

# *The* Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Nineteen, Spring 2001

## *Tools of the trade*

### The Princess and the Press: How to write a news release that will make you the belle of the ball

BY KIRSTEN COWAN

Everyone who has struggled to get media attention for their organization can find themselves lost in a romantic daydream. A dashing prince (or princess) with a press card wedged in their crown, swoops down on your organization and catapults it into the national spotlight following a fabulous TV appearance, feature article or guest spot. Your vital cause, your innovative products, are on everyone's lips, and you live happily ever after, a sparkling media darling.

In reality of course, the road to media attention has more to do with a skillful pen than a magic wand. How can you zero in on what is newsworthy about your organization and communicate that to those who have the nation's ears (and eyes)? A news release is a key tool, and writing an effective one is easier than you think.

The most important part of writing a news release is the same thing that matters in any kind of writing — write for your audience, not yourself. Of course this is even more key when you are trying to precipitate action on the part of your reader. Even though this seems like common sense, it's amazing how often press releases sound exactly like advertisements. The press are neither your customers nor your Board of Directors — they don't care about the features of your product or the amount of hard work you've done to make the world a better place — they want a story.

The first line and paragraph of your news release need to say it all. Pack the key attention-getting information into

the headline and first paragraph. There's a good chance the rest won't even get read. When you do go into detail, make sure it answers the journalist's or editor's needs. Where's the story? Why do their readers want to know?

Here's a compelling story, spun in two different ways.

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#### *For Immediate Release:*

#### **Impact resistant polymer compound available for townhomes**

A new innovation in housing materials made its debut yesterday. After extensive testing, 3PIGS Inc. is proud to announce that BRICKS™, its space age construction material, is now available. Developed through advances in bonding polymerase technology, BRICKS™ are an affordable, weather resistant alternative to traditional straw and wood materials.

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## *Help Reporters and Improve Your Image*

### How the Media Can Be Positive For Your Business

BY AL ROTHSTEIN

The news media can make a president. It can also make a president resign. It can mean success or failure for you, your product, event, or business venture. Yet many people simply aren't prepared to deal with the media.





Some of the most successful people shake like a leaf when confronted with a television interview. The biggest fear is being misquoted.

I know from my years of reporting (in a previous life) that the great majority of reporters are fair. But we must keep in mind that a reporter's job isn't to please us. It is to get information that the reporter feels the public should know. Their job is to get both sides and get it right.

Just as in most other professions though, there is a small percentage that doesn't care and "won't let the facts get in the way of a good story." It's that small percentage that makes people fear even the good reporters. That fear results in a defensive attitude during an interview and that gives you a negative image on the screen.

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## Media Names & Numbers

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## SOURCES **HotLink**

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# News from Sources

It seems as though spring is finally dawning on most of Canada, and with the first buds of green we at **Sources** are also seeing lots of new things. **Media Names and Numbers 2001** has emerged to exclamations of delight from those who rely on it. We have also hatched a new flock of services at Sources, including the an E-mail press release service. We're incubating a few more, so watch this space for exciting developments.

We've welcomed a few new faces at **Sources** as well. Kim Quashie has joined our coordinating staff, and Jennifer Doyle, Gayle Chaprick and Lynn Fenske are our newest Account Managers. It's great to have all of them as part of our team, in time for the Summer 2001 issue of **Sources**, in production right now. Turn to page three for the latest news about your listing

from Co-ordinators Tracey and Heather.

This issue of *The Sources HotLink* is stuffed with information and tips on maximizing your organization's media relations strategy. I welcome your comments, questions, and even criticisms. Don't hesitate to put pen to paper, or more likely, fingers to keyboard, and drop me a line. My E-mail address is [kcowan@sources.com](mailto:kcowan@sources.com).

Don't forget — *HotLink* is now available online as an Adobe Acrobat document! If your colleagues are bugging you for a copy, they can now see *HotLink* in all its glory online. Check out [www.sources.com/hotlink.htm](http://www.sources.com/hotlink.htm) for archived issues, past articles, Web sites on media and PR and lots more!

Have a healthy and productive Spring.

Kirsten Cowan

Editor, *The Sources HotLink*

## Getting the most from Sources

# Telling Journalists Who You Are

The heart of your **Sources** listing is the Descriptive Paragraph. An effectively written descriptive paragraph will have a noticeable impact on the number of calls your organization receives from journalists. It's worth it to take the time to craft a good paragraph.

The descriptive paragraph is a capsule introduction. Some organizations print their mission statement while others choose to address journalists and researchers directly. Make sure your paragraph is appropriate for **Sources** users. It's important to remember that the journalists using **Sources** are looking for articulate, available experts on issues, not for a shopping list of products or a few lines from your annual report. Tailor your writing to their needs.

One organization that does its descriptive paragraph particularly well is the University of Toronto (see page 317 of the Winter 2001 edition). U of T's descriptive paragraph includes the number of experts available, asks

**Sources** users to call the contacts listed and to take a look at the university's Web site. Another well-written paragraph belongs to The Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence (page 212 of **Sources** Winter 2001). It emphasizes the experience of the Initiative's spokespeople and lists the issues they are able to speak about.

You may want to include essential definitions in your paragraph. Don't assume **Sources** users are familiar with the complexities of what your organization does. Ideally they will call and ask you about specifics, but a well-written definition or phrase may catch a journalist's eye and prompt him or her to call you. The result could be a story about your organization.

For more simple, cost-effective suggestions for improving your **Sources** listing please contact Listings Co-ordinators Tracey Parn and Heather Easton at (416) 964-7799 or [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com) by E-mail.

**The Sources *HotLink* – Spring 2001 Phone: (416) 964-7799**

## Relax a Little!

If you have a presentation to make, a media interview to give, or just a rough day ahead, learning how to relax can mean the difference between a serene sense of accomplishment and a pounding headache. Here are a few tips that take just a few seconds.

Breathe! It's basic to life, yet so often we underestimate the ability of conscious breathing to relax us. Try this simple exercise to harness the power of breath.

- Sit upright in your chair.
- With your eyes closed, take in a long, deep breath through your nose.
- Feel the dry, cool air fill your lungs, and be conscious of letting your stomach expand outward, rather than raising your shoulders.
- When your lungs are full, slowly exhale through your mouth, completely emptying your lungs. It can help to make a low humming noise as you breathe out. Repeat a few times.

By making your respiration conscious, you can relax your breathing and slow your heart rate. Not to mention that extra oxygen to the brain has got to be a good thing.

Visualize! Feeling overwhelmed? Taking a moment to picture a place of seren-

ity can help you escape a pressure-filled environment or calm down before a stressful activity like public speaking.

- Begin by running through the breathing exercise described above, and then create in your mind's eye a relaxing scene, such as a country meadow.
- Involve all your senses, smelling the fresh air and the grass, hearing birds chirping and a brook babbling nearby, and feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin.
- Stay in your visualization for as long as you like, looking around and adding details.

Once you have developed a relaxing visualization, it is easy to "visit" whenever you need a brief time-out.

MOVE! We all hold tension in our bodies, as an aching necks, shoulders and heads can attest. If you can go for a walk, do so. Otherwise, simply standing up, shaking your arms and legs and touching your toes a few times can get the blood moving and release pent-up stress. Yoga, physiotherapy and ergonomic resources all have various stretches and moves that can help the desk-bound overcome stress. Of course check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.

## We want to hear from you!!

By now, you should have received your *Sources* listing package. The deadline for submitting your changed or updated information is April 27, 2001.

Responding to us by this date will ensure that journalists have the latest information about your organization and will help you stay up-to-date and connected with Canada's media. Please take this opportunity to make any changes that are necessary.

If you know that you are unable to respond by the deadline, don't despair! Give us a call and we can make accommodations to suit your organization's schedule.

If you need help with any other aspect of your listing please give us a call at *Sources*, we'd love to help.

Remember — if you are mailing back your renewal or update — we have moved! Our new address is 489 College St., Ste. 305, Toronto, ON M6G 1A5. Our fax and phone number remain the same. Hope to hear from you soon!

*Tracey Parn and Heather Easton*  
Listing Co-ordinators

P.S. If you have lost, misplaced or didn't receive your package, don't worry! Give us a call at *Sources*, A.S.A.P., and we'll fax you another one.

## The Princess and the Press

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Tuesday May 01, 2001, 9:00 am



### "I can't believe I'm here today!" exclaims survivor of wolf attack

3PIGS Inc. scientific developer A. Little Pig was in the midst of testing the company's new building material, BRICKS™, this April, 2001, when the test suddenly became much more serious — he was attacked by a wolf. Amazingly, not only did Pig survive, but the test house was undamaged. "Traditionally houses have crumbled under the impact of wolf attacks" says Pig. "the development of BRICKS™ means we can achieve a level of wolf-proofing that would have been impossible ten years ago"

There are a few other basics to keep in mind that will ensure you have a coach and not a pumpkin on your hands. Include complete, accurate contact information, with an individual's name. Make sure the person listed is articulate and available. If you mention a Web site in your release, make sure it has full details about your product or event before you send the release — not after.

The Internet is filled with accessible information on putting together news releases with that extra touch of fairy dust. Check out [www.infoscavenger.com/prtips.htm](http://www.infoscavenger.com/prtips.htm), or the five part workshop, including an interactive template, at [www.canadaone.com/promote/pressrelease.html](http://www.canadaone.com/promote/pressrelease.html).

Your relationship with the press might not be a fairy tale, but it definitely doesn't have to be horror story.

### MAILING LIST RENTALS

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#### Sources

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## How the Media Can Be Positive...

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### "No Comment!"

Your fear can tempt you to simply say "no comment," which will also make you look bad. "No comment" invites confrontation and makes you look like you are hiding something.

When there is a confrontation between you and the camera, the camera always wins. The chances of a confrontation with a reporter increase when a reporter hasn't heard from you by mid-afternoon.

There are several ways to avoid confrontations. Among them:

- Respect the reporter's deadline.
- Show concern for what a reporter is asking you.
- If you can't grant an interview, explain why.

Over the past fifteen years, I have seen relations between the news media and many businesses get better. In my seminars, I have seen a real desire by participants to improve media relations.

Businesses can improve media relations by helping to educate a reporter before the interview takes place. You have years of experience in your profession, while a reporter has just started to find out about you or your business.

Another way a business can help itself is by showing its human side. There are a number of ways to do that effectively. After all, you are an organization of human beings. Making the media aware of that can only help you get your point across, while it helps reporters do their jobs.

If both you and the reporter benefit, the chances are you will do business with that reporter again, good business.

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**E-mail:** [mediabrain@mindspring.com](mailto:mediabrain@mindspring.com).

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## HotLink Resources

# Expand your knowledge by getting advice from the experts!

### Speakers' Gold Newsletter

Put together by author and speaker Cathleen Fillmore, *Speakers' Gold* is a monthly newsletter that combines articles, reviews and tips of interest to professional speakers and anyone involved in public relation and marketing. For more information or to subscribe, visit [www.speakersgold.com](http://www.speakersgold.com) or E-mail Cathleen at [cfillmore@idirect.com](mailto:cfillmore@idirect.com).

Here's a taste of *Speakers' Gold* — the complete text of this article appeared in the February 2001 edition.

### Making your topic hum with humour

By James E. Shaw, Ph.D.

*After spending four years inside state youth prisons interviewing 103 girls and boys incarcerated for committing homicide, my public speaking about murderous kids turning school yards into grave yards, proved to me that, occasionally, paying audiences were disconnecting from me. My book, Jack and Jill, Why They Kill, a book for parents, was being widely praised across the country. Yet a flurry of highly successful radio and television interviews nationwide gave me no indication of what was missing in my speeches.*

*Greg Dean, my friend and renowned comedy coach and writer, offered to help. His joke development method, as described in his excellent new book, Step by Step to Stand-Up Comedy (New Hampshire: Heinemann), is not about finding jokes and haphazardly peppering your subject with them, but on using the story lines (facts) of your message and weaving original humor into them.*

### On the Record

An amazing resource for those involved in media relations is Simon Fraser University's online publication, *On The Record*, <http://www.sfu.ca/mediapr/onrecd.htm>. The site is intended to help the staff and faculty at SFU who may be unfamiliar with dealing with the media, but need to learn in a hurry how to put their best foot forward when on the spot. It's a great place to direct those in your organization just learning how to deal with the media. Also handy when you need to convince folks that a media relations strategy is worth investing in. Visit <http://www.sfu.ca/mediapr>.

Here's a tidbit from Simon Fraser's, *On The Record*:

### The Case For Co-operation

*Is there really any reason at all to bother with the media? Not too surprisingly, perhaps, the answer is yes. In fact, there are some very compelling reasons to co-operate with the media. For one thing, at Simon Fraser University, we depend on government for much of our financing and, as you know, the government is now paying particularly close attention to how it's spending the taxpayers' money. Newspaper, radio and television stories about the accomplishments of the university and its faculty to help demonstrate that the money is being well-spent. Such stories show that significant research is being conducted at Simon Fraser University, enhancing its reputation as a quality institution where important work is being done. And a good reputation is a big help when recruiting top-flight faculty and students, to say nothing of persuading potential donors that Simon Fraser is worthy of their financial support.*

*In addition, public opinion plays a key role in government spending decisions, and one of the most effective ways to influence public opinion is through the media. A single appearance on television, for example, gets your message across to tens of thousand of people — far more than you could possibly reach in years of public lectures.*

## Subject Index Advertisements

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A placement in the Subject Index is inexpensive, but the enhancement to your media relations plan is priceless. To reserve your spot in the issues — and the headlines, call *Sources* today!

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