

The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

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Keeping Current

BY ALLAN BONNER

In the 1960s TV show Star Trek, Captain Kirk would flip open his hand held sensor/communicator and survey the planet he'd just landed on. Today, on this planet, I can open up my hand held device and take a picture or get the news. On vacation, I can dial a number and hear a walking tour of the neighbourhood I'm in. If I'm car shopping, I can download information on a new car in a showroom that's closed for the weekend.

We are finally seeing a fundamental change in the way people send and receive information. I say finally, because this has been predicted for 60 years.

Flying cars, mail delivered by rockets and robots cleaning our homes just didn't materialize.

But technological convergence is actually happening. In 1968 Canadian journalist Patrick Watson wrote a book predicting that one day we'd come home, sit in an egg shaped chair and push buttons to see movies, shop or get the news.

Fast forward thirty five years and phone companies are putting TV, piano lessons, nanny cameras and such on computer screens. The egg shaped chair isn't part of the deal though.

Whether campaigning or governing, a successful politician has to keep up with new technology. It is said that President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill wrote letters to each other during World War II. The information would have been four days out of date by the time the letter arrived. They also occasionally used the telephone, time zones and line quality permitting.

During John Kennedy's time, documentary maker Robert Drew invented a light weight camera with sound. If you haven't seen it, you can't imagine the difference between the coverage this afforded versus the static shot of stuffed shirts standing behind a microphone.

In the Vietnam war, reporters would talk

a flight attendant into carrying a can of film to London or Hong Kong so it could get on the network news the next day. All those shocking reports from the war were at least 18 hours old.

But in those days sixty million Americans watched the network newscasts every night. Now it's dropped to twenty million, and their average age is sixty.

The young demographic is getting its news from late night comedy and talk shows, the Internet (chat rooms, radio, blogs), Much Music, satellite radio and cable.

Here are some facts and figures:

- Bloggers are young, wealthy and educated
- Blogging is publishing and subject to all relevant laws
- Some companies encourage employee blogging as a way to reach out to customers
- Some companies fire employees for blogging about company information
- Blogs helped propel Howard Dean into national prominence
- Blogs helped destroy Dan Rather's career
- Some days 10,000 new blogs are created

But about 50% of Americans have never even heard the word blog. Only about 5% of US companies use blogs and fewer are interactive. Even political blogs only attract about 5% of Internet users.

Some say blogging has crested.

The first step in really understanding this fundamental change is to recognize that it's a change in form, not meaning. In the *Harvard Business Review*, Business guru Michael E. Porter says "in our quest to see how the Internet is different, we have failed to see how the Internet is the same". Lawyers, businesses and politicians are

Put it in Writing

BY LYNN FENSKE

Earlier this year Steve Slaunwhite asked me to make a contribution to the 2nd edition of his book *Start & Run a Copywriting Business* (Self-Counsel Press, 2005, 217 pp. plus CD-ROM, ISBN 1-55180-633-9). He wanted professional advice on how to write press releases, something concise that would provide instruction to writers new to the format and style of PR/media writing. Some information bears repeating so here they are, as they appear in the book, my top five tips for writing press releases:

Be Newsworthy.

While assessing a story's newsworthiness is often subjective and instinctive, there are guidelines you can use to test its news appeal. Consider whether your story is immediate. Is it close to home? Does it affect many people? Does it have lasting importance? Certainly emphasize what is "new", "better" or "different" about your subject matter by explaining how it affects the reader.

Be Brief, especially in the headline.

You are writing to appeal to media professionals who specialize in three-worded headlines and eight second sound bites, so keep your message short and concise. Choose your words carefully. Trying to fit the whole story into a headline or writing more than one full page of body copy does not make for a compelling press release.

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Put It In Writing

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Follow the set format.

Press releases are structured with a specific place and spacing for all components including the headline, release time, dateline, body copy, end marker and contact information. Always follow the format. Put everything in its proper place, on a document that uses or resembles corporate letterhead.

Write like a reporter.

Be factual and objective. Answer the five W's and one H – who, what, where, when, why and how. Always write the release in a third person voice using simple, precise language. No ten-dollar words or excessive techno-jargon – unless you want to alienate your audience.

Include quotes.

Support the facts in the press release with quotations from key personnel or people directly involved in the story. Their commentary helps to personalize the story and give it relevance and perspective.

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Keeping Current

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having the same discussion about blogs as they had over a decade ago about E-mail.

No one is entirely sure how any new technology will shake down, but, look at it this way. The glass window in the car show room is a medium of communication. We look, become tantalized and buy. A TV set in an electronics store window broadcasting pictures of the car does the same thing through a different form of communication. Ditto the hand bill, barker on a soap box and even the WiFi (Wireless hook up to computers) or VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). These are all different ways of downloading similar information about that car.

The consumer doesn't care whether the pictures of the car are being broadcast over the air, arriving on cable, broadband (copper wire or fibre optic), VCR, CD-ROM (small or large), 8mm (16 or 35), beta or WiFi. Consumers care about content — the car.

The important thing for a politician to address is fragmentation, not new technology. Constituents are still watching a screen — computer, TV, cell or Blackberry. The issue is control. If you wanted the news 30 years ago, you watched the networks. Today there are a dozen choices and the consumer controls which to use. Cumbersome technology like hot type empowers elites. Simple technology like transistor radios or interactive Blackberry blogs empower users. This is almost as important as content.

The issue is also immediacy. In the old days, if you were angry at a newspaper column, you had to drag out a typewriter, bang out a reasoned response and pop it in the mail. Then E-mail meant you could skip a few steps and get your message out quicker. Now blogs feature both instant access and the possibility of instant response.

Cyber-democrats can now say they “put it on their blog” or “told off a blogger.” This may feel satisfying, but what if only one person reads it? How is it fundamentally different than sending a telegram forty years ago?

The trouble with technology is that there's no free lunch. You may gain immediacy and interactivity with the

Web, but you may also lose permanency and power. You may get high status with a *Globe and Mail* piece, but you miss the Much Music crowd.

But with a blog, a piece in the *Globe* or an appearance on a cable show that only two percent of the population watches, you can get a bounce or multiplier effect. Mainstream networks and cable news shows are reading blogs on the air to viewers, thus giving them legs. The *Globe* piece can be scanned and E-mailed to thousands who would never otherwise read that newspaper.

All media try to extend their brands into other media, gobble up existing media content, or want to be gobbled up. Historically, newspapers gobbled up handbills and signs by putting advertising on their front pages. They also ate up political pamphlets by providing commentary, coverage and advocacy. Early radio newscasts were written by newspaper journalists. TV gobbled up film, radio hosts and wire service reporters. Now, everybody's trying to put music, entertainment and news on a computer screen or a hand held device.

The trouble is the old media won't go away. Sure, we don't use hand-held megaphones much anymore. The Victorian Stereopticon with two pictures that simulated depth when the wooden device was held up to the eyes morphed into Viewmasters and then all but disappeared.

For the most part a new media of communication don't replace old ones. They are just added on to the mix and overlap a little with the others.

It is not clear how convergence is going to work out. One good guess is that we will all have an information appliance to carry around which acts like a phone, computer, TV, stereo, movie theatre and newspaper all at the same time. But we're still going to have all those older media as well.

Politicians who need to connect with constituents need to surf on the new media, while not ignoring the old.

Allan Bonner has coached approximately 30,000 people to deal with some of the most controversial and public issues of our time. He is the author of several books on business issues including: Doing and Saying the Right Thing and The Bonner Business Series: Media Relations.

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Effective Media Relations

You may be a speaker, a consultant, the owner of a small business, a staff or board member of a non-profit association, or involved in communications in a corporate or government setting. You know that promotion and publicity are crucial to success, and you know that getting media attention is one of the very best ways of getting publicity.

Media coverage is arguably the most valuable kind of publicity there is — it is based on the *news value* of what you do or say, and is therefore more inherently credible than advertising, which is paid for. Plus the potential reach of the media coverage you can earn far exceeds the reach of any advertising you can possibly afford.

The problem is: how do you get the media to pay attention to you? For many people, that is a problem they feel uncomfortable tackling.

Media Relations is Human Relations

If there is one key message that runs through the articles that have appeared in *The Sources HotLink* through the years, it is that *media relations is human relations*. Journalism — broadcast, print, or online — is about telling stories, and compelling stories are about people and their lives. If they are going to give their viewers or readers interesting stories, journalists need people to talk to, human contacts, people who can provide quotes and background, people who can make the story interesting.

There are certainly techniques and strategies for dealing with the media. But it's important not to get carried away by them. The key thing is to be authentic, to be yourself, not to sound rehearsed or phony.

If you get a call from the media, they are in all likelihood going to be calling you to ask you about a topic that you know about and that you feel passionate about. In fact, the likelihood is that you know a lot about the topic in question *because* you're passionate about it. This is important: Figure out what moves you and what you know about, and you'll be a long way along when it comes to developing your media "strategy".

Your relationships with journalists can be important to your success. All too often, however, we only think of these relationships as something to call upon when we need them. However, like any living thing, our relationships with journalists need to be

maintained over time in order to be fruitful.

Journalists turn to you for information if they know they can rely on you for credible, accurate information, not self-serving advertorial. By forwarding interesting news about research, developments and ongoing trends in your field — not necessarily directly about yourself or your organization — that you pick up at conferences, events or from colleagues, you can nurture a mutually beneficial relationship with journalists that will reward you hundred-fold.

Take the time to get to know the reporters you want to reach. Do a search through their publications' archives, often available on the Internet. Read articles they have written that relate to your issues. Each reporter has a different interest and priorities. By tailoring your approach to a reporter, you can greatly increase your chances of getting coverage.

The basics always apply. All the relationship nurturing in the world won't benefit you if you fail to return journalists' calls within the day, don't provide clear, concise, relevant story information, and don't have additional graphic, video and print materials.

With proper care, the relationships you and your organization develop with journalists can last a lifetime — and benefit everyone.

Search Engine Power

Finally, a word about *Sources*, the publisher of *The Sources HotLink*. *Sources* is designed to get journalists to call you. Reporters and broadcasters need knowledgeable sources to interview and quote when they write stories or line up guests. The *Sources* directory is the first place most journalists turn to when they need to find experts and spokespersons. Even when they're doing a search on Google or another search engine, they are likely to be led to your *Sources* listing — Google alone has more than 89,000 index entries pointing searchers to the experts — like you — on the *Sources* site!

Sources works because it gives journalists what they most need in their day-to-day work: a wealth of human contacts — **people like you** — offering a wide range of views and expertise, ready and willing to speak to the media. That's why a *Sources* listing complements and magnifies your other efforts to publicize yourself.

Introducing: The Sources Calendar

Sources has launched a new online feature — *The Sources Calendar* — to help you inform the news media about your upcoming events.

Launched in January, the *Sources Calendar* is already attracting considerable traffic. To increase its usefulness to writers, editors, and journalists, the *Sources Calendar* lists the deadlines for all writing- and journalism-related awards in Canada, as well as the national and regional conferences and meetings of all the major media-related associations.

Its main purpose, however, is to enable you to inform the media of your newsworthy events. Listings in the *Calendar* appear chronologically, and can also be filtered by location, date, and topic.

Best of all, you can list items in the *Sources Calendar* for **FREE** when you are listed in *Sources*.

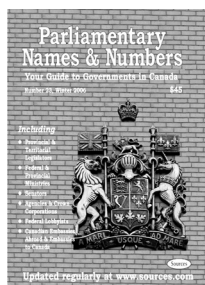
To add your event to *The Sources Calendar*:

- Go to www.sources.com and click on **Sources Calendar**
- Click on the **Add an Event** button.
- Enter your **username** and **password**. (These have been sent to you by mail; if you have misplaced them, just call the Sources office at 416-964-7799 with your Customer ID and we can send it to you.)
- Enter your event into the form, and save when you're done.

It's that simple!

And just a reminder: Your *Sources* listing automatically entitles you to post four news releases annually — **free** — on the *Sources* site. Call for details or visit www.sources.com/Releases.htm.

Parliamentary Names & Numbers



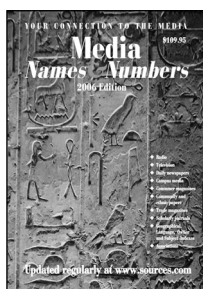
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