

Marketing – What is News?

Something new

Seems obvious enough – but remember that jaded journalists may have seen it all before. Everything that lands on their desks has to pass the ‘So What?’ test. What is it about your project that makes it stand out from the rest?

Human interest

Try to offer a personal angle – eg if you are bringing IT to a marginalised section of the population, emphasise how it has changed someone’s life – the Second World War veteran who used the internet to contact his colleagues; the housewife who has gained new skills and started her own business.

Using case studies often helps to bring a story to life – and these can be anonymous if the story is of a sensitive nature. You should supply the reporters with contact details for the people concerned, so make sure that they are willing to participate and are fully briefed.

Local interest

Local papers are interested only in local news. Emphasise what you are doing to make a difference to people on their patch. If you are providing football coaching for young people from throughout West Yorkshire, tell the *Keighley News* about courses you are putting on in its area. Once you have attracted the news editor’s attention, a press release could go on to tell him about the work you are doing further afield.

Look for excuses to interest other local media eg one of your volunteers may come from another town. If your project covers a wide region, it may be worthwhile making slight alterations to a press release for each area covered. Similarly, you could vary it depending on your target media eg your campaign to make sure children eat a more nutritious diet would be handled differently by magazines aimed at mothers and health professionals.

Good news/ success

Contrary to popular belief, local newspapers often contain more good news than bad. This can also be a good way of raising morale or giving your volunteers a public pat on the back.

What’s in it for me?

This principle is usually abbreviated to WIIFM? Tell people what you are offering them – whether it’s a cheap/free service, a volunteering opportunity, facilities that have previously been denied them or a chance to change their lives for the better.

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Anniversaries

The first year of your project, your 100th client etc. You can engineer this to make a better story eg put on a celebration event to mark a special occasion, choose a 50th happy customer who really is happy, enthusiastic, can string more than two words together for an interviewer, and won't run a mile when he sees a camera. Brief him carefully so that he knows how the interview can help you.

Calendar

Tie in press releases with key dates eg National Refugee Week, Black History Month, International Women's Day.

Celebrity

Can guarantee coverage and usually a photo but there's a risk that they may take over the story eg the launch of your project to help recovering addicts becomes 'East Ender star's cocaine hell', with hardly a mention of your work. Booking celebrities is not easy and they can have hundreds of other requests for their support, so it's best to concentrate your efforts on those that live in your community or have a personal interest in your cause. You could also look in the events sections of regional media to find out who is visiting the area. Make sure celebrities are well briefed, accompany them and remember to thank them for their time afterwards!

Local angle to national story

Keep an eye open for what's happening in the national news eg. projects centred on health and fitness could tap in to current concerns about obesity or school dinners.

Controversy

Useful if you are campaigning an issue – see also local angle to national story and letters to the editor.

Letters to the editor

Particularly useful if you are campaigning an issue or want to position yourself as an expert on a particular subject, who may be called on for comment in future. It's usually best to keep letters short and sweet – some papers ask for 200 words max – but take your cue from studying the publication in question. Remember that if you write more, it may be edited down and not stress the points you wish. Most letters pick up on current news events or anniversaries or something that has appeared in a recent issue. Remember to add your contact details but don't overdo this approach. Newspapers don't exist to provide a regular platform for everyone with an opinion to air.

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Follow-up story

You can plan your media campaign, so that it automatically generates a number of follow-up stories.

Disaster

Remember disaster is inversely proportional to distance. A flood that kills thousands of people in Bangladesh is a catastrophe for a national broadsheet. The rain that reduces takings at your outdoor fundraising event is a disaster for your local paper – and a chance to remind readers of the valuable work you are doing and the resources needed for you to continue.

Appeals for help

Local media are usually only too happy to oblige as part of their service to the public.

The unexpected

Dog bites man isn't news...but man bites dog certainly is. Very trivial stories can make national news just because they're quirky. A good example of this is the 'woman in a man's world' type of article. Or they could be used to lighten the mood in a programme filled with doom and gloom – think about the 'and finally...' section on News at Ten.

Surveys/research

Send your survey/research paper with a press release providing a news angle eg highlighting some shocking statistics or a related case study that gives some human interest value.

Regular features

Make the most of opportunities presented by columns like 'A Day In The Life Of...' or 'Down Your Way...'

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Events/launches

Usually you will want to publicise your event in advance in order to encourage a good turnout. To ensure greater media coverage, you can add a paragraph in bold type at the bottom of a press release along the lines of:

You are invited to send a reporter and/or photographer to meet his Highness, the Prince of Wales at the official opening of Posh Ponies Community Polo Pitches at Bowling Park, Bradford, at 5.15am on April 1st 2007.

If you need advance publicity, but you really want the media to turn up on the day, you could try placing an embargo on the press release eg write at the top left-hand corner embargoed until 0.700 hours, April 1st 2007.

Don't make your event too long – the media are unlikely to be able to spend more than one hour – and make sure that it does not clash with anything else.

(This information was prepared by Lynn Leadbeatter from bfunded, based at Keighley Voluntary Services, and is reproduced with permission.)