



Marketing Support

Publicity Guideline

A 5-step plan for increasing media coverage of your library



1. Select the right media

A trap many publicists fall into is targeting the most high profile and glamorous media, regardless of its impact in the library's patron base. Make sure you focus your efforts on the media that will most effectively help you reach your goal.

Think of it this way: Who do you want to walk through the doors of the library as a result of your publicity efforts? Once you define your target, find out which media specialize in reaching that person. Maybe it's not the local newspaper, maybe you should be wooing the high school newspaper.



2. Know your media

Once you've identified your target media, get to know them. If it's a newspaper, read it regularly. Learn who covers your beat by calling the assignment desk. Then learn as much as you can about that reporter. Your goal should be to discover the way that person approaches a story. What captures his or her interest?



3. Package your news appropriately

If you've studied your target media thoroughly, you'll know which elements of your story to highlight — open your press release with them. The old newspaper adage couldn't be more true: "don't bury the lead!"

Here's an example. If you're promoting your library's summer reading program, you may instinctively want to open your press release with:

The Libraryville Public Library launches its annual summer reading program on June 27, 2000, with a festival that includes mimes, jugglers and clowns.

That release is fine if you're targeting media who regularly cover library events — it's a tickler that reminds them of something they like to cover. However, if you're trying to target media who don't think library events are newsworthy, you've opened your press release with a guaranteed "coverage killer." Don't count on reporters to read your entire release. Most reporters read a few words of the first sentence then either pitch it or investigate the story.

What if you opened your press release this way instead:

More children sign up for summer reading programs than little league. That's according to the American Library Association, and in Libraryville, we're no exception. In fact, if you stacked every book expected to be read in this year's Libraryville Public Library Reading program, the pile would easily reach the steeple on the First United Methodist Church. "We're a community of readers," says library director Beth Dempsey...



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The second version is a little more compelling, right? It tells the newspaper report something about America and something about your community. When you've packaged your story this way, the Summer Reading Program is just a piece of a bigger story. With this release, you might include some summer reading suggestions for a variety of ages and interests (called "Tip Sheets").

Consider what you've created for the reporter: a story about the town, a program that supports the town's interests at the library and helpful hints. That's a nice package that the reporter wraps his or her words around.



4. Follow up by phone

Reporters get loads of mail, phone calls and fax transmittals every day. If you've mailed a press release, be sure you get it out of the in-box and into his or her hands with a reminder phone call. Beware: don't ask if the reporter received your press release! Reporters receive dozens of calls a day from publicists and are quick to get them off the phone. Be prepared to pitch your story again, leading with the elements that will most entice the reporter. Then, direct him or her to your press release, waiting on his or her desk — or, offer to furnish another copy for their convenience.



5. Establish an ongoing relationship

If you followed steps 1 - 4, you may have landed a nice piece of publicity. Keep in touch with the reporter with a thank you call. Reporters are like anyone else — they appreciate knowing their work was noticed and appreciated. Be sure to keep in touch regularly, too. A quick note to say you like a particular story goes a long way to getting your phone calls returned in the future.