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# *FIRST Publicity Tips*

## *By Mark McLeod*

"The greater portion of the editor's job you can do, the greater your chances of getting into print"

**Do Your Homework**
Who are your community's media outlets (TV, radio, newspaper, newsletter). Become familiar with what each produces and figure out how you can best fit into their format. For example, a radio station might target teenagers, while a newspaper's weekly calendar might target events that interest young parents. Learn how the newspaper, radio or TV station operates. What stories do they like to tell? What audiences do they appeal to?

**Keep Your Media/Contact List Up to Date**
Identify and connect with the correct person to receive the release. What are their deadlines, when are they too busy to talk? Make sure you have current names, addresses, email, phone, and fax numbers. Find out if the media prefers to receive information by email or fax. Releases are useless if released to the wrong person or someone who no longer works there.

**Take the Extra Step and Follow-up**
Good PR is about serving editors' needs as much as yours. Call to see if the release was received, thank them for coverage they give you both past and present. Become a key source to them of information about all things FIRST. Alert editors to significant events, such as an off-season competition, even if you aren't directly involved.

**Is It News?**
Find an angle that's newsworthy. A news release should read like a news item, not a sales brochure or something that merely promotes your team. Don't bury the news, deliver it up front. The media isn't likely to cover the same story year-after-year, e.g., fundraiser kicks-off again. So look for interesting and unique story angles developing variations from different points-of-view. Maybe a story about how the funds raised are used for community outreach, or how fund raising drove a student to become a business major in college.

**Stick to the Point**
Emphasize the benefits and significance of your news and save the superlatives to get right into what's newsworthy. Develop a feel for what turns editors on, e.g., the unusual, significant change, trends, reader significance, history, name recognition, first-time events. Don't try to cover the world in a news release. Keep the names and accolades to a minimum and avoid bogging down the release with superfluous information.

**Customize Your Release to Target Different Media Markets**
This usually just means a rewrite of the lead paragraph. For instance, if you release to both a local community paper and a regional or national media organization then change the lead paragraph to clearly state the local connection.

**Think Beyond Traditional Media**
Look for unique opportunities to get your message out. Some examples: Businesses have employee and customer newsletters, as do churches with information about community organizations, local Pennysaver-type publications are read by bargain hunters, the school yearbook, the PTA newsletter. Many community groups are looking for speakers – Rotary Club, senior clubs, Scout units, etc. Find a team student or mentor who is well-spoken and look for opportunities for them the tell the FIRST story.

**Know your Community Leaders**
Look for or develop links between FIRST and political, educational, professional, business leaders in your community. They can serve as important liaisons for your team. For example, any community leaders that are or were engineers or worked for a technology company at one time? Do leaders have FIRST age children. Cultivate relationships with them and ask for their help to make introductions and open doors.

**Find Sponsors to Underwrite Promotion Costs**
Hook-up with companies looking for complementary opportunities to promote their company name, logo and message. A company may agree to pay the costs to print professional looking posters in exchange for including their logo and other information on the poster to promote them too.

**Leverage FIRST Media Support**
Take advantage of the messages, statistics, and promotional material FIRST offers at www.usfirst.org to help develop and fill out a larger background to your story.

**Look at Who Else Gets Lots of Coverage**
Do you notice other local organizations that seems to have terrific exposure? Find out who's in charge of their promotion, it won't be hard. Meet with them and ask for guidance. There are mentors everywhere you look.

**Use the Right Press Release Format**
Date the release to give editors a sense of timeliness and urgency. Double-space it to allow space for editors to mark it up. Keep it to less than two pages. If you succeed in piquing their interest, they will call for more information. Accompany your article with fully captioned photos that are visually arresting.

**Make Your Team Contact Informed, Helpful, and Readily Available**
The contact name you put at the top of your release must be easy to contact, fully informed about every aspect of your team and able to drop everything to get the editors what they need for the article to meet the publishing deadline.

**Give the Media Enough Time to React**
For significant events, send in a release a month before the event takes place and follow it up two weeks before. When submitting articles after the fact keep them timely, don't wait a month.

**Pick and Choose**
Don't over saturate any one media with every little thing your team does. It will fatigue your media contact. Look at what is most important for your team and fits the criteria for newsworthy coverage. Spread stories around to different outlets. Send less significant items to multiple outlets for use as "as-needed" filler material.

**Always on Duty**
Always be on the lookout for good press opportunities in the back of your mind. Keep a camera handy, even if it's just a disposable that lives in your glove box along with a pen and notepad for jotting down names and facts.