ **FOLLOW-UP**
After you have sent your press release out follow up with a quick call to check they have received it and to see if they need any further information. Don't be surprised if they have not, or if they do not want to talk to you there and then – journalists are busy and have deadlines to meet.

2.4 Photocalls and press conferences

Photocall

- Notify journalists in advance if you are planning to stage a 'photocall' – an event such as a public rally outside a Ministry or a company headquarters – which they may want to film or photograph.
- Think how you can make your event stand out – for example, getting a celebrity or representatives of a local community to lend their support.
- Notify journalists with the time and place for the photocall and provide information on why it is happening or accompany the notice with a detailed press release.

Press conference

This is a sophisticated (and often expensive) means to gather a number of journalists in one place and provide them with your news. Consider whether this is appropriate, for example:

- Would it be better to just issue a press release?
- Do you have an expert, celebrity, politician or other who can speak in support of your work?
- Do you have visual images such as a video news release (VNR)?
- Will you make new materials – such as a report – available?

Press conferences work best when they are succinct (7-10 minutes maximum for each speaker) and very clear as to what the news is. As a guide, the conference presentations should take no more than 30-45 minutes. Always allow time for questions from journalists.

Different speakers should present their own perspectives but without repeating the same information. So for example, if you have a local community leader, a health expert and a researcher from your NGO then get each person to put their views across avoiding unnecessary overlaps and duplication of facts and figures.

Allow time either at the start or finish of the conference for:

- additional questions to be asked of the speakers
- journalists to meet with speakers individually
- television crews who will want to film their own interviews with speakers

To hold a press conference:

- choose a location such as a hotel that journalists can reach easily and that is big enough for your needs
- check that any equipment you need such as a slide projector or television and video player are available
- send out an invitation to journalists or editors in advance, giving them the date and time, location and very brief details of the conference (why you're hosting it, who's speaking, any materials that you will make available)

☛ **Bear in mind that journalists will ask some very difficult questions and they may even ask your 'opposition' what they think in advance so that they get both sides of the story. Be prepared – think of any difficult questions and how to answer them.**

2.5 Video news release

Producing a video news release (VNR) can be one of the most effective and efficient (both in terms of money and time) ways of getting your video and its message to a wide range of television media. However, a VNR is usually most effective as part of a broader media strategy, when it is coupled with a press release and efforts to secure media coverage.

Before deciding to produce a VNR you need to be reasonably confident that you can make your issue interesting to the media you have targeted.

The basic elements in creating a VNR are:

- A short 5-10 minute rough edit, highlighting your best visuals and key elements of your campaign message
- A clear description and shotlist of the material on the video
- A means of highlighting the VNR and distributing it in a timely manner and in the appropriate format(s)
- At least one spokesperson who is fully informed of the issue to give television interviews

Example Saving the shark - protecting the oceans

In 1999 the international conservation organisation WildAid began to develop a global campaign for the conservation of the world's fast declining shark populations. Each year around 100 million sharks are killed in fisheries – many die unnecessarily as they are by-catch (accidentally caught and not used by fishermen).

Sharks are apex predators important to the wider health of marine ecosystems and for many generations sharks have provided an extremely valuable food source for local coastal communities. WildAid decided to highlight these two key roles played by sharks and to look at the wastage of industrial fisheries.

As sharks inhabit international waters and international action would be necessary to begin to combat this problem, WildAid decided to launch its campaign using a VNR and press release from an international media centre – London. The 6-minute VNR achieved coverage in more than 100 countries and was shown on international networks like CNN and BBC World. The VNR and press strategy had effectively taken the first step in the campaign to raise public, political and media interest and concern.

Over 25 beta and 10 VHS copies of the VNR tape were required.

SECTION 3. YOUR MEDIA CHECKLIST

- ✓ Is your story newsworthy?
- ✓ What are the key points you want to make and what are the key facts you will need to let journalists know? Have you thought through the most important and interesting elements of your story? **Think creatively.**
- ✓ Have you got all your facts and the references to support them.
- ✓ Think about the different media you could approach – it is often the case that if one paper or TV program covers a story others will not.
- ✓ Are you making the most of your opportunity?
- ✓ Are you approaching the media at the right time for your campaign – would it be better to wait until you have more information or should you seize an opportunity now?
- ✓ Are you approaching the media using the best available technique – what will work best, a press release, VNR, press conference?
- ✓ Check you approaching the correct person in the way they prefer – are you talking to the journalist who is covering the story. Do you have the correct name, job title/position and spelling? Do they want to receive information by fax, email, post or directly from you?
- ✓ Have you followed up on your initial contact? Just sending a press release does not mean they will run your story – try to call them and talk about your story to get their interest.
- ✓ Finally, always remember to get printed copies of articles or videos of any television items which appear – these are enormously valuable to you and will help you assess how well your strategy is working.