



Communicate with your Community



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Part of the: Port Phillip Community Group Training Program

September 2004



How To Communicate With Your Community

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JUST IMAGINE

Imagine your community organisation is the local lifesaving club and you have just redeveloped the club and are now looking to gain more members. The lifesaving club looks fantastic and to celebrate, the club is having an open day. You have planned the open day's events and it's going to be the biggest event the club has held in years. Now it's time to announce the event to the public.

What would you do to promote the event and get out your key messages to the target audience?

One of the most effective ways to communicate to a large audience is through the media.

WHY USE THE MEDIA TO GAIN PUBLICITY?

Considering the amount of television watched, the number of newspapers purchased, and the increasing amount of online activity, it become obvious why the media is seen as such a powerful force.

One of the most effective ways to communicate with your target audiences is through the mass media. Determining which media to use, how and when can be a complex task. But, once you know the right way to approach the media and know what they are looking for you can gain some publicity for your community's group or activities.

Publicity is free coverage of an organisation, its products, services or activities through the mass media. Publicity through media releases, interviews and other communication activities is designed to broaden knowledge and achieve positive recognition of an organisation, its staff and its activities.



Mass Media includes:

1. Print publications such as newspapers, magazines, journals
2. Radio Stations
3. Television
4. Internet

As part of the council's annual community satisfaction survey, three hundred residents within Port Phillip are interviewed by a quantitative random telephone survey. A section of this survey explores respondents' usage of media.

Newspaper Usage

Newspaper	2003 Most frequent %	2002 Most Frequent %	2001 Most Frequent %	2000 Most Frequent %
The Age	67	70	69	70
Herald Sun	35	40	41	34
Australian	17	13	13	17
Financial Review	12	6	11	10
Port Phillip Leader	10	16	15	13
Emerald Hill Times	10	11	12	12
Others	7	9	10	-
Don't read newspapers	7	8	4	-

- Results in terms of readership of major newspapers have remained fairly consistent over the past four years.
- Respondents aged with a household income of more than \$80,000 were likely to read The Age (78%)



- Respondents aged 60+ were more likely to read the Australian (20%) than other groups.
- Males were more likely to read the financial review (16%) than females (8%).
- Those from the East St Kilda neighbourhood were more likely to read the Herald Sun (49%) and the Port Philip Leader (22%) than others.



Radio Usage

Radio Station	2003 Most Frequent %	2002 Most Frequent %	2001 Most Frequent %	2000 Most Frequent %
774 ABC Melbourne	16	21	19	21
ABC Radio National	15	15	9	7
Nova	15	13	-	-
Fox FM	11	11	13	13
3AW	11	8	11	10
Triple J	7	12	15	17
Triple M	7	6	7	8
ABC News Radio/News Radio	6	10	2	-
Triple R	4	7	4	-
Gold FM	4	3	6	7
Mix FM	3	4	6	9
ABC FM	3	2	12	-
Others	2	4	7	-
3PBS	2	4	3	-
Magic 693	2	-	3	-
3MP	1	2	-	-
Joy FM	1	1	-	-
Ethnic station	1	1	-	-
Don't Listen to Radio	8	5	6	-



Internet Usage

In 2003, 89% of respondents had accessed the Internet (up from 78% in 2000, 83% in 2001 and 2002). Of all the respondents, more than two thirds (67%) had accessed the Internet on a daily basis. 11% claimed they had accessed the Internet a few times a week and 5% do so weekly. These findings suggest that not only the Internet access increased, but usage behaviour has also changed with an increasing proportion logging on more regularly/daily.

City of Port Phillip Website

Residents who had accessed the Internet were asked about their awareness of the Port Phillip Website. Awareness has increased dramatically over the past few years from 40% in 2000, 47% in 2003, 62% in 2002, to 72% in 2003.

Awareness was higher amongst those aged 50-59 (89%).

WHAT ATTRACTS PUBLICITY?

Publicity is regarded as more credible than advertising because it is viewed as an impartial judgment on the media's behalf. It is important to be aware that publicity is a double-edged sword because the coverage received is at the discretion of the media outlet and could be unfavourable.

No matter how much information is distributed from your community group, it is the media who control how the message is portrayed and whether it will be published. So establishing a good working relationship with the media is essential to help gain positive publicity.



Value of publicity

- Publicity is more credible than advertising
- Publicity is free. Community groups don't always have the budget to accommodate the expensive price of advertising, which also requires repetitive frequency.
- Publicity appears in the news rather than in advertising columns and carries the third party endorsement.

HOW DOES PUBLIC RELATIONS FIT IN?

Publicity itself is an element of the public relations discipline. Definitions for public relations are plentiful. Simply though, public relations is the management of communication between an organisation and its stakeholders. Stakeholders being the groups of people (publics) who have a stake in an issue, organisation or idea.

A worthwhile definition is found in *Effective Public Relations* by Cutlip, Center and Broom (200, p.6.) It reads:

“Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends on”.

Public relations is then, not just about generating publicity for an organisation or cause: it consists of many functions, of which publicity is just one. Again to reinforce, publicity is information, which gains media coverage and is uncontrolled.



Types of publicity to consider include:

- Preparing a media release
- Feature Stories
- Photographs with captions and story summary
- Set-up news conference
- Radio and TV public service
- Media Kit
- Interviews
- Community notices print and radio

UNCONTROLLED MEDIA VS CONTROLLED MEDIA

Publicity is information that gains media coverage and is uncontrolled. In other words, the originator of the information has no say over how or when the story will be reported, whereas controlled media is usually what we pay for or has our control of the contents.

Advertising, for instance, is information over which the originator does have control in respect to content, placement and time of publication. A newsletter sent out to club members is also controlled media as all information is distributed without change.

Uncontrolled media such as news releases or photographs is subject to review by the media group and it is the media group who decide whether the information gets published, where it will be published and how often.

The most popular formats used to communicate news to the media include news releases, feature stories, captioned photographs or photo opportunities, and news conferences.



Uncontrolled Media can include:

- News releases
- Feature Stories
- Photographs with captions
- Photo opportunities
- News conferences
- Media Kits (media release and additional information e.g. brochure, fact-sheets)
- Interviews
- Letters to the editor

Controlled Media can include:

- House publications
- Brochures, information pieces
- Handbooks, manuals, books
- Letters, bulletins, memos
- Bulletin boards, posters, flyers
- Information racks
- Exhibits and displays

WHAT IS NEWS?

There is no clear or consistent definition of news. What is news to one newspaper is often of no interest to another. News value differs between press, radio and television.

News is something new, up to the minute, unusual, sensational or something, which will affect many people and is therefore in the 'public interest'.

News could also be defined as anything a media outlet chooses to print, broadcast, or film as 'news'. Since the selection is always the outlet's choice, you must become



familiar with what that particular media group wants and is looking for. This is simply another way of saying, 'Know the Media outlet'.

Some principles of newsworthiness:

- New or unusual information
- An event that makes impact
- A response to a current news event or statement
- The response and statements of a prominent person
- A human interest story
- A bizarre or extraordinary person or event
- Closeness, occurring in the local area
- Drama, tragedy, or having an effect on people's lives
- Conflict
- Elite or famous people

MEDIA RELATIONS

Under the media relations category comes news releases, organising photo opportunities contacting the media with the intent of gaining new publicity about, or originated by your community group. Media relations also includes responding to media requests for information. Special events such as fundraising events, open days, or award nights require media management.

Media relations involves targeting the gatekeepers of the mass media for communication about your community organization. The ultimate targeted audiences in media relations are the consumers of the media; the people you want to communicate to.



WRITING FOR THE MEDIA

Journalism is a strictly disciplined form of writing. It has to conform to space restrictions, often it has to be produced under tight time schedules, and it has to follow a certain format. The ‘mechanics’ of writing for the mass media entail presenting stories in such a way that parts can be eliminated – sometimes arbitrarily by sub-editors because of space restrictions – leaving a story that will still stand up and convey the most important facts.

It is referred to in the media as ‘writing from the top’. Unlike essay or short story writing, which uses a leisurely introduction to set the scene, journalism leads with the most important and most interesting points first. This style is used because most media consumers seldom read or hear all of a story. Most people scan newspapers or listen to the first few lines of news broadcast.

WRITING A MEDIA RELEASE

A media release is one of the best ways to notify the media of an important issue. Media groups receive loads of media releases each day, so it is important that the one you write is topical and catches the editors and audiences’ interests.

If the media release doesn’t grab the editor’s attention in the first couple of sentences, you have little chance of getting it a run. But if you can come up with the right formula for writing a media release, then it can be used by the media word for word and you will achieve what you set out to do; that is communicate key messages to your target audience/s.



To be effective, your media release should be:

a). Concise

Get to the point. Use short sentences and paragraphs. If there are long and tedious paragraphs, the story will lose the reader's attention. Concise writing mainly consists of identifying unnecessary words, phrases and even sentences, and cutting them from your story.

Some useful rules are:

Use a short word rather than a long one.

Example: 'about' rather than 'approximately'

Use one word rather than a lengthy phrase

Example: 'soon' is better than 'in the near future'

Words that are often unnecessary and can be deleted include: very, quite, also, ever, new.

b.) Simplicity

The second major step in writing for the media, is achieving simplicity. Your message has to be understood by the average person. Use plain English and avoid jargon, clichés and acronyms. Don't use technical terms without explaining what they mean.

a.) What, Where, Why, How, When, Who?

If you check the news pages of any newspaper, or listen to a news broadcast, you will notice that almost every story answers those six key questions. Your story must tell, simply:



WHAT happened; WHERE it took place; WHY it occurred; HOW; WHEN; And TO WHOM.

For example

Albert Park (VRI) Bowls Club turns 130 on Saturday September 6. Celebrations commence at 11am. At 2pm club patron, former Federal Treasurer Frank Crean, will open the bowling season for the 57th consecutive year.

d.) Angle

Journalists and editors refer frequently to 'angle on a story'. This is a term denoting the approach you take on certain facts or information. Every story has more than one approach or more than one 'angle'. Write for the reader and look for angles that will interest the greatest audience of people.

For instance community group open days are reasonably frequent, but the angle may be that the open day will have a surprise football guest speaker.

e.) Timing

Another critical factor to writing for the media is timing. Know deadlines for the media and time your material well before. You need to be sensitive to editorial deadlines.



f.) Headings

The heading should summaries the story. It should be catchy and grab people's attention so that they want to read the story.

Below are some **examples** of media release headings with starting sentences:

BOWLED OVER
ALBERT PARK V.R.I. BOWLS CLUB CELEBRATES 130TH
ANNIVERSARY

11am, Saturday September 6 – St Vincent Gardens

Albert Park (VRI) Bowls Club turns 130 on Saturday September 6. Celebrations commence at 11am. At 2pm club patron, former Federal Treasurer Frank Crean, will open the bowling season for the 57th consecutive year, although not a bowler himself.

TRANSPORTED ONTO THE PAGE
LINKING US TOGETHER - A HISTORY OF TRANSPORT IN THE PORT
PHILLIP COMMUNITY

Mother and daughter team, Pat Grainger and Mary Mason, have joined forces to produce *Linking Us Together*, a remarkable 72 page history of transport in the City of Port Phillip since European settlement.



FINANCIAL KICK IN NEEDED FOR TAEKWONDO CLASSES

The Inner South Community Health Service (ISCHS) needs a financial boost to keep its special taekwondo classes for kids between 6 and 11 going next year.

BANKING ON THE COMMUNITY

Public meeting to organise a Fitzroy Street community bank

7.30pm, Tuesday August 19 – St Kilda Bowling Club, 66 Fitzroy Street, St Kilda

Residents and traders of Fitzroy Street may soon be able to access their own community bank, if a recommendation from the public meeting wins final approval later this month.

g.) Identify the Spokesperson

Media releases have to be attributed to someone, whether it is your group's leader, or the local MP. When journalists write a new story they are required to attribute information directly to the sources from which it was obtained. The source however is not attributed to the writer of a media release. It needs to be someone important such as the community group's leader.

Attribution of information to the source serves two main purposes:

1. Its add authority and credibility to the story by giving the name and status of the source
2. It helps establish the objectivity of reporters by making clear that the opinions are not their own but are those of the source.



Quote someone important by the third paragraph. Introduce the spokes person and include the person's title and person's full name as well as stating what they have said.

For example:

Chris Price, a coordinator with the community, youth and family health program at the Inner South Community Health Service, said that the taekwondo classes catered for kids who didn't fit in to normal sports or activity programs.

"This special taekwondo class has made all the difference. They're gaining balance, flexibility and coordination but, most importantly, confidence. When they come out of the class, they're beaming," Mr Price said.



Media Release Writing Handy Tips

- Ideally there should be one sentence per paragraph
- Lead with your most interesting point
- Use active voice, not passive
- Expect the only first two or three paragraphs will be read.
- Quote someone important by the third paragraph.
- Keep the media release short – best to keep it to one A4 page length
- Attach a background paper or fact-sheet containing further information (media kit)
- If appropriate, organise a photo opportunity to accompany media release
- Use 1.5 line spacing
- Don't just use a computer spell check over the copy. Proofread over your work and if possible get someone else to proofread what you have written. You will be amazed at how many errors you can miss.
- Double check dates, times, venues, spelling of names, phone numbers.
- Have your contact details at the bottom of the media release



Media Release Check List

Tick

1. Community Group logo at top left hand corner of page
2. Date of release to media (e.g. Tuesday 28 September)
3. Catchy Heading (to generate interest and summarises what the release is about)
4. Short Intro (ideally less than 25 words)
5. First 2 paragraphs contain the fundamentals of the news – WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and HOW
6. Angle
7. One sentence per paragraph
8. Written in active voice
9. Quotation from a key individual (spokes person) by third paragraph
10. Contact details of an informed individual for the media to contact if required (ideally the person who wrote the media release).
11. Photograph(s), graphs, diagrams if appropriate
12. Include double line spacing and large margins
13. Check your spelling and grammar
14. Avoid jargon
15. Use everyday language (simple and easy enough for a 13 year old to understand).
16. Use simple sentences and switch to a new paragraph after each sentence.
Limit sentences to 25-30 words
17. Only one page long
18. 1.5 spaced
19. Have you researched what newspapers or magazines are best suited for your news?
20. Is your news relevant to your audience?
21. Is your heading engaging?
22. Have you addressed the key benefits or values of your news?
23. Have you considered how the public will relate to this news?



MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE

MEDIA RELEASE
ORGANISATION NAME

Community
Group Logo

Release Date (e.g. Wednesday 16 September)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Catchy Heading

INTRO

Short Intro (Ideally less than 25 words)

First 2 paragraphs contain the fundamentals of the news – WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and HOW Catchy Heading

BODY COPY

Each paragraph of a news release is less important than the one before it. This is called the inverted pyramid. Keep paragraph length to one sentence.

The final paragraph should summarise the background or the organisation or individual.

ENDS

Finish off the copy with 'Ends'.

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Where, when, who etc

CONTACTS

Details of your media contact person for further information, including name, email address, website address and business and after hours contact details. Journalists prefer the phone and work all hours



MEDIA KITS

Beyond the media releases is the media kit. A media kit contains your media release, background sheets, photographs with captions or a disc with images or logos. These are usually contained within a folder, if they are to be released at a press launch or conference.

Background sheets provide supplementary information that can be sent with the release or faxed at a later stage to help brief journalists who are writing features. A single sheet with bullet points of all the news angles titled Points of Interest can succinctly list all the news and feature angles in an event. This can be mailed with the main press release.

The kinds of background sheets that you might provide are:

- Biographies of major players in an event
- Fact-sheets
- Short profiles of organisations involved
- Succinct history of a project
- A list of all the artists involved in the event

In preparing a media kit be sure the information is accurate and thorough and will answer the journalist's most fundamental questions. And provide sufficient background information to allow the editor to select a story angle.



PHOTOGRAPHS

As well as providing photo opportunities, a good idea is to send the media a couple of photographs that illustrate the media release's subject. There is a skill in taking a good photograph and one that the media would use. It may be a good idea to do a simple photography course. It would be well worth the money.

Here are some points to note about taking photographs for the media.

- Photos should be taken live in real environments and with people
- They should focus clearly on the issue, product, image, or person that your community group wants to emphasize, without irrelevant, visually distracting clutter in the foreground or background.
- Photos should be eye catching, using angles creatively
- Photos must express a viewpoint
- Photos must make a visual impact.

Also provide a caption for the photo which summarizes the news.

Below are some good examples of photographs with captions that are eye-catching and will grab people's attention.



SENDING OUT THE MEDIA RELEASE

There was a time when the only way to send out the release was to post it! Now you can:

- Post it on your web site and email the media, giving them a hotlink to the release. However, only a journalist who is doing research is likely to go there unprompted. It is vital, however, to keep your web site up-to-date. Web sites cluttered with old material gives your organisation a bad image.
- Send it by email as a Rich Text Format attachment or pasted into the body of the email. Some journalists do not want their mailbox full of unsolicited mail, so make it easy for them to request you do not send releases that way in the future.
- Send it by facsimile.
- Opinions vary as to the best way to send out a media release. You have to decide which method best suits the issue or the journalist. A release from an unknown organisation or unknown source is likely to be binned. This is why building a relationship with the media is so important.

