

The voice of the Voluntary Arts

## Publicity explained

Voluntary arts organisations need to promote themselves and their projects in order to increase their membership, encourage people to participate in their activities and events, increase their audiences, build a good reputation and gain credibility for their work. This can seem like a daunting task especially if you've never done it before. 'PUBLICITY EXPLAINED' offers a step-by-step guide to making the task easier and more manageable no matter what size organisation or group you are.

One of the reasons for using the media is that press coverage is often free, very influential and reaches a large number of people.

### So, how do we do it?

#### STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR TEAM

##### Choose your PR person

It would make life simpler if you assigned someone in your organisation to specifically be your media representative or PR person. This person should be articulate, friendly, well informed and easily reachable (i.e. they won't be much use if they are always in meetings or on trains). S/he will be your spokesperson and be available for press interviews (remember, this will not necessarily be your chief executive or a senior manager).

##### Tell the media

Once you've decided on this, it would be good policy for the newly assigned officer to circulate a letter to the media introducing themselves and providing full contact details. It's often worth giving out an alternative contact number as well (home or mobile). This may sound alarming but you are only likely to be called at home in exceptional circumstances and being accessible out of office hours may prove the difference between a story going ahead or not.

#### STEP 2: BUILD YOUR MEDIA LIST

##### Research, research, research!

Keep your media list up to date. This is a vital job and although it can take some effort it's worth allocating some time each month to building the list up. Take it one step at a time, starting with the key media outlets.

- A good place to begin finding new contacts is with a media directory: **The Guardian Media Directory** (a Guardian Publication, updated annually) is good value and contains a comprehensive list of over 12,000 radio, print and TV contacts. It is available from bookshops or can be ordered online at: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/guardianbooks>. Alternatively, you can find **Benn's Media Directory** in most public libraries.
- **Local news agencies** also serve as useful channels through which to get your story in the local media (you can find these in the Yellow Pages).
- **Arts Councils** often keep lists – see contact details at the end for further information.
- also try **Councils for Voluntary Action**: WCVA, NCVO, NICVA, SCVO – see contacts at the end.

##### Be accurate

- Once you have put together a list of media, check that the names and titles of press contacts are correct. Start with a phone call to the newspaper or broadcaster.
- You shouldn't address things simply to 'the Editor' as there may be one in each department (an Arts Editor, Features Editor, News Editor) and your press release may never find its way to the right desk.
- Ask to be put on their own mailing list to be kept informed of new personnel or programme changes.

##### Make contact

- Try to make a good impression. The very first time you call a reporter, introduce yourself and ask whether it is a good time, or if it would be better for you to call another time.
- Once you have them listening, ask about their deadlines – when do they go to press, when do they have a news meeting, when would they like to be contacted?



- Ask what kind of stories they are interested in – and take note.
- Make sure you get their direct phone line if they have one, their fax number, and their e-mail address.
- And then be ready to fax them **immediately** with your press release or another clear, snappy document. They are unlikely to wait around for you.

### Keep track and stay in touch

- It's important to keep a record of the journalist's responses each time you call.
- Every time you call again, remind them what you discussed before. This helps build the relationship. They then get to know that you are efficient, reliable and on the ball.
- Invite them to any event your organisation might have. Meeting them face-to-face will increase your chances of being remembered!
- If you get to know a journalist personally, make sure you call them before you call others, and offer your story or ask their advice about placing it.

### Stay informed

It's a good idea to read the publications or watch/listen to the programmes you want your story to appear in so you get an idea of their style and content.

- Collect newspapers' **media kits for advertisers** – they tell you all the key information about each paper, including target markets, circulation and readership.
- It's also important to check the key newspapers everyday to monitor the media for your '**clippings**' i.e. your stories. (If you can't afford to buy all the publications, you could find them in your local library and make copies or the relevant articles). Clippings are very useful to show your board, funders, and for your future press packs or quotes for brochures. Some newspapers have clippings services available, but these can be expensive, so make it your job to collect them.

### Categorise

Organise your list of press contacts into groups. You might want to think about using the following categories:

- reviewers (by art form);
- free listings editors;
- news editors;
- columnists/feature writers;
- photo editors;
- freelance journalists.

## STEP 3: MAKE A PUBLICITY PLAN

### Identify your message

First you will need to agree on the key messages you want to get across using the media. These will probably fall in line with concepts you come up with in your marketing plan. (See *VAN Briefing 75: Planning a Marketing Campaign* for more information).

### Find your story angle

Then, you need to think creatively about ways to turn your message into something that the public will want

to read. The journalist will turn your press release into a story – so make their job as easy as possible by getting the story potential or 'angle' to leap off the page. There are three main types of story, so consider each one and try to twist your message to fit one of these:

#### a) News

A news item is one that is linked to a specific date, a one-off event or a new piece of information like a forthcoming event, the opening of a new venue, a problem affecting your members, or the participation or endorsement by a celebrity of an event. In short, something that will be new to readers. Know what's in the news today and what the current issues are – often being topical is a good way to turn your story into news.

#### b) Features

Features come in all shapes and sizes and cover all sorts of themes:

- a **human interest feature** is a personal story, perhaps a triumph over tragedy. It can be anything that is centred on a person or people who have experiences to which readers can relate;
- an **analytical feature** could be an opinion piece, a review, a report based on in-depth research, or a look at the background to current statistics.

Feature articles depend more on personal contact and personal issues. They have to catch the imagination of a journalist or an editor and be something they can get their teeth into. Ideally the journalist/editor you work with will be someone you have spoken to before and whom you know to be interested in your work.

#### c) Events listings

- **Print:** when you want to promote a forthcoming event try to make sure it is mentioned in the 'what's on' sections of all papers. Note that when sending a press release some free listings just run the W's (who, what, where, when) whereas others may run your whole release. Make the job of the listings editor easier by including all the important details: contact details, venue, date and time, ticket prices etc.
- **Radio/TV:** contact local radio or TV news stations too as they will often cover an event if they know about it in advance and can send a reporter down. They are much less likely to cover an event retrospectively.

### Establish a timeframe

You will need to include a timeframe in your plan. Knowing the deadlines for sending copy to the relevant journalist is essential. This will ensure that you get your story published, and you gain a reputation as a reliable professional – one that the journalist can trust to use again.

- Decide when you want your story to be published.
- Find out when the media deadlines for publishing/broadcasting are for the date you have chosen.

Often the larger, national papers or monthly magazines have copy deadlines of up to **six weeks**. Local media



outlets are more likely to work on a weekly/ fortnightly basis. Listings editors usually have a specific date each month as their deadline.

### Target the right media

Once your ideas have been divided into these three categories (news, features, events), decide which paper, TV/radio station or publication each story would be most suited to. Consider their deadlines and their readers' interests. There is no point sending out something unless it will be relevant; you will only waste the journalist's (and your own) time.

- For example, if you want to generate publicity for a local weekend event, start by sending your press release to your local radio stations and local papers (especially those with an events listings section). Don't waste your time sending it to national papers unless they have regional events listings and you can still make their copy deadline. (Or possibly if you think that the story is really newsworthy and relevant to a national audience, perhaps tying in with current headlines).

So – start by targeting the journalists most likely to use your story and work backwards in order of importance, making sure you address the most appropriate contact from your media list.

### Budget

**Remember:** even if the media coverage itself is free, the process of sending out information takes time and money – telephone calls, photocopying, postage, photography and printing costs all add up. Make sure that you budget enough for these and you choose your media outlet carefully. Publicity can be great value for money if you are selective and sensible.

## STEP 4: PRODUCE A PRESS PACK

### A press pack should contain:

- a press release;
- background information;
- the flyer for the event;
- images – photographs or discs with images or logos (of the right size and format).

(Note: If you are worried that sending several press packs out may be expensive, consider just sending a press release which ends saying: 'for further information, images or a press pack please contact...')

### The Press Release

This is the foundation of any publicity campaign and so it's really important that your press release is well written and well presented. It should give the editor of the paper all the information they need to publish the story, or follow it up with a reporter. It answers the questions who, what, when, where and why in the opening paragraph and gives a contact name and telephone number for further information. It is usually short – about 250 words – and made up of short paragraphs of short sentences. It finishes with information on who to contact for more information. (See *VAN Briefing 77: How to... write a press release* for more information).

### Background sheets

These give extra details to supplement the press release – and can help to point out to the journalist the many news and features angles in your event – which means they don't have to look for them. Make sure the information on the sheets is succinct and clear – perhaps using bullet points or tables where possible. Examples could include:

- a fact sheet with a list of 'points of interest' or 'notes to the Editor';
- a list of all the artists involved in an event;
- biographies of the key players;
- short profiles of the organisations involved;
- maps;
- a brief history of the project.

### Flyers

Your flyer acts as a mini poster advertising your event or activity. An attractive, eye-catching flyer with a bold heading will help to grab the journalist's attention. (See the section on designing an effective flyer in *VAN Briefing 76: A guide to good design* for full details).

### Images

The photographs used in your publicity campaign can shape the public's perception of your event.

- You should never send the same image to competing papers.
- Some publications only print their own photographs – so be sure to notify them of photo opportunities. Just in case they can't come, arrange a photographer yourself.
- Build up your collection of photos – like newspaper cuttings, these can be very useful for future marketing.
- For more information, see *VAN Briefing 77: How to... write a press release*.

### Send out the press pack

The press like to be the first to hear about an event so make sure your press pack goes out before your flyers are circulated widely. There are several ways to send it:

- by post;
- as an email attachment (use Rich Text Format so it can be easily opened and less likely to carry viruses);
- by fax;
- by posting it on your website and email the press with a hyperlink to the release.

**Find out what each journalist or newspaper prefers.** If you can't or don't know it's best to stick to sending by post.

### Follow it up

Always follow up the press pack or press release with a phone call, checking the correct person received it. This is a great opportunity to really make a pitch for the story and to make human contact with the journalist. Unless s/he wants to chat, keep the call short and to the point. If you are hoping to get a feature, outline the idea and explain why you think readers might find it interesting. Trim it down to the interesting, attention-grabbing essentials.



## STEP 5: EVALUATION

We know evaluation always feels like a pain to do! But how else can you judge whether your efforts have been a success? Plan time for this on a regular basis – even if it is simply a matter of gathering and filing press cuttings and keeping a log of the number of inquiries you receive. Done regularly you will start to notice if things are not working as you hoped. This is a great early warning system that will enable you to change your strategy if you need to.

## A FINAL WORD

Following these five simple steps should take some of the stress out of publicising yourselves and your activities. However, it's worth remembering that you cannot control what the press will say, and that bad publicity can be very damaging. You need to be a bit media-savvy. This requires building a good working relationship with journalists and being creative in thinking up interesting stories to feed them. You have to be realistic about what the media will be interested in – stories that will interest their readers (the people you also want to interest) and sell their papers.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### Useful contacts and websites

- SAUCE: Hot Tips for Effective Arts Promotion [www.fuel4arts.com/sauce/default.htm](http://www.fuel4arts.com/sauce/default.htm)
- Do Your Own P.R. [www.doyourownpr.com](http://www.doyourownpr.com)
- Arts Training Central [www.artstrainingcentral.co.uk](http://www.artstrainingcentral.co.uk)
- Arts Training Wales [www.a-t-w.com](http://www.a-t-w.com)
- Directory of Social Change [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk)
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action [www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations [www.scvo.org.uk](http://www.scvo.org.uk)
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action [www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)

- Arts Council of Northern Ireland [www.artscouncil-ni.org](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org)
- Arts Council of Wales [www.ccc-acw.org.uk](http://www.ccc-acw.org.uk)
- Scottish Arts Council [www.sac.org.uk](http://www.sac.org.uk)
- Arts Council England [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

### Further reading

- *DIY Guide to Public Relations* by Moi Ali (Directory of Social Change)
- *Marketing for Dummies* by Alexander Hiam (IDG Books Worldwide)
- *30 Minutes... To Write a Marketing Plan* by John Westwood (Kogan Page)

### VAN publications

This document forms part of a set of briefings about marketing and publicity issues, which includes:

- **No. 73: Writing for the web**
- **No. 74: Publicity explained**
- **No. 75: Planning a marketing campaign**
- **No. 76: A guide to good design**
- **No. 77: How to... write a press release**

Other relevant VAN Briefings include:

- **No. 14: Writing words that work**
- **No. 19: Designing your newsletter**
- **No. 53: Creating clear print: reaching the blind and partially sighted**

All VAN Briefings can be downloaded from our website [www.voluntaryarts.org](http://www.voluntaryarts.org) in the 'publications' section, where you will also find a list of briefings written specifically for the web. You may also like to have a look at the 'Marketing & Publicity' page on the 'Running Your Group' section of the VAN website.

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**Disclaimer:** We have taken reasonable precautions to ensure that the information contained in this Briefing is accurate. However, the document is not intended to be legally comprehensive. We recommend you take legal advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.



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