

## The house guide to Press, PR and the Media



### *The good news:*

The arts industry is lucky. You have:

- events people want to attend
- interesting, creative people producing and appearing in the events
- strong photo opportunities
- and you provide much needed light relief in the mix of current affairs.

### *The bad news:*

- You are up against industries that employ experienced and often expensive communications agencies.
- These agencies not only have incredible PR contact databases, they might also have pre-existing relationships with the 'right' journalist and more importantly they know how the game works.

### *What is PR?*

According to the UK's Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), Public relations is about **reputation** – "the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

### *PR is part of the marketing mix and now encapsulates:*

- Traditional print media: national and local newspapers; national and local magazines. But also community newsletters, local government and council publications.
- Radio – national and local
- Television – national and local
- Websites and blogs
- Social Media channels: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram, Vine

### *PR - the basics:*

1. With your team, consider the image you want to portray of your organisation and your events. What are your core messages? Who are you targeting? How do your current audiences regard you? How can you alter your organisation's image?
2. Research how other organisations present themselves and write their press materials.
3. IdeasTap have produced a very helpful guide on how to write a Press Release: <http://housetheatre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/IdeasTap-How-to-write-a-press-release-fact-sheet.pdf>
4. Research which media (magazines, newspapers, radio, TV) might be interested in your event, organisation or news story. Where would you expect to read or hear about your event?
5. Target the right journalist or Editor within that publication. Follow them on Twitter, research their work.
6. Rather than blanket emailing 50 journalists, focus on a handful of key contacts. This will be more effective and more rewarding.
7. Remember: Journalists are bombarded with information. Journalists working in the national media receive hundreds of emails, calls and voice mails every day, and now with twitter it's even harder to cut through the 'noise'.
8. Prepare your pitch. Find the unique angle. How would you explain your story to a stranger in the pub?
9. The journalist probably won't open your email – so pick up the telephone. Speak clearly and keep to the point. Be polite, upbeat and friendly. Be prepared to leave a message – busy journalists don't pick up their phones. Avoid calling them on deadline day.
10. If you are pitching for a larger feature summarise the main points of your press release with bullet points. You should also suggest 10-15 further points, in bullet point form, which briefly set out new ways to cover the subject matter, offering different angles the journalist might be interested in.
11. Most journalists say their pet hate is being asked if they have received your email, so avoid that one. If they say the story is not for them, or doesn't suit their publication or radio/tv show, don't take it personally.
12. When you send the press release, keep your opening note very brief, but summarise the story so that they can quickly assess whether it's suitable for them. Copy and paste the press release below your note, and if you want you can also attach a pdf of your press release.

13. Don't forget to include your mobile number so they can easily reach you for extra information or images.
14. Chase, politely. If the journalist sounds keen on the story be as helpful as you can. If they get in touch, respond as quickly as possible. If they sound uninterested, ask if there's a better time for you to call. Ask them what might make the story work for them.
15. How can you help the press? Follow your target writers or producers on Twitter. Keep an eye out for tweets from the media asking for help on a story. One good turn...

### *Timing and planning*

If you don't have the luxury of a dedicated Communications person, it's often the last thing on a very long list of 'things to do'. But with most things, it's all about timing and preparation. Here are some general guidelines:

#### *Long lead magazines*

- So called because you need to pitch for coverage many months in advance.
- The higher the circulation, or profile of the title, the more competition there is for column inches.
- Research magazine titles; locate the right type of magazine (lifestyle, hobbies, women's interest, local area, family or County magazines) so that you focus in on your target audience.
- Placing coverage in high circulation lifestyle magazines is difficult, but not impossible. You need to make contact with national magazines six or seven months before your event (especially if you are pitching for a larger feature or interview). Generally it's three to four months in advance for a mention in a magazine's What's On page, for example.
- Locate which section your event or story might appear in. Find out who edits that page, follow them on twitter, research which angles might hook them.
- Have your press release, telephone pitch and eye-catching image ready. Read previous issues of the target magazine, and when you speak to the Editor or writer you could compliment them on a feature they worked on.

#### *Newspapers*

- If you have a strong, time sensitive news story carefully plan your message and pitch on the phone to the most relevant journalist, e.g. the arts correspondent. Failing that try email and twitter to reach them.
- If you are planning an important launch or news story liaise with other organisations in your sector to ensure that your story will not collide with other planned news events happening in your industry. There's no point launching a new festival on the same day as the Booker Prize short list is announced.
- National newspapers' editorial meetings are usually at around 10.30am. On daily papers usually the worst time to ring is from 4pm onwards.
- Contact forward planning desks in advance, especially for features. In news, roughly 80% of each day's content is pre-planned and in the newsgathering diary, 10% is dedicated to breaking news and 10% to investigative journalism.

#### *Weekend supplements*

- Editorial deadlines for the Weekend supplements vary, but if you are working on a major arts event and would like to pitch for a feature allow three months' notice, to enable the Editor to forward plan their schedule.
- For mentions in the What's On sections (Sunday Times' Culture, guardian's guide etc) allow eight weeks.

#### *Regional TV news*

- This is a great way to reach a huge, local audience. It's worth the time and effort needed to make it happen.
- Often local TV news teams have forward planning producers. Call a week in advance of your event or planned news story; find out who is scheduled to forward plan for your selected date
- Before pitching the idea, think about how you would package up the news story – the spokespeople, the locations, what they would film.

### *Photocall / 'Photo Op'*

- These are a great way for arts organisations/events to break out of the Arts pages and into the News section.
- Photocalls can be your biggest calling card, if you plan what you offer and when.
- Research eye-catching photos which make the News sections or online picture galleries – they are often quirky, unusual, beautiful, and funny. What can you offer?
- If you are targeting daily national newspapers, contact the Picture Desk Editor two or three weeks in advance to schedule your photo opp. Also contact the Picture Desks at news agencies: Press Association, Getty etc.
- Traditionally photocalls take place in the morning to make the following day's paper.
- Set out in an email briefly detailing what and who will be available to photograph, and explain three or four different options so that competing daily papers or picture agencies don't have to share the same image.
- Consider the practicalities – if you are inside how are the light levels, if you are outside consider how the weather might impact on the photo. If the photographer was a bit higher would the image look better? Can you get hold of a step ladder?
- For weekly local newspapers, if you want to publicise an event you could 'stage' a photocall 3-4 weeks in advance to ensure the picture is used in good time to raise awareness.

### *Local newspapers*

- Most (but not all) local papers are weekly. Find out which day they start their new edition and call on that day, as they will have more time to talk.
- Avoid contacting them on deadline day – usually the day before the paper appears in the shop.
- To find out more about how they operate ask if they might be able to give you a tour of their offices. This will strengthen your relationship with them and help you meet the wider team.

### *Local Radio*

- You have several routes to take: you might have a local News angle for their bulletins, or you could put forward someone to talk about an event during one of radio station's programmes (more common with Local BBC stations than commercial networks.)
- Approach a news story as you would a daily newspaper. If it's a planned news story, speak to forward planning to get the event details in their diaries 2-3 weeks beforehand. Suggest spokespeople they could interview and local angles they could take. It might involve a pre-recorded interview the day before.
- Send the station's producers and Editors a monthly press release featuring your events for the coming weeks, angles they might want to cover, or people they could interview (actors, producers or someone from your team.)
- If you have a confident speaker in your team, someone with a warm personality and knowledgeable about the area or the local arts scene, then you might be able to get them a regular guest slot on a programme.

### *Listings and Press Association*

- Most newspapers and magazines have a listings section of arts events, which they might compile themselves. There are also many websites featuring arts events listings.
- Consider these organisations a monthly or season Listings press release, in the post or via email, which contains 100 word description of the event, the time, ticket price, booking information – and where there might be interview opportunities or news angle.
- The Press Association provide entertainment listings to many national and local titles and you can enter your events, for free, onto their database here: <http://www.pressassociation.com/Listings/AddYourEvent/>
- Press Association also has a forward planning section for special events here: <http://www.pressassociation.com/SpecialEvents/Calendar/>

*Some other ideas:*

- Get to know your media contacts. Invite them to your events, invite them for coffee and if you are based in a venue take them for a tour, introduce them to your colleagues – with time, they will become your advocate.
- When you get coverage, send a hand written thank you letter or card to the journalist.
- If you are an arts venue send out your latest programme with a short personal note from your Director to your local advocates – media, headteachers, community leaders – highlighting key moments of the coming season.
- To develop advocacy channels within your community, invite local business leaders, councilors, MPs, teachers, journalists and local TV / radio contacts, other community leaders and tweeters to your events. Consider hosting pre or post show drinks. Acting as a conduit for these people to meet informally, to network and build relationships within the community, will reflect positively on the venue's role within the area.
- For arts industry press coverage (e.g. Guardian Culture Professional network, Arts Professional magazine) suggest writing a case study on a recent project or initiative.
- Think about how you can raise the profile of not only your venue / organisation but also the people who work there. You are probably surrounded by interesting and talented colleagues who could be fantastic material for local magazines.
- Look at where other similar organisations in your industry get media coverage. Set up a free Google News alert for your organisations, and 'competitors'. This will let you know about online media coverage. If you have budget you can pay for a media cutting service to collate your coverage.
- Find two or three people within your organisation who would be happy to be your spokesperson. If you can budget for it, arrange a group media training day, and consider sharing the cost with other organisations in your industry.
- Set up a Communications group. This is great way to share information and encourage stronger connections in your geographical area or industry.
- Research the internet for more PR tips. For example, have a look at 'Push / Pull' theory and see how that might frame how you plan your communication messages: <http://www.oocities.org/wallstreet/8925/pushpull.htm>
- When you get coverage, share it on Facebook and Twitter. Use the content you researched for your pitch for your organisation's social media accounts. Regard your social media channels as your own magazine or TV programme, focus on interesting content to build your followers.
- Last tip: your job is to make the work of the journalist as easy as possible. Research your own story, what makes it interesting, why should it get coverage.

Further reading:

[http://www.smarta.com/advice/sales-and-marketing/pr/public-relations-\(pr\)-for-businesses-the-basics/](http://www.smarta.com/advice/sales-and-marketing/pr/public-relations-(pr)-for-businesses-the-basics/)

<http://www.volunteergenie.org.uk/how-to-sell-a-story-to-a-journalist-or-producer>

<http://www.stuffjournalistslike.com/2012/01/six-way-pr-flacks-piss-off-journalists.html>

[http://www.wdm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Media%20support%20-%20journalists%20and%20pitching\\_0.pdf](http://www.wdm.org.uk/sites/default/files/Media%20support%20-%20journalists%20and%20pitching_0.pdf)

<http://www.oocities.org/wallstreet/8925/pushpull.htm>

### BBC Regional TV zones

