

# Grow your school's reputation through the media

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Some do it very well, but most school leaders miss the opportunity to get masses of positive media publicity.

In a nutshell, it's about convincing editors and journalists to write and produce good news stories about your school.

This is the best form of school marketing that exists for two reasons. First and foremost, people believe and take far more notice of news stories, rather than advertising. That's because they know the decision to use editorial material falls with editors, not you. This creates the perception that you or your school must be pretty successful if you appear in the news media.

That's not to say there isn't a need for advertising. That's more for creating awareness, whereas publicity is about profile and reputation building.

The other huge bonus with publicity is that it's absolutely free. If you give a journalist a good idea for a story, or an interesting photo opportunity of some school event, you pay nothing. That should be a major attraction for school leaders, as funding is always an issue when it comes to growing profiles and reputations in the local community.

There is a third benefit also. If your school does experience some crisis or adverse event, you will have built up local goodwill from your good news stories. You will also have created a good relationship with local reporters. This could see them go easy on you when they decide how to report the crisis.

## Where do you start?

Now we've established the benefits, we need to look at how to generate this publicity. The first step must be finding the right media to target. Where schools cater for a particular local community, local newspapers are the best place.

They need material for their editorial pages, and schools are always big parts of any community. One mistake many people make when wanting free media publicity is to look at it purely from their perspective.

Any editor or journalist that sees that your attitude is all about you



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and your needs will be turned off. You need to form a relationship and find out how you can help the journalist. Buy him or her a coffee and ask how you could be of assistance. Talk about some of the things your school does, and whether they may be of interest to the readers of the newspaper. Remember, the journalist is only interested in what they would like. He or she is not working for you, but if you can find stories of interest, you'll both win.

## So what are journalists and editors looking for?

In my experience, news stories fall into four distinct categories. The first are those related to topical issues. For example, if your school had its own version of the Rugby World Cup, I'm sure local newspapers would have been interested in covering it. Not only would it have been interesting, but there would have been some great photographs they could have taken.

The next category includes things that are out of the ordinary.

This last example could have fitted this category, but so could numerous other ideas. Why not create your own event with a twist. A bald man who owned a restaurant in the US a few years ago had almost no-one visit on Tuesday nights. So he decided to offer free dining for bald people. This created masses of media attention and soon filled up his restaurant with both bald and non-bald diners.

What could you do?

Anything that is new or a first can be of interest. Are you the first school to achieve some honour, or do you have a pupil or school team that has won a major award? If so, let the local media know about it.

The last category is human interest. This could be the teacher who is leaving after 50 years of service, an international student with an interesting past, or anything about a person or group of people that others would find fascinating.

## How long will this take?

The big question most people ask us at our "How to get free media

publicity for your school" courses is, "How long will this take?"

This is totally up to you. There are different ways of contacting journalists. It could be that you set aside a few minutes at a staff meeting once a month to see what's coming up that could interest media. Then you could just send a quick email to a selected journalist to ascertain interest.

For things that are big, you may want to write a press release. This is like a news story you see in the newspaper, but it's sent to journalists to encourage them to produce a story on the topic covered. These are helpful and can increase your chances of success. But you don't need to write them if time is scarce.

Once you have your good news stories published, don't leave it at that. To make sure everyone sees them, send them out with newsletters, through your social networks, and place them on your school website. [SI](#)

**Pete Burdon** is Founder and Head Trainer at Media Training NZ. The company runs media training and publicity generation courses for school leaders. To find out more or register your interest in a course coming to your area, contact [pete@mediatrainingnz.co.nz](mailto:pete@mediatrainingnz.co.nz) or visit [www.mediatrainingnz.co.nz](http://www.mediatrainingnz.co.nz)