

Media Relations

If media relations sound like a big job, it is. But it can be organized into a job that can be handled by a volunteer. The key is timely information flow within the clinic. Part of the planning for any event, new acquisition, or any major project should include a plan for publicity. Designate someone to provide accurate information at least one month prior to when you plan to hold your event or make an announcement. Although your local editor might rewrite your release, if the information is printed, your release has done its job.

One of the primary ways for a clinic to tell its story to key audiences is through the press. You may not have a major television station in your area, but chances are you have a local newspaper, a local radio station, and perhaps a local-access cable television station. You can also use the technology of the Internet to post timely news and press releases on your website.

Media relations is only one part of your entire communications plan, but it can be your most valuable and efficient tool. Once you know how to get your message not only accepted, but valued as important news by your local media, you've made a big step toward the success of your clinic.

Publicity is low cost but has high return. Placing a news story about your clinic or event gives your message credibility and recognition whether broadcasted or printed.

Good editors and news directors appreciate:

- timely news releases
- well-written news releases
- well-organized news releases

Live up to these expectations and they will use them appropriately. They also like story tips that they can follow up on their own time.

It is important to be careful that news stories do not feel like advertising. News professionals are very adept at recognizing real news and rejecting disguised ads. They are keen to ensure integrity of newsworthy stories.

Guidelines to consider in your clinic's media relations plan:

1) Know your local media

- subscribe to your local newspapers and magazines
- watch the local news
- bookmark local media websites
- join any organizations where you are likely to meet reporters and editors
 - some cities have press clubs that you can join
- get to know reporters personally and which news sections they cover
 - start by arranging a short meeting at their newspaper office or TV station to introduce yourself
 - be considerate of their busy schedules and make it brief
 - drop off some printed material or personally deliver a press release instead of mailing or e-mailing it
 - Invite them personally to any special events
 - you will have other opportunities to develop these contacts into more familiar relationships over time
- if you provide a newsletter, make sure your local media contacts receive one
 - the more they see your name the better
- understand media deadlines, so your news reaches the right place at the right time
 - no one likes working under a tight deadline
 - late news can sometimes be no news.
- be sure to post every press release or news worthy item to your website
 - updated information on your website is key to rising in the search engine ranks
 - It provides access to your clinic from a global perspective

2) Newsworthy information

One of the first skills to develop is being able to distinguish between news and ads. Do that by reading, listening, and watching your local media to see how they treat

news so that you can conform to their choices and styles. News is something unusual or important

and/or affects a large number of people in a significant way. It must be timely and provide value to those who view it.

Reporters are not interested in:

- yesterday's news
- items that are of interest only internally to your clinic
- routine events

Provide reporters with good human interest stories. Invite staff and volunteers at your organization to let you know about good story ideas that you might be able to pitch to the media. The best ideas often come from people who are on the front lines of your organization.

3) Writing News Releases

- Put the news in the first paragraph
 - don't hide it under a paragraph about your organization (that goes last)
- Be brief
 - newspaper space is valuable
 - radio broadcasters will cut your news release to fit a very small time frame
 - you might want to write shorter releases for local radio stations
 - if broadcasters take Public Service Announcements, PSAs
 - the rule of thumb is that a minute is filled with 150 words maximum
 - no PSA should be more than a minute.
- Be clear
- Be accurate
- Proofread
 - for typographical errors
 - for content

- Have others proofread as well
- Make sure your release has the “WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW” within the text
- Use a quote from a credible source
 - make sure it is lively
- Double space your copy
- Indicate the end
 - with an “ENDS”
 - or the symbols ###
- Don’t write more than two pages
 - use “more” at the bottom to indicate to typesetters that they should look for the rest of the release if your release goes over one page in length
- Include the number of words in the release
- Be sure to put the name and contact information of the person editors can call for more information at the top
- Make yourself available for the media at any time
 - reporters are working on a deadline and will appreciate your rapid response

Remember

Your copy is a “suggested” copy. It will likely be edited for print media. This may be especially true if you are interviewed for a story. Be aware of your key points and try to reiterate them when possible.

4) Media Kit on website?

It is useful to have a standard media kit already prepared for your clinic. Even better is an online media kit that anyone can access at any time.

Include:

- the history
- mission and goals

- brief profiles and photos of key staff and Board members
- the most recent news releases
- a downloadable PDF of the current annual report

Busy reporters will appreciate being able to access this information easily.