

How to make your Press Impressive

Whether it's an art show, play or open day, most events need one thing - people. There are different ways to get them there. You can send out flyers, advertise, and you can also use the media in other ways that often cost you nothing and can be very effective.

Radio stations, newspapers and TV stations are businesses. They have a product that tries to include the best and the most interesting news and events happening within their market area. But to be able to choose what to include they must first be aware of what is happening.

That is your job. Do the local media outlets know - at least one or two weeks ahead of time - about your event? This might seem basic, but often is forgotten. Many associations or groups ring after the event is over to ask why they had no media coverage. It is possible the media were not informed?

Notify the chief of staff in the newsroom in writing, preferably in a typewritten press release to avoid confusion. It is not difficult and does not necessarily need to be done by a public relations person.

Include, without any waffle, the basic ingredients of any news story. The news editor needs to know:

1. What the event is?
2. When the event is?
3. Where the event is?
4. Who is organising it?.
5. Who is the contact person?

The simpler, the better. Hundreds of press releases go through any news organisation every day and it is imperative that your message gets through straight away.

You can provide extra information - like ideas that might make television or photograph opportunities, or what is particularly interesting about the event - but make sure the basic details are most prominent.

Once you have your release, you need to think about the best places to send it. Who is most likely to be interested? This is where the media organisation's market area comes in. If you are organising a school fete, remember an organisation like a television station or The Cairns Post covers a vast area and many, many schools within that region will have fetes. Not all of them can be featured. Don't let that stop you from sending out notification of the event - particularly if there is something a little unusual about it - but just keep in mind the logistics of what the media has to do with limited page space or air time.

On the other hand, a suburban newspaper like The Cairns Sun or The Tableland Advertiser covers a much smaller area. There aren't so many school fetes and you may get greater coverage.

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Newspapers are always on the lookout for vibrant colourful picture ideas, the sort of thing which also makes good television. Radio stations often need articulate, interesting spokespeople. Does your event answer any of these calls? If so, include that in your press release.

Editorial and advertising are not usually linked in a news organisation. If you have paid for an advertisement, that is what you will get. It will not give you an 'in' for a news story and does not factor into journalists' decisions about what news stories will be used. It does not hurt to make a follow-up phone call after you have sent your fax or letter. It might have gone astray somewhere or somehow fallen into the wrong hands. Ask for the chief of staff or news editor. Let them know you have sent the release and ask if they need any further information.

It helps if you know who to send the release to. If, for instance, you have an arts story for The Cairns Post, it is most likely to go into Friday's entertainment section known as Time Out. The editor of that section is John Killorn. You could send a release addressed to the entertainment editor and one to the news editor - you might end up with two mentions in the paper - a picture in the news section and more detailed information in the specialised section Time Out. The news organisation will decide exactly what it feels is the most suitable use for your information.

You can always ring an organisation and ask who to address your release to.

It is hard for any news organisation to give a guarantee when and if it will feature your event. Even if a TV news crew attend the function, it may not appear on the evening news. This could be because other events have had to take precedence. Your item could also be used at a later date.

Then again you never know just how far your press release could go. If you have a great picture idea, it could end up on the front page!

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