

Give them ‘something to talk about’!

SUMMARY: Your church is having a special event, and you want the whole community to know. How do you get the word to the news media?

How can you make your event stand out from the other happenings and causes that compete for space in your local newspaper or time on your local TV and radio stations? Start with five important, but relatively easy, steps.

- Create a newsworthy event. In other words, give the media something to talk about. Come up with a “hook” – something that sets your event or cause apart from others. Is it entertainment? A special guest? A contest? A compelling cause? A timely event? What will be the “magnet” that attracts crowds and media coverage?
- Come up with a clever, attention-getting name for your event.
- Invite local celebrities or community notables to participate.
- Plan for “Kodak Moments.” Television stations and newspapers will appreciate good visuals for photo ops.
- Choose an articulate spokesperson to represent your event/cause to the media. If possible, create and practice brief, but inspiring and informational, sound bites to offer in an interview.

Getting media coverage is all about relationships. It is helpful to develop a relationship with a reporter or assignment editor before you have a story or event to publicize. If coordinating communications for your organization will be your ongoing responsibility, introduce yourself to media contacts by sending them your business card and a personal note explaining your role. Consider the following before pitching your story to the local press:

- Is your event of more interest to a religion editor, an arts critic, a sports reporter or a feature writer? Do your homework so you know whom to contact. Usually you can send your press releases and story ideas to assignment editors or producers at TV stations and the city desk or section editors at newspapers. It is wise to call media outlets in advance to ask or verify to whom you should direct your press releases and pitches. Whenever possible, address your press release to an individual. It also is wise to send your release to more than one person.
- Don’t wait until the last minute. Begin communicating with your contacts three to four weeks before the event. Initiate the contact with a snail-mailed or faxed press release (especially helpful at smaller community newspapers), followed by an e-mail reminder of the event and another copy of the press release. Phone calls are not always welcome, but at least *attempt* to talk to a real person. Three days before the event, send a final e-mail reminder, highlighting how to reach you on the day of the event. It is ideal to have a cell phone or pager on the day of the event so people can contact you at the last minute.
- Pestering is a turnoff, but follow-up is a necessity. It is fine to check in to make sure your press release was received, but don’t push so hard that you damage chances for good coverage or long-term media relations.
- Don’t limit your contact to one media outlet. Smaller community newspapers and local cable television stations may be more willing than larger media to make public-service announcements to publicize community events. Large corporations in your area may be willing your post your press release or announcement in their company newsletter. Local radio stations also may make community announcements. Small media outlets generally focus more on

community involvement, human-interest stories and “good” news than do daily newspapers and broadcast television.

- Check with your local newspaper and public-access cable television channel to see if they maintain a community calendar or electronic bulletin board where you can list upcoming events at no charge.
- Be sure to maximize your church or organizational Web site to post news and information about upcoming events.
- Write a thank-you note or letter of appreciation to the reporter or media outlet that covered your event. It is part of nurturing an ongoing relationship with the press.