

May Month Publicity Tips

Key Messages you can Communicate

- Most Canadians take communication for granted. One in 10 Canadians has a speech, language, or hearing disorder which hinders their capacity to communicate.
- Early identification and rehabilitation of speech and hearing disorders can often prevent communication difficulties in school, on the job, and in social situations.
- Speech-language pathologists are educated professionals who are trained to evaluate and treat speech and language disorders.
- Audiologists are essential members of the health care team who are trained to evaluate and treat a full range of hearing disorders.
- Speech-language pathologists and audiologists work within the school, health care, or private sectors to improve the quality of life of people who have communication disorders.



Developing your Media Contact List

There is no real magic to developing a network of media contacts. By planning, providing personal attention, and regular follow-up, you can establish yourself as a reliable source of information for the media. Providing factual and interesting information on your profession and relevant issues in the community contributes to the media's role to inform and educate. Building a media contact list takes time and effort. Media directories, such as the *Bowdens Media Directory* or *Matthews Media Directory*, are good sources of media information. They can be found in the reference section of most libraries. If you don't have access to a media directory, go through the Yellow Pages under the main headings of newspapers, radio, television, etc., and draw out the major media outlets. Then call each one to get mailing information and the names of particular editors, reporters, columnists, or producers.

What Do the Media Look For?

The media look for certain characteristics to determine whether or not a particular event or situation is *newsworthy*, that is whether or not it deserves to be printed or aired. A story is more likely to be used if it contains several of these elements:

- Importance – Is it important to or does it affect the majority of the population?
- Human Interest – Does it incorporate an emotional element? Will the reader empathize with the story?
- Prominence – Does it involve a well-known person?
- Proximity – Is it close to the audience, either geographically or psychologically?
- Timeliness – Refers to fast breaking stories, but can also refer to seasons of the year. Is it news that is fresh and current?
- Unusualness – Does it sound interesting, different, exceptional?

Tools for Reaching the Media

Once you have a media contact list, you can plan how to reach those media using one or more of the following tools:

News releases

News releases inform the media about new activities, programmes, and special announcements. Something about the information should make it newsworthy.

Backgrounders

A backgrounder is a fact sheet that provides current or historical information and statistics which would add depth to information in the news release.

Profiles

Profiles give biographical information on noteworthy individuals in the association, or on people who have led successful lives with speech, language, and/or hearing disorders.

The information should be contained in one page and preferably include a photograph.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

PSAs are free announcements offered by radio and television stations. They are used to publicise events and activities or promote messages in the public interest. Most media have a PSA policy; they should contain information of interest or importance to the public.

Interviews

This tool allows for exploration of ideas and concepts. It includes interviews for background information, pre-arranged interviews for story coverage, and on-the-spot interviews for quick reaction and comment. Live interviews, such as talk shows and public affairs programmes, offer strong opportunities to help change attitudes but should be handled by broadly informed people in the association or invited experts.

Feature Articles

These articles usually are 500 words or longer and explore a particular theme. Features are lively, informative, and tend to emphasize the human interest angle. An unsolicited feature may or may not be used by the media, depending on editorial policy. Community media are more likely to use supplied features than dailies or magazines, for example, self-help columns, profiles, etc. To be considered, a feature must be objective and professionally written. A good tactic is to pitch the story idea, get the journalist interested in your angle, and have the journalist cover the story.

Notices

Use this tool to convey simple, straightforward information on upcoming events. Notices must include subject, date, time, location, and pertinent information about parking, disabled access, and supplemental communication (hearing, ASL, etc.). Some media will accept typewritten notices and provide the layout; others require a formal camera-ready layout.

Letters to the Editor

Letters are featured in every issue of the daily newspaper and can be written by a member of your organisation. Editors publish letters that are 200 words or less, are focused on one main idea, and would be of interest to readers. Include your daytime phone number. Not all letters submitted to the newspaper can be printed.

Opinion pieces

Articles that appear opposite the editorial page of daily newspapers, usually written by people who are not journalists -- opinion leaders, presidents of associations, consumer advocates.

Tips to Get You Started



What is Targeting?

When planning which media to contact for conveying information on your programme, service, or activity, you must target your efforts. You will not be able to reach all the media and probably cannot afford to, so be selective. Make some thoughtful choices about which media to contact based on which ones you believe will provide the most impact -- and then target them.

Building Contacts

Another way to get the information you need is to call organisations and individuals which are involved in related activities and ask for a copy of their media list. You may have some updating and checking to do, but you will have a basic list you can expand on.

Making Contact

When you make the first contact with a journalist, ask about and note deadlines for submitting releases and information. News deadlines vary between radio, television, and the press.

Many weekly newspapers, for example, have a Wednesday deadline for Saturday delivery. Some newspapers, and columnists in particular, may need information for PSAs as much as two weeks in advance.

Speak with the assignment editor or producer, if possible. Making personal contact with the media will give them a point of reference to you, your group, or organisation. Your initial call should be short but informative:

- Identify yourself and briefly state the purpose of your call.

- Provide a concise description of your association's presence in your area.
- Give some examples of current association activities and programmes.
- Inquire about policies on providing articles, public service announcements, and community calendar information.
- Offer to provide background information.

Always be prepared with facts and information. Make sure you have all the information and facts you need before you call a media outlet. That may include any or all of the following:

- Date, time, location
- Alternate day or location (e.g., weather considerations)
- Spokespersons
- Alternate spokespersons
- Sponsor information and contact(s)
- Price (e.g., free or not)
- Access - wheelchairs, parking
- TTY, assistive listening devices

Get to know key media contacts not just as contacts, but as people. It's much easier in community media: in some cases, journalists may be part of other organisations in which you're already involved. Engage them personally -- as volunteers, event hosts, celebrity participants, sponsors -- something that will draw them and their families into "participating" in the association from a personal perspective.

Think about the needs of the media. Try to develop ideas for visuals for television, photographic opportunities for the print media, and ambient sounds for radio. When speaking with reporters, for example, suggest the kinds of visuals a photographer or camera person could use.

Provide photographs. If you have high quality photographs, colour or black and white, some media will use them. Persons or groups of people in the photograph should be clearly identified. Write a short, catchy caption on the back of the photograph to establish interest and highlight a speech, language, or hearing message. Photographs should generally be no smaller than 5"x 7" and have a glossy finish. Photos are good for community/weekly newspapers.

Mail, fax, e-mail or deliver news releases and announcements. You may not be able to deliver *all* your releases/announcements, but try to select a few important media outlets where personal contact may result in more coverage.

Tip ...

When dealing with media, think local and consider all the many possibilities for people, events and spokespersons in your community. Then plan ways to match them to an appropriate approach.

Follow up with a phone call. After the release is out, call selected editors to make sure they received it. Determine whether they plan to use it now or later.

Say thank you! Reporters and columnists are rarely praised, so when they get it right, let them know.

Use credible spokespersons. Research has shown that the most credible and interesting sources for the media and members of the community are local individuals who are known and respected within the community. These people may be experts from the local college or university, local hearing/speech care experts, business and community leaders, or programme specialists.

Credible spokespersons also include those who "have been there". For example, these are the people who may have experienced the benefits of treatment for speech, language, or hearing disorders. Their testimonials can have quite an impact.

If you are interested in receiving more detailed tip sheets in the areas of :

News Releases and Public Service Announcements

Media Interviews

News Conferences

Crisis Media Communications

Please contact Angie Friend at national office angie@caslpa.ca