

MAKING IT WITH THE MEDIA

- A GUIDE TO BUILDING A POSITIVE MEDIA PROFILE FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

This guide has been prepared by the Department of Conservation and includes practical advice on all aspects of your media and publicity work. Look through it carefully.

*This is a user-friendly guide to help you in your dealings with the media.
Keep it handy - by the phone or somewhere central in the office.
Use it when you're asked those tricky questions about issues you wish would go away.
Use it to promote your organisation, and build a positive image for it.*

WHY BOTHER WITH THE MEDIA?

When you're busy the media seems like a big hassle in the midst of everything else you have to do. However, there are key reasons why it should be one of your top priorities.

1. It's important to keep a high profile so the public can see what you do. Your organisation plays an important part in the New Zealand conservation scene.
2. A high profile is essential for you to keep your issues before the public.
3. A high profile will ensure you have a healthy future.

WHAT IS THE MEDIA?

"The Media" is a mixed bag. It can be anything from your local suburban newspaper or talkback radio to National Radio Sports or TV's 6 o'clock news and the Holmes show. In between are metropolitan newspapers like the Christchurch Press and the NZ Herald, provincial newspapers like The Waikato Times or the Marlborough Express and country wide radio networks like Radio Pacific and Newstalk ZB. In the four main cities, some regional television is available. There are also a wide range of magazines and interview-based TV and radio shows and an increasing number of opportunities are now available on the web.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MEDIA

- ∑ Take the time to get to know journalists in all your local media.
- ∑ Find out how they work what they're interested in and what their deadlines are.
- ∑ Respond professionally and quickly to their inquiries.
- ∑ If you can't help them, suggest someone else who can.
- ∑ Avoid a 'no comment' response. If you can't respond, try to give them a reason.
- ∑ Treat all media with equal respect and develop honest one-on-one relationships with your contacts. You have a right to expect the same respect, honesty and professionalism from the journalists themselves. Don't be taken in by self-important attitudes or be bullied into revealing information.

- ∑ Don't assume that because a newspaper or radio station is local it is of less importance than its national counterparts. National newsrooms often pick up stories in local papers. Local media will be the mainstay of what you do.
- ∑ Work with others in your organisation who have dealt with the media before.
- ∑ If you are shy or embarrassed about promoting yourself - find a colleague who will do it for you?

WHAT IS THE MEDIA INTERESTED IN?

The media is looking for stories to tell a curious public something **new**.

If it's **news** it's just happened, it's about to happen, or was only recently discovered.

News must interest, entertain and engage its audience.

News can be about -

- ∑ **People** - The media are genuinely interested in local identities or celebrities. They also want to know about the extraordinary things that ordinary people do.
- ∑ Things affecting **the heart** .
- ∑ Things affecting **the pocket**..
- ∑ **The unusual** - Unusual people, unusual actions, unusual events
- ∑ **Research, reports and statistics**.
- ∑ **Opinion**
- ∑ **Politics**
- ∑ **Conflict**
- ∑ **Change**

WHAT THE MEDIA WANTS FROM YOU

When journalists call they want **information**. They regard you as an expert and want you to say something they can print or broadcast.

They may be calling you because:

- ∑ You have just been given more Government funding.
- ∑ You're the spokesperson for the organisation.

- ∑ They want a local angle on a wider story.
- ∑ You have an opinion.
- ∑ Your personal experience is valued as being either unusual or usual in the story they are doing.
- ∑ They want to background an issue and are willing to talk with you off the record, a good idea if you know you can trust them to keep their word. **We recommend you avoid this practice unless you can be absolutely certain this is the case.**

Remember

- ∑ “**News**” may not seem like news to you, but it will be to the public. You are an expert in your organisation. You will nearly always know a great deal more about the issue than the Media does.
- ∑ The journalist’s job is to get a variety of opinions and sources of information to obtain a balanced story. Don’t expect to read or hear a perfect precis of your point of view. They will be looking for the other side of the story as well as yours. You can feel good if it’s accurate and balanced account.

DEALING WITH INTERVIEWS AND INQUIRIES
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Should you do the interview?

- ∑ Is it in your interest/do you need it?
- ∑ How will it come across if you don't do it?
- ∑ Do you have the time?
- ∑ Do you have the authority?

Many interviews are requested at short notice and under time pressure. **We suggest you always buy time prior to an interview.** Famous US athlete Magic Johnson calls this “PMT” - “Pre media time”. In essence, you buy enough time to focus and work out what you want to say. Follow the guidelines below:

- ∑ Decide what you want to say and what you don't want to say.
- ∑ Develop a priority list with the most important points first.
- ∑ If possible, talk your interview through with another member of your team.
- ∑ Check facts.
- ∑ Be prepared to make your point whether you're asked or not.

Remember

Be direct. Be honest. Stick to the subject.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

The telephone is a journalist's third arm - increasingly reporters are doing a majority of their work on the phone. They'll want to interview you immediately over the phone **or** organise a later interview either by phone or face-to-face.

When they call find out:

- ∑ Who's calling?
- ∑ Who they work for.
- ∑ What they want - an interview or background information?
- ∑ Their deadline.
- ∑ How long the interview is to be.
- ∑ Who else they are talking to.

If you agree to an interview on the phone consider the following:

- ∑ Clear time and space for the interview – let others at home or work know you are doing it.
- ∑ Eliminate all the distractions you have control of – the dog, the parrot, kids, lawn-mowing etc.
- ∑ Be clear about the time of the interview and be available early.
- ∑ Get phone numbers for the interviewer and producer in case you are lost, late or sick.
- ∑ Turn off your cell phone and suspend call waiting if you have it.
- ∑ Avoid interviews on cell or cordless phones where possible.
- ∑ Place the receiver of the phone in relation to your chin – not your mouth when you are talking.
- ∑ Stand and do the interview but don't walk around the room.
- ∑ Have a few notes on one piece of paper – otherwise avoid shuffling papers or clicking a pen.

RADIO INTERVIEWS

If you are doing your radio interview in the studio you may be asked to take part in the following programmes:

- ∑ News bulletins.
- ∑ Current affairs programmes like Morning Report or Checkpoint
- ∑ Personality based interview shows like the Kim Hill Show. They prefer people in the studio but will talk by telephone.
- ∑ Talkback shows either by phone or as a guest in the studio talking with the host and taking caller's questions.
- ∑ Documentaries and special interest programmes like Insight

TIPS FOR RADIO INTERVIEWS

- ∑ Radio is an intimate medium. Forget about the mass audience. Talk with just one person in mind, the person you want to explain something to or convince.
- ∑ Be clear about what you want to say.
- ∑ Say it with feeling, passion and commitment.
- ∑ Use simple, clear and personal language.
- ∑ Avoid jargon.
- ∑ Don't constantly refer to the interviewer by name. It sounds obsequious.
- ∑ Don't refer back to something you've already said. - It may be edited out.
- ∑ If you make a mistake say so. If you're broadcasting live the audience will appreciate a frank and human mistake. If the interview is pre-recorded it can be recorded again. A good journalist values accuracy as much as you do and will be happy to oblige.
- ∑ Expect your interview to be edited and re-run on later bulletins or programmes.

TIPS FOR TELEVISION INTERVIEWS

On television the same points apply but you also have to think about your appearance

- ∑ Avoid distracting jewelry
- ∑ Wear plain clothes. Avoid busy patterns like dots or stripes.
- ∑ Avoid white, black or bright red - flattering colours are autumn or spring shades e.g. coral, turquoise, green, blue or light pink.
- ∑ Be aware of your posture. Don't slouch or sit rigidly.
- ∑ Use your hands but avoid excessive and distracting movement and avoid knocking the microphone if it is attached to your clothes.
- ∑ Make sure you're in a comfortable chair or position.
- ∑ Tell yourself you're smart and look great. Take a few deep breaths and go for it.
- ∑ Look at the reporter and try to avoid being distracted by the TV crew.
- ∑ Avoid taking sheaths of papers or pens you can click into the interview.
- ∑ Wait for the interviewer or director to indicate the interview has started and finished.

NEWS BULLETINS

If the interview is for a news bulletin it will almost certainly be done over the telephone. The journalist will take notes and record all or part of your conversation. Ask them to tell you when they are recording. In the piece that goes to air they will explain the story in their own words then play only 10 or 15 seconds of your voice. They decide which part of the interview they'll play but you can control what they have to choose from.

- ∑ Practice saying your message in 10 second, 15 second and 30 second blocks. It sounds impossible - until you try.
- ∑ Focus only on the most important points.
- ∑ Use simple, everyday language.
- ∑ Talk about feelings where appropriate.
- ∑ Illustrate your point with practical or colourful examples or visual references where appropriate.
- ∑ If you can, finish with a clear, memorable message:

DEADLINES

One of the most useful things you can do for the media is to give them plenty of notice of upcoming events.

They are far more interested in following a story from the beginning and often feel foolish if they come in halfway through the event – usually shows they have been pipped at the post by the opposition.

All journalists work to deadlines. They are under pressure to get the story to air or to press by a specific time. **Ask them what their deadlines are.** If you can't respond to their questions in time let them know. They'll appreciate your professionalism.

Deadline Rules:

- ∑ Morning newspapers generally have journalists working from 9am to 11pm. They get very busy in the middle of the afternoon, after the opposition afternoon daily has come out. The best time to contact morning papers is between 9am and 2pm.
- ∑ Evening papers - the previous afternoon or by 7.30am on the day of publication.
- ∑ Suburban newspapers are all different. Make a point of finding the deadlines in your area.
- ∑ Radio news bulletins are hourly. Radio always wants to get the news to air fast.
- ∑ Current affairs radio – e.g. Checkpoint - 4.30pm. Morning Report - midnight the previous night. Midday Report 11.30am. These are guides only. If the story is important enough broadcasters will want you to go on air when it suits their programming and that can mean immediately. Only do this if you feel prepared.
- ∑ TV deadlines - e.g. 6pm news - 4pm (if it's an absolutely amazing tale, but generally before 9am on the day in question). This is also a rough guide. TV journalists may be able to incorporate telephoned information into their story minutes before it goes to air.

BE PRO-ACTIVE

- ∑ Don't wait for the media to call. If you've got a good story, an up-coming event or information that should be made public, contact the media by phone or, fax or email them with a media release.
- ∑ Develop friendly professional relationships with your local reporters. Take time to meet them, invite them to your office. Their job is all about developing contacts like you. **Personal contact is still one of the most powerful tools you have at your disposal.**
- ∑ If you don't know who your local reporters are, ring and ask the editor. On small papers and radio stations there is usually only one reporter covering everything. You can save them work if you're a reliable contact, with a good nose for news and some writing ability.
- ∑ Note the names of journalists you like. Talk to people in other organisations who seem to have a high profile in the media. Find out who they work with and how they get their stories broadcast or printed.
- ∑ Invite the media to your important functions. Be prepared to explain how your organisation works enlist them in your cause.
- ∑ Provide them with background material on your issues. Up to date fact sheets are always useful
- ∑ Think about issues you could comment on - but make sure you do this promptly, while they're still hot.
- ∑ Make an effort to have your say on talk-back programmes.
- ∑ Keep a clipping book with all your media publicity in it so you have reference to what has gone before.

NEWS RELEASES

What are they?

A news/press release is a piece of information/announcement from an organisation or individual. It is sent out to the media either to break news or to respond to news already broken.

What does a good one look like?

- ∑ A good news release should deal with one idea or announcement.
- ∑ It should be clear, accurate, punchy, and brief.
- ∑ Above all it should actually say something.
- ∑ It should be typed and only use one side of the page.
- ∑ Your main point should be at the top of the release, not buried in the middle or the bottom.
- ∑ At the bottom of the release you should provide the journalist with the name and contact numbers (day and night) of the person/s you have designated to answer questions for you. **This is really important!** We need contact numbers for where you will be when the journalist receives the news release.

All or any of the following are useful:

1. A mobile telephone number.
2. Your home number
3. Your DDI
4. Your email @ home & work

All good intentions and hard work go down the drain if the journalist can't follow up on the new release.

Things to watch out for:

- ∑ Releases which are too long, unclear or inaccurate.
- ∑ A lack of clear purpose or motivation in the release.
- ∑ Blatant attempts to get free advertising.
- ∑ Spelling mistakes & inaccurate information, double-check everything!
- ∑ Make sure your news release is not an isolated entity. Ideally it should come with you. You should ring up your media contact and tell them you are sending it - you should then follow by checking it has been received and volunteering further help.

Background material:

Sometimes releases are accompanied by background material which gives the reporter a history and context for the story. When releases are written try to be clear what is news and what is background material.

TIPS FOR STARTING NEWS RELEASES

- ∑ Vary your writing style to match the issue you're talking about.
- ∑ Don't try and crowd the "5 W's and h" (who, what, where, when, why and how) into the first paragraph, but make sure all this information is in the release.
- ∑ Try for an opening sentence, which quickly captures the essence of the story. "What" intos are generally the best.
- ∑ Use simple words.
- ∑ Use short paragraphs, no more than 23-25 words for the first paragraph.
- ∑ Try to use active verbs and strong nouns. (There was a man who was wearing a green jersey who was furiously trying to eat his meal. Revised to: A man in a green jersey devoured his meal.)
- ∑ Start with what happened - the key issue or complaint.

- ∑ Deal with the most important thing you want to say first. Think through the details of a complicated event and decide just what is important. The princess must kiss the frog at the beginning of the story.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE MEDIA GETS IT WRONG

So they've printed or broadcast something you didn't say. If you are sure of your facts, complain.

- ∑ Get back to the reporter first. Listen to their reasons for the original story and ask them to check their notes of the interview with you. They might offer you an apology - but these are often buried in the newspaper, so one strategy can be to complain and then suggest they do a positive story sometime in the immediate future. This can be about something else you would like publicity on.
- ∑ Only ask for an apology if the journalist is clearly and demonstrably wrong and the story actively damages you or your organisation.
- ∑ If you're not satisfied with the journalist's response, go to chief reporter or the editor if necessary.
- ∑ If you are continually having trouble with a news organisation consider asking someone at the top of your organisation to go and discuss the issue with the editor. Sometimes the heavy treatment helps.
- ∑ If you believe the mistake has caused great damage to you or your organisation, consult your lawyer to see whether a libel action could be taken.
- ∑ If all else fails go to the Press Council (for printed material) or the Broadcasting Tribunal (for radio and TV complaints).