

ImPRESSive

A MEDIA TIP SHEET FOR ADVOCATES

Spring 2003

STAGING A SUCCESSFUL PRESS EVENT: THE INS AND OUTS OF PUTTING TOGETHER A PRESS CONFERENCE

A press conference, which can be an effective tool for delivering a message, helps you gather the media, key speakers and experts in the field, and your organization's membership. The main steps in organizing a press conference consist of finding and securing a venue; recruiting speakers and incorporating visuals; getting the press to your event through a series of e-mails, faxes, and follow-up calls; and lastly, ensuring that the press actually covers your event. Through this ImPRESSive, you will learn how easy it is to organize a successful press conference and how, when used effectively, you can use all the elements of a press conference to lure the press and get out your message.

WHY HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE?



Press conferences are often more effective than simply working one-on-one with the press. Through a press conference, you can reach out to many more media outlets and ultimately more people. The

time and effort you commit to the press conference will determine how much earned media you will generate. If done successfully, you can heighten your organization's visibility, recruit new members and volunteers, and disseminate your message.

THE EVENT



The first step in organizing a successful press event is finding and securing a location and, more importantly, confirming speakers. You can also think of some creative visuals that fit in with the theme of the press conference. When used effectively, a key location and good speakers can be great tools for luring the press to your event.

VENUE



The most important consideration when finding a venue for your press conference is its proximity to the press. The

ImPRESSive

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press will be more likely to come to your event if you go to them. Therefore, capitol buildings and places near the press usually have a better turnout than those held in locales that require the press to travel. In addition, think about how the location fits in symbolically with the theme of your event and your message. If you must decide between a spot close to the press and a thematically perfect place, you should choose the convenient one or else risk losing some reporters.

SPEAKER

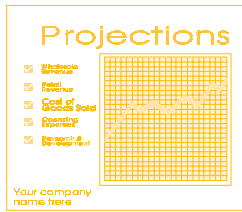


When considering what speakers to invite, you should not only be conscious of who will best deliver your message, but you should also remember that the key is to get speakers that the media wants to hear from. Speakers should be used as a means for recruiting reporters. Local elected officials, state legislators, and key community leaders are good people to ask. In addition, you can personalize the event and put a face on the issue by asking someone to share his or her personal story. (For ideas on building a story bank, see the July 1999 and Winter 2002 issues of our ImPRESSives). Make sure to keep in mind that elected officials have busy schedules, so the sooner you ask them to speak at your event, the more likely they are to be available.

You should also ask your speakers if they are willing and available to do interviews on local television programs and radio stations. In addition, see if they can be available after the press event for interviews with reporters and camera crews who attend.



VISUALS



Visuals and other thematic gimmicks can also help you entice reporters to the event. A visual image can give your message a local edge and will work best if you have TV stations covering your event.

Nevertheless, finding visuals should come after you've found a convenient location and recruited stirring speakers.

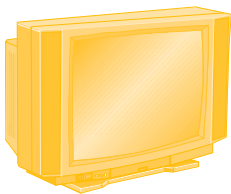
GETTING YOUR EVENT COVERED BY THE MEDIA



The most important part of organizing a press conference is getting the media to cover your event. Many people feel that by simply faxing a media advisory and a press release, they will be guaranteed a room full of reporters the day of their event. In reality, these releases must be augmented by phone calls, follow-up calls, and persistence.

The procedures for courting these different media outlets differ slightly. Here are some tips on the best ways to approach each of these media outlets.

TELEVISION



Setting up Interviews on Local TV Programs

In the first week of planning, call the producers of local television programs to let them know about your upcoming event. Explain that your spokesperson and speakers will be available for interviews the day of the event. Local morning shows are always looking for people to interview. If you call them early enough, you have a better chance of getting

on their show. Your pitch should highlight the local angle of your press conference and should sell your high-profile speakers. In addition, let them know if you have any individuals who are willing to share their personal vignettes. If they tell you they are booked, let them know that you will be calling them a couple of days before the event in case they have any cancellations. Make sure to keep them in the loop and to send them the same information you send everyone else, such as a media advisory, a press release, and other supporting materials.

Getting a TV Crew from a Local News Station to Your Event

Fax a media advisory to the assignment editors of the TV station a day or two before the event. Make a follow-up call to make sure they have gotten your fax and, more importantly, to confirm that your event is on their calendar. If you still have not heard if a station will be covering your event, give the assignment desk a call the morning of your press conference. Assignment editors meet every morning before 9 a.m. to go over their daily assignments. Therefore, you can give them a reminder call that morning. This will prompt them to mention your event during the morning assignment meeting, and it will also give you the opportunity to hear if they are planning on attending the event.

Getting on the Local News

Fax a media advisory to the TV station producer a day or two before the press conference. If your local news has a health beat reporter and producer, make sure they get copies of the media advisory as well. Make a follow-up call to confirm that the producer received your fax and to pitch your story. Your pitch should highlight your local angle, any noteworthy speakers attending the event, and individuals who will be available to share their personal stories.

Don't put all your efforts into getting on the evening news. The noon news is easier to get

**Sample Script for Pitching the Event
to the
Health Beat Reporter/Assignment Editor of Newspaper:**

Advocate: Hello, my name is Sam Martinez. I am calling from Health Care Today. Did you receive our media advisory about our press conference tomorrow?

Reporter: No.

Advocate: We will be holding a press conference on the steps of the capitol tomorrow to release a new report with new data on the number of uninsured Arizonans. The press conference is going to take place at 10:00 a.m., and a state Senator will be speaking at the event. In addition, an uninsured family from Tucson will be sharing their personal story.

Reporter: Thanks. Could you please send me some more information? I'll try to make it.

-OR-

Reporter: I can't make it, but I'm interested in the study.

Advocate: I'll send you a press packet tomorrow.

on, and many times TV stations will replay the noon piece during the evening news.

RADIO



As with TV programs, contact state radio news services, local NPR stations, and local talk radio stations well in advance about your event.

Let them know your spokesperson will be available for interviews, and offer up any speakers that have agreed to be interviewed as well.

Try to schedule and tape shows a week in advance, making sure the radio station understands and agrees to air the interview the day of the event. By taping in advance, you can free up your time for print and TV.

If the radio program is booked, follow up closer to the date in case they have any cancellations. Keep the radio stations in the loop with a faxed media advisory and other pertinent information.

PRINT



Fax a media advisory to the health beat reporters or assignment editors of all the newspapers and newsletters on your press list. Don't overlook editorial writers, and

make sure you give them the same information and attention you give your health beat writers. In addition, reach out to weeklies, minority newspapers, and, when appropriate, senior papers. Always follow up with a pitch call. During this call, pitch the event and highlight what will be released at the event, any noteworthy speakers, and any individuals who will be available to share their personal vignettes. Leave them your phone number and e-mail address in case they want to any more information. Keep them updated with any changes or any new information.

When releasing a new report or study, you may decide to send it to reporters early so that they can process the facts and figures. If this is the case, make sure they understand and agree that the report is embargoed until your release date. The report you send out should also have an embargo label with a release date and time. Do not share any information with any reporter until they have agreed to respect your embargo.

Another way of contacting reporters to inform them about your press conference is via e-mail. However, you should make sure to follow up these e-mails with a pitch call. Most reporters receive hundreds of e-mails a day, and therefore it is always worth your while to give them a call. Your pitch calls to reporters should be done between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Most reporters start their day at 10 a.m. and will be working under a deadline after 2 p.m. Reporters get irritated when they receive calls after 2 p.m. that do not have anything to do with the story they are working on at the time.

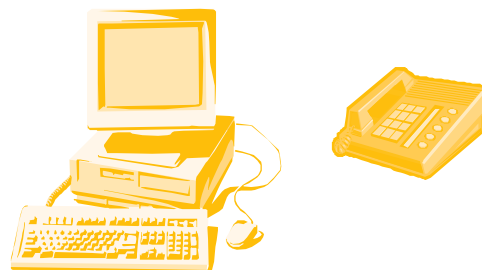
NEWS SERVICES



Contact daybook editors two days before the event with a faxed media advisory. The daybook, a calendar of news events, is distributed to reporters

daily through news services such as AP and Reuters. Daybooks are a quick and easy link to many newspapers and are a great way of maximizing the number of outlets you reach.

After you have faxed or e-mailed the media advisory, give the daybook editor a call to confirm receipt of the advisory.



Sample Media Advisory

Name of Organization
Address, City & Zip Code
Telephone & Fax Numbers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date

CONTACT: Name
Telephone Number
E-mail Address

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS NUMBER OF UNINSURED ARIZONANS

WHAT: *Purpose of press conference.*

WHO: *Names of speakers with their titles and organizations. If you are organizing a rally, include the number of activists attending and their relationship to the event.*

WHERE: *Date, time, and location of the event. If you are holding several press conferences or rallies statewide, you can attach a list of places and times.*

WHY: *Purpose of the press conference. Explain why you are holding the press conference here.*

VISUAL OPPORTUNITIES:

If you will have any visuals that might interest TV crews, include a description in this section.

**You can also add any other pertinent information, such as what other organizations are involved in the press conference, etc.*

Media Outlet	When Do I Contact Each Media Outlet?	Who Do I Send a Press Advisory To?	Who Do I Pitch the Story To?	What Is My Ultimate Goal For Each Media Outlet?
TELEVISION	Fax media advisory 1-2 days before event.	TV Station Producers, Health Producers, & Assignment Editors.	TV Station Producers.	TV crew attends event & event is covered on noon or evening news.
PRINT	Fax media advisory 1-2 days before event.	Beat Reporters or Assignment Editors, & Editorial Writers.	Beat Reporters or Assignment Editors, & Editorial Writers.	Reporter and/or Editorial Writer cover my story in local paper. Minority/Senior paper and weeklies pick up my story as well.
DAYBOOKS	Fax media advisory 1-2 days before event.	Daybook Editors.	No one. Your follow-up call to Daybook Editor just confirms that your event is on their calendar.	Event makes it on calendar and attracts reporters I did not know to contact.
RADIO PROGRAMS	During first week of planning to schedule interview on radio program.	Station Producer.	Station Producer.	Taped radio interview before event that airs day of event.
TV PROGRAMS	During first week of planning to schedule appearance on TV program (the sooner, the better).	TV Program Producer.	TV Program Producer.	Appears on morning TV program talking about my event the day of the press conference.
NEWS SERVICE REPORTERS	Fax media advisory 1-2 days before event.	Assignment Editor or Beat Reporter.	Assignment Editor or Beat Reporter.	AP reporter covers my story.

THE DAY OF THE EVENT & MAKING THE NEWS



On the day of the event, make your final round of follow-up calls. Call assignment editors at the TV stations and get a count of what cameras will be attending your event. This will give you a feel for what to expect at your event.

Get to the event early with press packets, a clipboard with a sign-in sheet, nametags for reporters (especially helpful if speakers will be taking questions from the audience), any stickers that you may be giving out, and pens. Set up a media sign-in table with the press packets and a sign-in sheet. The sign-in sheet should ask for each reporter's name, his or her affiliation or organization, and a contact number. This list allows you to see who attended your event, update your media list and, more importantly, see who did not come to the event. The media sign-in center should be set up in a

highly visible spot. If you are unable to set up a table, you can stand with a clipboard and your press packets. This is also a good job for an eager volunteer or intern.

Introduce yourself to each reporter, hand him/her a press packet, and ask him/her to see you if he/she needs any more information or has any questions. Let reporters know what speakers will be available for interviews following the press conference. This is a great opportunity to build relationships with these reporters.

Following the event, call through the list of attendees. Ask if they need any more information, and offer up your spokesperson if the reporter did not speak with him/her at the event. In addition to this, cross-reference the list with your press list and call through the non-attendees. Just because they did not attend the event does not mean they will not cover it. Make sure to fax them a press release and to send them a press packet as well. Call these reporters and follow up to make sure they have received the information and to see if they have any questions. With a bit of persistence, you can talk your story into the news.

Contents of a Press Packet

- ✓ Press Release.
(For more information on writing a press release, see the October 1998 issue of our ImPRESSives.)
- ✓ Report or study, if you are releasing one.
- ✓ Any extra information you would like the media to include in their story.
- ✓ Contact information and brief biography of speakers.

TIMELINE



IN THE FIRST WEEK OF PLANNING

- Find and Secure a Location
- Recruit and Confirm Speakers
- Contact and Schedule Interviews with Local Television Programs

TWO DAYS BEFORE THE EVENT

- Send out Media Advisories and Make Follow-Up Calls
- Contact Daybooks (AP & Reuters)
- Reach out to Smaller Papers, Minority Papers, Weeklies, Senior Papers, and Radio Outlets
- Fax Media Advisory to Local Television Programs
- Schedule and Tape Radio Interviews in Advance to Air the Day of the Event

ONE DAY BEFORE THE EVENT

- Brief Speakers on Message and the Event
- Make Follow-Up Calls to the Media
- Mail Press Packets
- E-mail or Call Reporters With Whom You Have a Relationship

THE MORNING OF THE EVENT

- Make Morning Calls to Television Crews to Get Count of TV Crews
- Make Morning Calls to Reporters to Confirm Their Attendance
- Arrive Early with Press Packets and Set Up a Table or Volunteer with a Sign-In Sheet for Reporters

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE EVENT

- Fax News Release and Make Follow-Up calls to Non-Attendees
- Make Follow-Up Calls to Reporters Who Attended the Event To See if They Need Any More Information

IF NO PRESS ATTEND THE EVENT

In an ideal world, your calls and hard work will produce a roomful of reporters and TV cameras. Nevertheless, the reality is that on some occasions, no reporters attend an event. If this happens to you, don't give up. This does not mean they will not cover your event. First of all, hold the press conference as if the room were filled with reporters. In situations like this, it helps to have a built-in crowd to make up for the reporters. Immediately following the event, take your speakers to newspapers and radio stations and offer them up for an interview. If your speakers are unable to attend, you can stop by to hand deliver press packets and let them know you are available for interviews. If this is not logistically possible, fax out your press release and e-mail out an electronic press packet to everyone on your press list. Tell

them about your successful event and pitch the story. After all, they won't know that there were no reporters at your event.

CONCLUSION



Press conferences are an excellent method of disseminating information and raising your organization's visibility. In order to stage a successful press conference, it is important to take the time to recruit the right speakers and find an appropriate location. If you want your press conference to receive media attention, you should leave no stone unturned when reaching out to reporters. By planning ahead and engaging in both long-term and short-term pitching, you can ensure solid media coverage for your event.



Next **ImPRESSive**:
Coming in Summer 2003

Writing a Media Plan

Your outreach to reporters and media campaigns should be treated in the same way that you plan your legislative work and fundraising plans. Through the next **ImPRESSive**, learn how to create and implement a strategic media plan and why this is such an important resource to your organization.

ImPRESSive

Back Issues:

- * **The Story Bank: Using Personal Stories as an Effective Way to Get Your Message Out**, Winter 2002
- * **Finding the Hook: Getting Press Attention Without a Traditional Press Conference**, Fall 2002
- * **On the Record & Off the Record: Controlling the Story**, July 2002
- * **Building and Maintaining Relationships with Reporters**, April 2002
- * **Tips for Interviews - Part III: Television**, January 2001
- * **Tips for Interviews - Part II: Radio**, December 2000
- * **Tips for Interviews - Part I: Newspaper**, October 2000
- * **Getting Your Message Into National Stories**, June 2000
- * **How to Shift Focus on a Story**, April 2000
- * **The Art of Story Banking**, July 1999
- * **Getting in the Editorial/Opinion Pages**, March 1999
- * **Creating Working Media Lists**, December 1998
- * **Drafting a News Release**, October 1998

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