

SEPTEMBER REPORT

AVOID THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE WHEN THEY DEVELOP A MEDIA PLAN

“How do we start a media plan?”

I recently mentored students doing pro bono work for a not for profit organization. That was one of their first questions

**The first reaction for some people is to pick up the phone and start talking.
Or rush to the fax machine clutching a media release**

There is a better way to manage your media matters

Fastest with the Mostest

Whether you are in a large organization, small business or belong to a community group, the chances are high that a positive media profile is on your “wish list”.

Why? Because despite billions of words on millions of web pages, the media remains the fastest way to reach most people.

Here are some pointers on avoiding the most common mistakes people make when they develop a media plan.

Who Do I Want to Talk To?

Some people get fixated on the media, for the sake of the media.

Don't lose sight of the fact the media are valuable only because they can help you reach the people you must talk to. The media is not an end in itself.

A successful media plan starts at the ground floor by precisely defining the people you want to reach (the audience). Ask yourself who they are, where they are, what they do, and what they think about your issue.

If you can't answer these questions, you're not yet ready to talk to a reporter.

Once you know your audience, it's a straight forward step to determine what radio, television, newspaper and on-line outlets are best to reach them and who to approach.

Tip When talking about audiences, avoid the term “general public”. That literally means trying to reach everyone, everywhere.

You probably lack the time, money and, certainly the energy, to engage everyone, everywhere. There are very few companies or agencies that must cover everyone.

Choose Your Channel

There are almost 3000 media outlets in Australia to choose from - community radio stations, powerful national papers, countless hours of TV programming each week, specialist magazines, etc.

They know their readers, viewers and listeners and what appeals to them.

If you want to maximize the chances of a media outlet carrying your story, stay within their “zone of appeal”. Give them something that will resonate with their customers.

By all means go for the newspapers and broadcast stations at the top end of town, but don’t forget the thousands of other opportunities available to you.

Tip The websites of most media outlets have details of the demographics of the people they reach.

For example, <http://newsmedianet.com.au/home/> shows details of the type of people that read News Limited papers.

Key Messages

Key messages are the critical pieces of information you want your audiences to know.

Keep them simple, clear and unequivocal. The more complicated they are, the more opportunities there are for them to get distorted, as they pass through numerous editors, sub editors, journalists, producers and program directors before reaching your audience.

Tip Work with only 3 – 5 core messages at any one time. Express them in the active voice and keep them to 25 words or less. Your goal is to have your key messages become “lead messages”: the ones the media actually reports.

Back up your key messages with facts, figures, case studies, testimonials, recently released reports, international comparisons or whatever necessary to bring your issue alive.

In the Media Cupboard

Your “media cupboard” has a variety of tools, each designed for a certain job:

- One page media releases succinctly summarize your issue and simply must grab attention within the first paragraph.
- Media alerts warn reporters of events, the impending release of reports etc.
- Media kits carry the most detailed information.
- Interviews put the people in your policies.
- A *story bank* brings together all facts and figures, quotable quotes, testimonials and case studies you need before you approach the media.

Tips A media kit allows you to provide the most detailed information to journalists. Use backgrounders, media releases, biographies, reports, photos and copies of speeches to present a convincing story.

It is a simple matter to convert a hard copy kit into an on-line resource.

See www.mainstreet.com.au/articles_media.asp for ideas on building a story bank.

Pitching is not Just for Baseball Players

You have written the perfect release and just faxed it out. Time to sit back waiting for the phones to ring! Wrong!

Major media receive thousands of releases each day. Even small newspapers and community radio stations are swamped with faxes or emails. That means you should hit the phones and talk to reporters who cover your type of issue.

When you call a reporter, ask if it is a convenient time to talk. If it is, present a condensed version of your story in 45-60 seconds. Put the key points upfront and indicate why it would interest their readers. Look for linkage and try to tie in with something the reporter may have previously covered.

If it is not convenient, ask for the best time to ring back. Then make sure you phone again.

Tips Don't annoy people in a busy newsroom by asking "did you get my media release?"

When you ring be prepared to offer additional information that you think is of interest (apart from what's in your release).

Deadlines dominate in a newsroom, so keep conversations short, sharp and to the point.

Look for that Perfect Picture

Whenever you can, offer an image opportunity to the media. Always look for the picture that sums up what you are trying to say. Why? Because a good picture can often carry an average story.

At your events, go out of your way to think about the needs of photographers and TV crews. Ask the editors of smaller papers, newsletters or niche magazines if they are interested in receiving your photos.

Tips When they arrive at an event, brief newspaper photographers and TV crews on what is going to happen, when and where - before it happens. That gives them time to prepare and set up for a shot.

Make it easy for camera people by offering to gather together interesting people, VIPs, performers etc together before or after the formal proceedings.

Media Analysis

Don't be like a blindfolded person shooting at a target in the dark. Use a disciplined process to track the media coverage you get.

Know where and what is being said, written or broadcast about your issue. How can you improve if you don't know where you succeeded, but more importantly where you need to do things differently next time?

Tip See www.mainestreet.com.au/docs/SpecialMedia.pdf for ideas on setting up a media analysis program.

Take the First Step

Next time, before you pick up the phone to call a journalist or head for the fax machine with a media release, make sure you can tick off each item on this checklist:

- I know the people I want to reach.
- I know the radio and TV programs and newspapers that will help me reach them.
- My key messages are clear, simple and relevant.
- I can support them with facts, figures, case studies, testimonials, etc.
- I have well written media releases and media alerts.
- My media kit has the detail to make a convincing case.
- I have a timetable to contact relevant reporters.
- I can support my issue with images.
- I can track and analyse media coverage so I can improve in future.



Maine Street Marketing
www.mainestreet.com.au
info@mainestreet.com.au
0401 063 837

About Maine Street Marketing

Maine Street Marketing specializes in media strategies, from fully geared national campaign plans to simpler strategies for one-off events.

For a free consultation about your media needs, call 0401 063 387 or email bob.crawshaw@mainestreet.com.au