

How to Get Media Coverage of your Events

~ Jeff Harris
State Public Relations Officer

If you follow these easy instructions, your chapter will be almost guaranteed to have media coverage of your event. Each chapter should use their own best judgment on when, or if, the press should be invited to cover an event. If you're not certain that good press will be the result of the media attending your event, it may be wise not to invite them.

The first thing you need to do is develop a targeted media list. Find out which newspapers, magazines, television programs, radio stations or websites will be interested in your event. Many of these media sources are already listed on our state web site. Local and regional paid-for and free newspapers often have community pages which list upcoming events - and then report on them afterwards. Don't forget to include your local motorcycle publications and national organizations; such as the AMA and MRF.

The second step is contacting the media outlets and asking them to print details or provide news reports of the event shortly before the big day. If they agree, you need to follow up with a press release containing all the details of the event and provide contact information. Most media will already have story ideas in mind, or are looking for a particular angle such as human interest, charitable causes or celebrity attendance. You may have an event that could be of special interest to local media due to an influx of tourism dollars to Pennsylvania. Be creative in thinking up ways to "hook" the media outlets into covering your event. Media notification should ideally begin several months in advance with a "save-the-date" phone call or post card. More details should be sent via event flyers and early press releases that detail the news angles for the event. At the very least, try to give the media outlets two weeks notice of an upcoming event.

Get on the phone and call the news desks at the local newspapers, television and radio stations you want to target and ask when their deadlines are. Find out if they prefer to receive information by fax or e-mail. Find out if there are special correspondents for community and charity news, and get their contact information. These are your contacts so get to know them! Invite them to your chapter meetings, send them Christmas cards, and keep them informed of events you are organizing throughout the year.

Another good way to "hook" some media coverage is by getting a big name celebrity to support your event. This is always a sure-fire way to attract the media. Contact any local celebrities, from sports stars to television stars to politicians, and ask them to join your event or, if they can't come along, to send a message of support. Ask if you can pass this message to the media, along with a photograph of the celebrity. (for example, Punxsutawney Phil...)

The third step is to provide a knowledgeable contact person for the event to assist the press (as required). Make the media's job simpler by providing easy access to the events organizers, participants and celebrities. If there are additional flyers, event brochures, or event schedules, you should assemble press kits for each media representative and present these upon their arrival. Finally, there will be media interested in your event who can't attend for any number of reasons. Be prepared to also send them a press release afterwards. The release should describe what happened, how many people came, and how much money was raised. If you do most of the work for the busy reporters, they will be grateful. Invite photographers and local TV channels to come and capture the event on camera. If the local paper doesn't send a photographer, get a good photographer to take

plenty of pictures then send just one or two of the best shots to news desks and picture desks as soon as possible after the event.

Photographs of your event are a must! Always use lively, colorful images to help get your story into the papers. Compose the picture so that it tells the story, and make sure it has people in it. Get an A.B.A.T.E. logo in the picture if you can, as well as any wording that explains the story (such as: event banners or posters). Pictures of one or two people often work better than a large group and get as close as you can. Informal shots can be more interesting than formal posed ones. Digital cameras are great as you can e-mail your photos to the newspapers directly. If you don't have access to a digital camera, make sure you can get your pictures processed and delivered the same day.

These four easy steps really are the basics, but once you've been through two or three events, you will develop the right media contacts and figure out a well-timed strategy. The key to success begins with targeting and notifying media early on, providing event access and contacts, and sending post-event press releases that provide detailed information about the events conclusion.

I will be happy to help your chapter and district PR officers to write the required press releases. Also, please send me copies of all the media coverage you receive. I try to monitor all of the Pennsylvania news outlets, but still tend to miss some excellent reports. Thank you for taking the time to read my column, I hope you find the information useful. Good luck promoting your event! Special thanks to Joe Chyr of Ridge Runners for inspiring this month's PR report.