

Three Rs & Five Ws.....Secret Code for Good PR

When it comes to school and learning the three Rs, it is my opinion that the 'r' for reading is perhaps the most important. After all, the more you read, the better you write (shouldn't that be 'w'?) and spell and in general, communicate.

So, if you are daunted by the prospect of working with media, the first bit of advice I am going to give you is to start reading. And watching, listening and critically analysing how different media goes about its business of compiling and reporting news and current affairs.

Get started by setting time aside each day to read your daily paper – the hard copy or online – listen to the radio news while driving from a to b and if you can, catch a nightly news bulletin on tele.

These days you can be as 'newsy' as you like thanks to the rise and rise of online and social media. Each and every news medium seems to have its own online version, facebook page and twitter account – look, like and follow and you will not only be actively communicating, but be up to the minute in both what interests you personally and the news at large.

The Approach

So, assuming you have been doing your reading there is still more work to be done before you start working with media. You also need to become familiar with the actual people behind the facade or title. Most, if not all media work to strict copy and production deadlines – you need to become acquainted with these. Find out who is the right person to contact in regards to your story angle and then tailor make the message to each media group so that it fits with each organisation's objectives. No shotguns allowed.

Looking at the Press

There are several types of news stories

- Quick grabs or briefs in which only a small amount of information can be relayed.
- Fillers, which are just a few paragraphs long.
- Early general news stories which are usually eight, 10 or 12 paragraphs.
- In-depth articles or features/interviews.

It is always important to present your 'news' message using simple and concise language. Start your communication with a written statement or press release. Only then should you start talking. Be sure to have a spokesperson at the ready that is erudite and confident in reinforcing your argument/ message using quick grabs. And always be prepared to comment – and especially during a crises. Media training comes in very handy in this instance.

Claims like "I didn't say that!", or "why did they not use the bit I wanted them to use?" can be quite a common complaint by people in the public eye and those dealing with media. Good media management is not difficult, but relies on restraint and strategically controlling the message as already mentioned above. Some people are so excited (or too arrogant) about whatever it is they are trying to communicate –that they end up foiling any chance for achieving good publicity.

When writing and talking to media, always consider the language you use – best advice is keep it simple, normal, conversational - just be yourself. Start by

practicing your own conversational style – at home, around the table or with friends. This can help when it comes to conveying accurate messages via media.

Tips on writing a good press release:

The way we maximise the chance of a story being used is to apply the inverted pyramid test.

The first sentence has to convey the essence of the story in no more than 28 words. Think five W's –Who? What? When? Where? Why?

The second and third paragraphs expand on this basic information. The less important facts go last to allow the story to be cut from the bottom, without the meaning being lost.

Use third party endorsements and quote your source or spokesperson.

Try to accompany your press release with a good, high resolution image that is suited to the media in question – or make a photo opportunity available. A good photograph is key to achieving good publicity – no question! There are some great photographers in Cairns who understand news and editorial style images.

Remember that everything we release is subject to re-write and to the media's own spin. There are no guarantees and it is always best to leave your expectations at the door. All you can do is your best to manage the process.

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