



IMPRESS A
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A REPORTER: HOMEWORK

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It's amazing how many people don't realize reporters are overworked, stressed out, underpaid humans - just like they are. They assume a reporter is on call 24/7 and that it's okay to call or text them late on a Saturday night or before the crack of dawn on a Sunday to demand coverage for an upcoming private gala the public is not invited to attend.

Or they'll complain their press release about a promotion of a company employee did not receive front page attention, or any attention.

STEP ONE:

Step One in any relationship with the media is the need to understand how particular publications or media operate. How many reporters do they have now, compared to 10 years ago, or even six months ago? Many organizations have a fraction of the staff they had a decade ago, but their audience still expects the same level of attention to news beats that are no longer fully staffed or relevant.

What kinds of stories do they cover?

If it is a local news organization, how is the community covered? What kind of coverage do businesses receive?

STEP TWO:

Step Two, treat a reporter or editor as you would prefer to be treated: with courtesy and respect and with an understanding of their deadlines, ethics and work schedules. And understand that the average reporter is usually juggling deadlines for a half-dozen articles, news briefs or columns.

Here are some suggestions for impressing the press - and getting their attention without annoying them.

- Don't send a press release via mail.
- When sending a general announcement to every press person on your list, "bcc" their email addresses. They don't need to see to whom you sent the email, and it eliminates their impatience with having to scroll down dozens if not hundreds of names to read your press release. Best of all, they cannot copy your list or hit "reply all."

- Avoid sending press releases as email attachments. Put your press release into the body of the email. Photos, however, should be sent as attachments, not embedded in the email body.
- Do not send a release or photos that are in zip files or need special, time-consuming codes to open.
- Write in plain English. Avoid jargon or industry acronyms.
- Write a lead for your press release that will grab the reporter's attention.
- When you call a reporter or editor, if she or he says they are "on deadline," ask when a convenient time to talk would be – and get off the phone. They won't talk to their mother when they are on deadline, as they are rushing to get an article written or a page edited before it is due to go online or in print.
- Keep the press release short, succinct and to the point. In the first paragraph, be sure to provide the answers to the basic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? And How or How Much?
- Why? is usually the most important question. Why is this event happening? Why is this a significant invention? Why is this carwash No. 1 in the area? Why should the reporter be interested?
- Complete contact information for the press contact should be listed at the top of the press release. Similarly, for people in the press release, provide complete names, titles, contact information (cell, landline and email addresses), website links, addresses or event location.
- When pitching a media or publication in your area, do some research. Make an effort to read, listen or watch that media and understand the audience it reaches and the type of journalism it does. Know when it is published, refreshed online or goes on air. Is it an "as it happens" site, a nightly TV news show, an online publication, or a print publication that is a daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly?
- If you are hoping for coverage of an event, like a special carwash that will benefit a charity, and a well-known sports celebrity will be detailing the cars, be sure to get the announcement to the media one or two weeks ahead. If you want the public to attend, get your press release out two or more weeks in advance and take it upon yourself to enter the information on the online calendars of all area media.
- If a reporter asks for certain information by a specific time and date, meet that deadline.
- When an event is not open to the public, do not ask for coverage unless there is a compelling reason to cover it.
- Should the reporter schedule an interview, in person, online, or on the phone, be on time.
- When all is said and done, remember to say "Thank you." A handwritten note is best. And, very, very, very rare.
- Be sure to post the story on all your social media. ■