



# 10.0 Marketing and Communications

## Working with the Media

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### Introduction

Fundraising, public support, and reputation are all affected by media coverage. What can you do to help in a world where press coverage can make or break your organisation?

The first step is to always consider your organisation's SMART marketing objectives – all communications activity should feed back into these objectives.

Your organisation's key messaging should have been developed during the development of the marketing strategy and all subsequent communications should be coherent with this key messaging.



Image: Press Conference

It is important, however, to tailor all messaging to your different audiences, remembering that one set of messages will not be the right fit for all.

This is easier when you are being proactive – planning your media strategy for upcoming initiatives.

It may be more difficult when you are being reactive – responding to a crisis.

It is incredibly important to focus on media relations. Make it your business to know and build relationships with your national, local and hyperlocal media, learning about their different audiences. Compare their audiences with yours and this will help you to strategically target certain segments with specific messages, or to respond to the different media in the right tone of voice during a crisis.

### **Keep your Eye on the Big Picture**

Ensure that systems are already in place for dealing with the media. Is there someone responsible for liaising with the press? What is their brief? How are they trained to deal with media enquiries?

#### **Communicating your organisation's ethos and initiatives:**

- What is going on in the wider community or further afield? Is there anything relevant happening that your organisation can maximise upon to help to amplify your own message?
- Keep tabs on coverage of voluntary organisations in the media. What gets covered and how?
- Keep in touch with opinion makers in the community. Find out how the organisation appears in their eyes
- Develop a clear idea of how you would like your organisation to appear in the public eye. What activities would you particularly like the public to associate with you?

### Crisis management:

- Liaise with other organisations to find out how they handle media attention
- What mistakes do organisations make, and how might these be avoided? Bring in news clippings to meetings, watch taped coverage and discuss
- Identify potential problem areas: journalists are always on the lookout for scandal: Could your organisation's activities be seen as biased?
- Highlight known trouble spots and areas of worry and discuss
- Create worst-case scenarios: What is the most negative way the media could present your organisation or its activities? Talk through the ramifications and possible avoidance tactics

### Spokespeople:

- Make media training a part of the committee induction – committee members will often be the best spokespeople because of their overall strategic vision of the organisation. They may need specific training around your organisation's brand and marketing strategy, to ensure that key messaging comes across when they are interviewed
- It is important to attempt to provide Welsh speaking spokespeople for the Welsh media, or else they will not cover your story. In crisis situations, talking in the language of your audience will be an obvious approach in terms of maintaining the relationship

### Drafting a Media Policy

In its role as policy-maker for the organisation, the committee can help clarify media relations by working with staff and management to create an organisational media policy. This should be a statement of the organisation's stance toward the media rather than a detailed plan addressing every contingency (Such a plan should be left to your press officer or designated member of staff). The organisation's policy should spell out roughly how media enquiries will be handled, specifying who should speak to the media.

It should also provide systems for deciding the organisation's position on any given issue, and for disseminating this information organisation-wide. It is key that the organisation appears to speak with one voice on issues and that staff, trustees, volunteers - everyone - know how to respond when approached by the press, if only to refer journalists to the right person to answer their questions.

## When does the Organisation Speak to the Media?

Normally, the Chief Executive, designated member of staff or senior volunteer will act as spokesperson to the media. However, in some situations the Chair or some other committee member may be called upon to represent the organisation.

In times of crisis, such as the unexpected departure of the Chief Executive or when the organisation is facing negative issues, a committee spokesperson can present an image of stability and continuity. This is an opportunity to focus media attention on the overall mission and long-term goals of the organisation, rather than on the current problems.

Who speaks to the media will ultimately depend upon the circumstances.

- If your organisation is proactively seeking publicity for a current initiative, you will have planned for the most knowledgeable committee member or alternative spokesperson in advance
- In circumstances of crisis, when you are in a more reactive role, your media policy should make it clear that before the media is spoken to, a decision is made internally about who is best placed in the circumstances, to deal with the situation

## How to Create a Media Strategy

With its unique vision of the organisation, the committee can bring an important voice to discussions about pro-active media strategy or public relations programmes.

A pro-active strategy is designed to make the media work for the organisation by using it to raise the organisation's profile and keep the public eye on the positive work it does.

Such a strategy would normally be planned by management and implemented by staff, but the committee can help by contributing its broad awareness of the issues.

Such a strategy should include:

- Press releases about achievements. These must be well written and ready for the press to use. Look for opportunities to tie organisational activities to issues in the news
  - Providing images, videos and background information up front will save a journalist time and may mean that you are more successful in gaining coverage
- Inviting the media to report on special events and functions
- Integrated public relations campaigns for special events, organisational milestones - such as inaugurating a new building or hitting a high membership mark - and fundraising drives
- Speeches by key members of staff or committee members, when required
- Crisis communications planning – a clear strategy underlining how your organisation will react to unwanted media attention (including who will deal with enquiries), with a clear intention to attempt to direct the media away from the crisis and towards your organisation’s long term goals, including your achievements to date

## Effective Press Releases

### Some Basic Rules

Good press releases are simple – avoid complexity.

Good work can be boring – you have no absolute right to media coverage.

If you can't say your main points on one page of A4 then it isn't worth saying!



Image: Press release in newspaper

## General Format and Style

Use your letterhead, mark it clearly with 'Media Release' at the top. Next line put the date and words 'for immediate use' if you want it to go into print as soon as possible. If you want it to be published on a specific date in the future put 'embargo until (date)'.



### Important Note

The embargo is a gentleman's agreement only – it has no legal standing.

- Keep your main points down to one side maximum – anything else is additional information and can be included as 'notes to editors'
- Offset your text at least one inch to the right (journalists like to make notes on press releases)
- Contact details should be on each sheet of additional paper as sheets can get separated

The style throughout must be concise, catchy and as intriguing as possible. Imagine you know nothing about your organisation: does this story stand out; is it really of interest to readers/ viewers? In short, is it tempting to an editor deluged with press releases daily?

## Structure

### Headline

A catchy, short title giving a sense of the story in a few words. Let the journalist write the actual headline for the newspaper and avoid being 'clever'.

- Heading
- Date
- For immediate use / embargo details

### Paragraph one

It is absolutely vital that it is short, to the point and newsworthy. Ensure you have covered the five W's: Who, What, Where, When and Why (in any order). This paragraph must be able to stand on its own with the most important in it. Keep all sentences short – max 25 words.

### Paragraph two

Provide the next piece of information: either more details about the above, or new information.

### Paragraph three/four

Only if necessary, e.g. **you have more new information**. This paragraph is often a quote from someone involved (**who is willing to talk to the press if requested**). The quote must add a new dimension, such as the personal side of a story.

Alternatively, it could be a quote from your spokesperson explaining the importance of the story in strong, authoritative language. It is also often an opportunity to get your key messaging across in the right tone of voice.

### Contact details

Name, title and contact number should be included in clear, bold print at the bottom of the document.

### Notes for editors

This is where you can fill in the background. Describe what your charity does in a couple of sentences giving the basic statistics of the issue or your organisation.

If distributing your release via e-mail do not put the words '**press release**' in the subject box or as a title. Imagine seeing your email inbox full of messages called '**press release**!' The first sentence has to say who is doing what and when – journalists make a decision on what they can see in their inbox, **i.e. the very first sentence only**.

### Bring the story to life – do the legwork

Journalists are very busy people whose inboxes are often bombarded. Presuming you've caught their attention, consider what else they will require to be able to publish your story. Don't give them extra work, do the background work for them – provide relevant images or footage, labelled correctly.

If you know the media in question provides hard facts, backed up with comprehensive stats to their readers, provide the relevant data for their readers. Perhaps they often publish human interest stories, in which case, provide interviews and/or images of people. In other words, know your media and their readership and give them what they want.

## Language

### Write in Plain English

Jargon; long sentences and complicated words get in the way of a message:

- Decide what you want to say – write down bullet points before you attempt to write a press release and have your background information at hand
- Write as if you're speaking to someone next to you. Most people don't use long words or sentences when they speak- so why use them when you write to the press?
- Use phrases people use everyday but avoid clichés. If it doesn't sound right when you say it out loud, change it
- Keep sentences short and simple. Avoid adjectives
- Be positive. 'it was a minor problem', not 'we don't think this was a major problem'
- Be specific. Resources/facilities? Need money for a new building - say so
- Have someone check your material – it's hard to proofread your own work



## Some needless words

Here are just a few examples of simple words that should be used in press releases instead of the alternatives.

Accordingly	so
Ascertain	find out
Commence	start
Concur	agree
Discontinue/terminate	end/stop
Numerous	many
Erroneous	wrong
Facilitate	help
Initiate	start/begin
Owing to the fact that	because
Unaware of the fact	didn't know
Utilise	use
Persons	people
Obtain/receive	get
Endeavour/attempt	try
In lieu of	instead
In the event of	if
In close proximity	near

## Welsh Language Standards

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 makes Welsh an official language in Wales. This means it must be treated no less favourably than English.

While not all activity has to be translated in its exact context, an equal balance should be aimed for in terms of both English and Welsh speaking audiences being exposed to activity.

## Further Information

### Resource Hub

#### Media Trust

<https://mediatrust.org/communications-support/resource-hub/>

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### Getting Started with the Media

#### NCVO

<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/campaigns/communications/how-the-media-works>



Cefnogi Trydydd  
Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector  
Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact  
<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

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## Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.