

Generating Regular Media Coverage:

Part 2 – What reporters want (and don't want) from you

Generating news media coverage is a fantastic way to grow the profile of your organisation and publicise the work you do. Not only does it maximise reputation and reach thousands of potential donors, volunteers, and other targets, it's something you can do for yourself for free. The key is knowing the system and persevering. Through this 3-part series media expert Pete Burdon will share his top tips and tricks for generating regular media coverage. Following on from creating your media list, learn more about what reporters want (and don't want).

Once you have your list of media to communicate with, it's time to understand what they want from you. This is important and is often misunderstood by organisations looking to raise their profile. If you can demonstrate that you know what reporters are looking for and give it to them, they will take you seriously as a possible on-going source. But if you don't, you will most likely aggravate them and assign every email you send to their trash bin.

So, what do reporters want?

It sounds simple, but all media want stories that will interest their audience. You may think that's obvious! When I was a newspaper reporter, I was surprised how many story pitches I got on topics that would never interest my readers. This is a complaint I hear from almost every reporter I speak to.

The problem is that we all have our own interests, and we assume that others will be equally as interested in them. For example, if you are starting a new service, that will be huge for you, but may have minimal interest from anyone else. That is unless it has a major news hook that would grab the reader's attention.

A news hook is something that makes your story stand out. It's what will attract the eye of the reporter because they know it's something that will interest their audience. In my experience, there are three major news hooks offering the best opportunity for the not-for-profit sector.

Best opportunities to hook publicity

Topical issues

Commenting on issues already in the news is the best way to get media attention. This is because they are already newsworthy. Do this by relating the topical issue to your issue. It's something that is often overlooked, and it's not difficult.

For example, an international charity could be in the news with their story of struggling to raise funds to get people vaccinated against COVID-19 in Africa. This makes any story about community organisations and COVID-19 funding newsworthy. Opening the opportunity for organisations working in New Zealand to share their story on that topic and raise their profile.

It could be that your organisation supports families, and you are finding fundraising more difficult with COVID restrictions. Or maybe you need more funding to get people in remote areas vaccinated. Any link to the story already in the news about the international charity struggling to raise funds makes your story newsworthy.



Things out of the ordinary

All media love stories that are different. There's an old saying, "Dog bites man is not a story," but "Man bites dog is."

What could you do that's out of the ordinary? This could be a unique fundraising campaign that is newsworthy because no-one has done it before. Or something that you can make happen nationally in a coordinated way. If your activity generates great photographs for the media, even better. You could make an outrageous prediction or attempt a Guinness World Record. The possibilities are endless.



Human interest

These are stories about people that will connect with readers on an emotional level. People who have come through adversity against the odds. People who have achieved their goals. Families who are doing better because they are better supported. The focus is on people and the difference made for them through the work your organisation does. Obviously, you need to ensure you have permission to share from the people who are the subject of the story and you take any steps required to protect privacy. They can be great in helping you raise your profile, show your impact, raise credibility, and attract new donors or volunteers.



Other hooks

There are other news hooks that will help you connect with reporters. The biggest one I haven't mentioned is conflict, it is an angle that can create negative publicity and requires thinking through. Another one is things that are new or a first. This doesn't mean anything new would be of interest, but it could. Milestone stories come into this category. For example, you've helped your 1000th child, your charity is now 50 years old. These are worth considering alongside topical issues, out of the ordinary and human interest hooks. Story ideas that incorporate more than one hook are also a great opportunity.

Guest articles

The news hooks covered above would be the focus of your press release, or what you might pitch reporters in the hope they would produce a story. Another good option is to offer guest articles to print media. This is an opportunity for organisations who have advice to offer. Create an article in Spring sharing tips to avoid sunburn as summer approaches if you work in cancer prevention. Pitch an article with tips for looking after mental health in the depths of winter if you work in mental health. Share an article with tips for keeping your house safe while you are away if you work in crime prevention. These are articles you write yourself and are identified as the author, whereas with news stories, a reporter writes those and features you in them.

Ways to aggravate reporters

You want to avoid doing things that can aggravate reporters, thus limiting likelihood of success.

Not being available for follow-up

If you send an email pitch or press release, ensure you are available if the reporter wants to talk to you. If you have meetings scheduled all day, wait until the next day. When they do ring, it's fine to delay them for 30 minutes or so to prepare yourself, but no longer.

Send the same pitch to another reporter so it appears in competitive media first

This is a great way to destroy a relationship with a reporter. I need to qualify this. If it's something that would be huge and likely interest a huge range of media, you can circulate it everywhere. The same goes for an event you're holding where you want as many people as possible to attend. If your pitch covers none of those, you are best to focus on one media outlet and tailor it specifically to them.

Ask to see the story before publication

In almost every situation, you should never ask to see the story first. This is usually taken as an insult by the reporter or his or her editor. Some media even have a strict policy of not doing this. The main reason people want to see a draft story is to avoid being misquoted if the story involved an interview. The best way to deal with this is to be clear and brief during that interview. You can also tell the reporter you'll be available if they want to check any quotes back with you. Having said all

this, I have heard of rare situations where junior reporters offer you a chance to see the story first. Take up that offer, but don't ask.

Demand coverage

There will be times when the reporter rejects your pitch. This may happen when you're convinced the story would be a winner. There can be many reasons why a reporter, or editor, does this. It's important to accept their decision. If you have formed a good relationship, you can ask why, but make it friendly and brief.

Summing up

In my experience, using these hooks and advice articles create many opportunities for attracting media coverage.

There is another way to find ideas that works very well. Research the media you have on your list to get an idea of the sorts of stories and articles they run. This will provide opportunities to select reporters and media that fit with the stories you want to share, or those who appeal to the audience you are trying to raise your profile with. It will also spark ideas you won't have thought of.

By following these guidelines and persevering, you'll get some great coverage in your target media without it costing a cent. In the next instalment, we'll focus on how to communicate your story and article ideas.



Pete Burdon

As a former daily newspaper reporter and government press secretary, Pete has worked on both sides of the media.

This has given him a good understanding of how to work with the media in a way that benefits both parties. As well as helping clients master the media interview and media publicity process, Pete is regularly in different forms of media himself.

He is also the author of "Media Training for Modern Leaders", published in Melbourne in March 2016 and selling in bookshops across Australia.

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