

Put on a Press Event - Get Press Attention

PRE-EVENT

- Build your list of media contacts: Comb through website contact lists
 - Newspapers (email addresses and phone numbers)
 - i. Reporters
 - ii. News Editors/Assignment Editors
 - iii. Opinion Editors
 - TV News / Radio (email addresses and phone numbers)
 - i. Reporters
 - ii. News Desk
 - iii. News tip lines
 - Statewide or special-interest publications/online press outlets/blogs
- Build relationships with key reporters/editorial boards (make appointments; don't "drop in")
- Determine LOCATION and TARGET that will attract the most press attention:
 - Does target have the power to fix the problem?
 - Does target have ability to get message to decision-maker?
 - Is location easy to get to for press and participants? Easy, free parking?
 - Does it provide a good visual backdrop?
 - Is there shade? If not, will a canopy work?
 - Is room big enough/not too big?
 - What about sound? Need a sound system? Megaphone? Is there traffic or airport noise?
- Determine MESSAGE:
 - Easy for public to understand and connect the dots (avoid wonkiness and make connections)
 - Be timely - take advantage of current events/public sentiments
 - Use humor when possible
 - Use lists (i.e. "the county's five worst polluters")
- Choose a START TIME and DAY that best suits participants/target/press: 10-11:30 am on Tue, Wed or Thu is best for the press (try for 12 pm live TV coverage). Weekend coverage is much harder to get.
- Determine BEST FORM for press event: You need to "make" news to get attention
 - Rally (needs demand and a large crowd)
 - Stand-alone press conference (announcement or demand)
 - Decision-maker visit (i.e. make appointment to meet or make delivery)
 - Water activity (a paddle, shoreline human chain, cleanup, flotilla)
- Identify and confirm emcee/key spokesperson
- Find a volunteer to act as "media liaison" (to greet reporters, provide materials, connect them to spokespeople)
- Identify, invite and confirm speakers who can succinctly tell a compelling story (# of speakers depends on form of press event but fewer is better - no speaks for more than 5 minutes ever)
- Determine Visuals (MUST HAVE)
 - Hand-made posters
 - Props (i.e. jars of slimy water, poster-size photos, maps, costumes, cute kids)
- Designate a photographer to take photos of the entire event (that way even if press is a no-show you will have photos for the press release and social media)
- Recruit participants through social media, phone-banking, and email - if you can't get at least 20 participants there then rethink your plans
- Draft and send PRESS ADVISORY* to press contacts via email - call to make sure they got it (send it 3 even 5 days in advance and then the day before and the early morning of)

- Prepare PRESS RELEASE* in advance (gather quotes beforehand)

EVENT

- On the morning of the event, **make press CALLS** to sell event/confirm they are coming; **email advisory again** with “TODAY” in subject line (make sure they know that you will have good visuals)
- Arrive 30 minutes early at the location
- Make sure all attendees sign in (use a clipboard) so you can turn them out again the next time
- Have copies of press release/fact sheets to hand to reporters
- Have participants stand behind speakers if possible (for good visuals)
- Start as promptly as possible - don’t anger reporters who arrived on time by waiting for stragglers

POST-EVENT

- Plan B if press is a no-show: Take as many of the participants as possible directly to the closest newspaper office and ask to speak with reporter, news editor or opinion editor
- Add important details (especially # of participants if high) to already prepared press release
- Get photos/press release onto social media and sent by email to reporters (those who came and those who did not) as quickly as you can after the event and before 5 pm
- The day after, send news clips and photos to all attendees (makes them more likely to show up the next time)
- Most of the time, when a reporter hears from the public it is negative. **COMPLIMENTS** go a long way; if a reporter nails it, send a “thanks and great job” by email/phone call/social media

*ABOUT THAT PRESS ADVISORY:

- Never put too much info in an advisory (if you put too much they won’t need to come to the event)
- Include basic who, what, where, and when so they are enticed but left wondering what is coming
- The exception to the “be vague” rule is when you have a big name speaker that will draw the press
- Always include in the advisory that there will be visuals (identify them if they will entice attendance)

*ABOUT THAT PRESS RELEASE:

- You should be more detailed with the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when* and you should add the *why* and *how* too. Aim to keep release no longer than a page and a half.
- Don’t say who you are coordinating with before you say what you are doing. Put the most important information at the top.
- Use concrete language, and explain how your activities will benefit real people in the real world

ABOUT PRESS CONFERENCES:

- Reporters have no time for conferences that deal with info they can get in other ways; make sure you have some genuine news
- Press conferences should not last more than 20 minutes - **DO NOT DELAY GETTING TO PUNCHLINE**
- For press conferences have one key spokesperson, then introduce others to answer questions
- Reporters think in terms of headlines and lead paragraphs and so should you
- Develop a list of key statements that you can drop in when responding to a reporter’s questions
 - Preface key statements with indications that they are worth remembering like “The crucial issue is...” “There are 3 things to remember...” or “What’s really important is...”
- If reporter asks questions that get off the desired track, get back on it with “That is a good question but the real issue is...” or “That is a good question but we are here today because...”