

# The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Ten, Winter 1999

## A Reporter's Mindset

The people I train to deal with the media ask me a lot of questions about how reporters think. Here are some of those questions, some answers and recommendations.

### Q: What is a reporter's job?

**A:** A reporter wants to "get the story" and communicate it factually to the audience. In doing so, the reporter must paint a picture in the most interesting way.

**What you can do:** During an interview your role is also that of a communicator, and you too must paint a vivid picture to your audience. Facts and figures don't always do this effectively. Finding the human element does.

### Q: Why does a reporter always seem to want controversy?

**A:** A reporter wants to find the existing controversy in a story, if there is one, and find the solution.

**What you can do:** When you are being interviewed, show why you are part of the solution.

### Q: Why does a reporter interview me for 30 minutes, and use ten seconds?

**A:** A reporter is looking for interesting, catchy sound bites.

**What you can do:** You can help control the outcome by making your answers short and to the point.

### Q: Why does the reporter come into the story with his/her mind made up?

**A:** The best reporters do not do this. For those who do, it depends upon the story, the reporter's background, and the reporter's sources.

**What you can do:** If it appears that a reporter has his/her mind made up, challenge them and correct them immediately!

*Continued on Page 2*

## Crisis Communications Checklist

In times of crisis, it is all too easy to be "reactive" and allow the swell of events to overtake your communication plan. Some time spent before trouble hits can be worth millions. Case in point: a survey showed that public confidence in Hydro-Québec actually rose following the infamous ice storm of last January. By having a crisis communications plan that included a commitment to keeping Quebecers informed, Hydro-Québec managed to improve its public relations in spite of service disruptions and long delays. Remember – every crisis is an opportunity.

1. Who responds in a crisis? By having clear responsibilities within your organization, you avoid looking as though you are dodging questions. Hydro-Québec received praise last winter by having their president speak directly to the people.
2. Don't forget internal communications. During a crisis people inside your organization have a practical and emotional need to be kept informed, just as much as the public. During the ice storm, Hydro-Québec communications held daily briefings

between the day and night shifts, keeping everyone abreast of the situation.

3. Have your facts ready to go. Fact sheets and "FAQ" (frequently asked questions) sheets about your organization are a handy source of background information that journalists on a deadline need. If you provide the facts, then you know they are correct.
4. Accentuate the positive. The most valuable benefit of a well-thought out crisis strategy is that your representatives will feel and show trust in your organization's ability to handle the problem. Nothing impresses like real confidence, and only advance planning can bestow it. Secure in the knowledge that you were ready for the crisis, and are moving to solve it, your spokesperson's attitude is the best media relations you have.

For more about Hydro-Québec's public relations savvy during Ice Storm '98, check out *Marketing Magazine*, December 21, 1998, "Smart PR warms Quebecers to their hydro utility."

## Inside this Issue

- Best PR Websites, pg. 7
- News Release Know-How, pg. 6
- Develop an Online Strategy That Works! pg. 4

## News From Sources

We're well into the new year, the second-last of the millenium, and our new year's resolutions feel like they have a little more weight this year. If staying on top of things is part of the "New You" for 1999, then this issue of *HotLink* will give you lots of help! On page one, Al Rothstein's looks inside a reporter's brain – something we'd all love to do! Turn to page seven for a guide to the best PR resources on the Internet, compiled by *HotLink's* dedicated Web surfers. Speaking of surfing, the Crisis Communications Checklist on page one has great advice on how to stay out of hot water.

With the new year comes a new *Sources*! Bigger and better than ever, the Winter 1999 *Sources* has been distributed to over 11,000 journalists across Canada, from the new offices of the *National Post*, to the venerable community papers that link small communities across the country. Enjoy your complimentary copy!

I am always looking for stories and articles of interest to *HotLink's* 1000 plus readers. If you would like to share a proven technique, valuable resource or a cautionary tale, call me at 416-964-7799. Best of luck to all of us in keeping our millennial resolutions!

Kirsten Cowan, Editor,  
*The Sources HotLink*

## SOURCES **HotLink**

Winter 1999

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## Recent Letters from Journalists

Ever wonder how we at *Sources* can be so confident that journalists rely on our service every day? Here is a small sample of some unsolicited requests for copies we've recently received;

Hi from CTS!

As Associate Producer for RHONDA LONDON LIVE I would like to request two copies of *Sources*. This will help me tremendously in researching guests for our program.

I look forward to receiving [*Sources*].

Sincerely,

Paul Willoughby  
Associate Producer,  
RHONDA LONDON LIVE

\*\*\*\*\*

Please send me for use in our news bureau three copies of *Sources*, beginning with the current issue.

Thanks very much,

Larry Greenberg, News editor,  
*The Wall Street Journal*.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was most overjoyed to have discovered the *Sources* publication... I would very much like to receive a copy of your directory and other source materials that you offer journalists.

Yours,

Stuart Becker, Freelance writer,  
Market analysis and Industry Reports

## Media Outlets Which Have Recently Called Or Written Requesting Sources

*Assembly of First Nations Bulletin* – 10 copies for the AFN's newspaper distributed to over 100,000 homes across Canada.

*Atlantic Business Magazine* – two copies for this monthly publication distributed across the Atlantic provinces.

*The Suburban Papers* – an additional copy for their community papers

... serving the Montreal area. "CBC Radio National Newsroom" – a dozen additional copies  
*Reader's Digest Magazine* – four copies for their Montreal offices  
"Pamela Wallin Live" – six additional copies for the production staff of this hot news show.

### A Reporter's Mindset *Continued from Page 1*

**Q: Why does the reporter who covers our beat never get it right?**

**A:** Sometimes we are to blame when a story is inaccurate. When we refuse to do an interview or don't give the reporter enough time, we can't expect the reporter to understand our side.

**What you can do:** Use media encounter as opportunities to educate the reporter. Back up what you say with documentation.

**Q: We send out press releases. Why don't reporters respond?**

**A:** Your news is not always a reporter's news.

**What you can do:** Keep in mind that a lot of others in your position are fighting for air time. You must learn how to sell you story to the media, and make it stand out.

Remember that reporters have a job to do. If you help the reporter, you are really helping yourself. You will have more control over how your message is delivered.

*Courtesy of Al Rothstein Media Services, Inc., specialists in spokesperson training and media relations seminars.*

Phone: 1-800-453-6352

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

WWW:

<http://mediabrain.home.mindspring.com>

The Sources **HotLink** – Winter 1999 Phone: (416) 964-7799

# Telling Journalists Who You Are

The heart of your *Sources* listing is the Descriptive Paragraph.

The Descriptive Paragraph tells journalists before they call, what you do. Think of it as 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.

You may also want to take some time to make your paragraph more appealing to journalists. While most journalists and researchers start in the Subject Index and choose organizations to call according to the subject headings they are listed under, some browse through the listings pages looking for inspiration. Your descriptive paragraph could provide the spark of inspiration for their next story.

One organization that does its descriptive paragraph particularly well is the University of Toronto (see page 308 of the Winter 99 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 WWW site.

Which brings me to another point – if you have a WWW site be sure to include the URL in your *Sources* listing. Additionally, you can hotlink your site to SOURCES SELECT® *Online* for only \$25 per year.

Another feature you may want to add to your listing is a French-language paragraph. *Sources* is a national service. Almost 1,000 copies of the print edition

are distributed in Quebec. French-speaking journalists and researchers anywhere in Canada can access your listing on the *Sources* Internet site. If you want to address *Sources* users in Canada's other official language the cost is only \$99 per year for a 60 word paragraph.

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.

One other thing to consider in evaluating your descriptive paragraph, after 50 words there is a \$5 charge per word. The extra cost may well be worth it. But always write as economically as you can.

Whatever choice you make please ask for help if you need it – we've helped many organizations spruce up their listings – and do take the time to review your entire listing at least once a year. One simple technique: give your listing to one or two persons outside your organization to read. Once they're finished ask them a few basic questions. If they're puzzled or confused consider rewriting.

For more simple, cost-effective suggestions for improving your *Sources* listing please contact our Listings Co-ordinator, Tracey Parn at (416) 964-7799 or tparn@sources.com by E-mail.

# Raise Your Profile!

Over 80% of organizations and individuals listed in *Sources* choose to enhance their image by including a logo or photograph with their listing in print and online.

To be able to reproduce your image clearly we will need a good original copy – letterhead, business cards, PMTs are all fine. Please do not send a faxed copy or disk of your information.

A logo or photograph with a catchy descriptive paragraph will increase your appeal to journalists, editors and researchers – making them more likely to contact you for information.

With questions about your logo or other aspects of your *Sources* listing, please phone: (416) 964-7799, fax: (416) 964-8763 or E-mail us at sources@sources.com. We're here to help you.

Tracey Parn  
Listings Co-ordinator

**Don't  
Forget...**



You can  
make changes to your  
listing at any time! Let  
us know when your information  
changes and we'll  
update your online listing  
within a week.

## Do's and Don'ts of Your Paragraph

- DO** Direct your paragraph to journalists
- DO** Provide a spark of inspiration
- DO** Include your WWW and E-mail info
- DO** Consider a French paragraph
- DO** Keep it simple!
- DON'T** be afraid to call Sources for help

**Listing  
Helpline**

**(416) 964-7799**

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# Get the Internet working for you

BY ULLI DIEMER

The stampede to get on the World Wide Web is still under way. But computer publications increasingly report a smaller but significant rush to get off the Web, as companies discover expected revenues and promotional benefits aren't materializing.

The disappointed ones tend to be those who plunged in with inadequate planning and excessive expectations.

It is possible to develop an effective presence on the Web at a reasonable cost. But you have to follow some common-sense rules.

Ask yourself:

- ♦ What are your goals? Is your primary objective to promote awareness of your company or organization? Are you seeking to broaden support for your cause? Are you planning to use your site to sell products or services?
- ♦ Have you clearly thought through your aims and objectives? Have you established a budget? A timeline?
- ♦ Whom do you want to reach? Members? Potential members? Customers? Potential customers? Supporters of your cause? People who share an interest in a particular subject?
- ♦ How do you want people to use your site? To access information about the issues you're involved in? To find out more about your products? To place orders? To interact online with others who share your interests?

## FACT:

89% of journalists go online monthly\*  
45% do so weekly\*

## FACT:

5,000 journalists a month use the Sources World Wide Web site

- ♦ Will your site offer features to make users want to come back time after time?

Once you've answered these questions to your satisfaction, you need to develop a marketing strategy.

All too often, one hears of organizations pouring time and money into developing a World Wide Web site, then sitting back waiting for the world to find them.

It won't happen.

Thousands of new Internet sites start up every day, joining the millions already in existence. How will the people you want to reach find out about *your* Web site?

Even if they happen to learn of its existence, what will motivate them to check out your site rather than countless other equally interesting sites they could choose from?

When it comes to World Wide Web sites, nothing could be further from the truth than the *Field of Dreams* fantasy "Build it and they will come." If you build it without a coherent and targeted marketing strategy, *no one* will come.

In developing your strategy, keep the following points in mind:

- ♦ Your WWW site is one more tool in your communications/public relations tool-chest. It can *supplement* your existing ways of getting your message out, but it can't *replace* them.
- ♦ The World Wide Web is not a broadcast medium. Your content doesn't go out on the airwaves. It sits on your

site, unseen, until you find ways to attract and lead users to it.

- ♦ Your WWW site produces costs (time, money) as well as benefits. These have to be weighed against the costs and benefits of other ways of communicating your message to your customers, constituency, or the public. Don't starve your tried and proven communications methods to build a gold-plated WWW site.
- ♦ Don't put all your eggs in the Internet basket. Seventy-five percent of Canadians don't use the Internet. Fewer than half of the 25% who do use it are frequent users.
- ♦ A WWW site works best when it is integrated into a co-ordinated communications strategy. Your other communications efforts should publicize and support your WWW site, and your site should publicize and support your other efforts.
- ♦ Make sure your World Wide Web URL (address) is mentioned prominently on your letterhead, in your sales literature, in your *Sources* list-

## FACT:

Two-thirds of journalists use the Internet for research and reference on articles.\*

15% rated "search engine" as the most important reason to visit a site.\*

\*Results from Middleberg & Ross Media in Cyberspace Survey

ing, in all your communications.

- ♦ Make sure your WWW site home page gives your mailing address, phone number, E-mail address, and fax number. Mention it in your print and broadcast advertisements.
- ♦ Take advantage of the fact that experienced WWW users rely on online directories, subject guides, indexes, and specialized search tools to find what they're looking for. Massive "search engines" typically return thousands of "hits," most of them irrelevant, for each search. It's more valuable to be listed with the specialized sites which place their emphasis on *selecting* the best sources of information and on providing *annotation* and sophisticated *indexing*.
- ♦ Make sure the key online sites reaching your intended audience are

aware of you and have indexed you appropriately. If your site is about birds, ask the Birding in Canada site to establish a link to you. If you want to reach journalists, make sure you are listed with *Sources*, since SOURCES SELECT *Online* is the primary site for Canadian journalists.

- ♦ Saying "We have a Web site" is comparable to saying "We have a phone." Your phone won't ring unless you have an effective strategy for attracting calls. Your World Wide Web site won't work for you either without an effective strategy to make it part of your overall communications and public relations strategy.

*Sources* General Manager Ulli Diemer co-ordinates the content and design of the SOURCES SELECT *Online* World Wide Web site (<http://www.sources.com>).

## Resources That Will Help You Get More Out of the Internet

*1998 Canadian Internet Handbook* and the *1998 Canadian Internet New User's Handbook*.

BY JIM CARROLL AND RICK BROADHEAD

These are the books to have for those getting started, and those looking to go deeper into the online world. Refreshingly Canadian in an area usually dominated by American perspectives.

*The Internet Unplugged*.

BY MICHAEL A. BANKS

This tome will show you around the bells and whistles that turn a

neophyte surfer into a Big Kahuna. Don't be fooled by the first glance – *The Internet Unplugged* is written in a very accessible style.

*Dean's Digital World*.

BY DEAN TUDOR

In every issue of *Sources* you find a great article from Ryerson University professor Dean Tudor. In the Winter 1999 issue, turn to page 346 and help yourself to Dean's expert advice for finding Canadian information on the Internet. Check out back issues of *Sources* for more of *Dean's Digital World*.

## New Area Code for Alberta

Alberta has a new area code! Numbers north of Edmonton, including the city itself, are now reached with a 780 area code. The southern half of the province, including Calgary, remains 403. The change took place on January

25th, but the old area code will be routed through until July 12th. Don't wait until then! Update your address book and speed dial now!



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Does your organization produce a publication or have a Web site worthy of praise?

Let us know at  
416-964-7799, or  
[sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com)  
so we can tell HotLink's readers all about it

### We want to hear your voice!

Do you have questions or comments about this newsletter, your listing in *Sources*, or any of the services *Sources* provides? Call us at (416) 964-7799 or [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com) by E-mail. Your suggestions and observations are important to us!

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## Sources Hot Tip

# Getting the Most from E-mail

The E-mail I receive from journalists seeking assistance with their research and from organizations listed with *Sources* is often puzzling. Many messages are unaddressed, unsigned and written in haste. Some queries require detective work before we can send a proper response. E-mail deserves as much attention as other means of communication. Consider the following tips:

Check your E-mail daily. If your E-mail address is included in your *Sources* listing it may be used by journalists (especially night owls or those in other time zones). If someone has posted a message in the middle of the night he or she is probably hoping for a reply early the next day.

If you include your E-mail address on your business card, letterhead or in your *Sources* listing and you don't have the time to check your E-mail consider removing it or replacing it with one main business E-mail address.

Respond to inquiries from journalists and researchers *immediately* and consider quoting parts of the original message where appropriate. Quoting the original message is like repeating the question in an interview. It can help clarify your answer.

Include your full name, name of your organization, regular mailing address, phone number and fax number, and E-mail address on *all* E-mail messages. A journalist who receives an E-mail message and is unable to figure out who sent it may use a quote from another organization which has included full contact information.

Submit your E-mail messages to the same scrutiny you do your business letters. Remember that E-mail messages reflect your organization.

Finally, **E-mail is on the record.**

## Share the Good News

Has your organization generated media coverage recently? Share the details and a copy of the story. Fax: (416) 964-8763, mail: 4 Phipps St., Ste. 109, Toronto, ON M4Y 1J5, E-mail: [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com).

# Successful News Releases – 7 Must-Know Tips

BY BARRIE ZWICKER

Before you send out your next news release review the following:

1. **Make sure it's important enough.** One or two "ho-hum" news releases are like crying wolf. If you get a reputation for sending out releases when they aren't warranted, you may end up being ignored when your organization has something really important to tell the world.
2. **Make it short, preferably one page.**
3. **Include the Five W's:** who, what, when, where, why. If you have useful background material, send it as an attachment.
4. **Use clear ordinary language.**
5. **Be sure to include the name or names of people in your organization who can be reached before and after office hours in case of questions.** List business and home phone numbers. One unanswered phone can "turn off" a reporter on a bad day.
6. **Consider how and when to release your information.** Keep deadlines in mind. You could release your information – if it's important enough – on a riverbank (pollution story), courthouse steps (legal case) or at the home of your president.
7. **At the end of every news release, include "See our listing on page XXX of the current edition of *Sources*, or at [www.sources.com](http://www.sources.com)"** This reminds journalists of an excellent additional source of information about you – one at their fingertips. It shows how serious and organized you are about media relations. The journalist recipients of your press release will tend to remember – between press releases – they can find you in *Sources*.

*Barrie Zwicker is Publisher of Sources and Parliamentary Names & Numbers and a Segment Presenter specializing in media criticism and the Internet on Vision-TV's daily human affairs program Skylight. He can be reached at 416-964-7799 or at 416-651-5588 (home/writing studio).*

## Nunavut is coming!

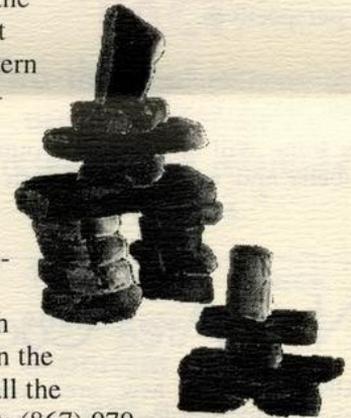
April 1st will mark a major change in the map of Canada's North. The Northwest Territories will divide to form the Western and Nunavut Territories. Nunavut stretches over 1.9 square kilometers, from the North Pole to the 60th parallel.

The territorial capital will be Iqaluit on Baffin Island. For everything you need to contact the Nunavummiut (people of Nunavut), subscribe to

*Parliamentary Names & Numbers*, with all-new Nunavut information coming in the Spring 1999 issue. In the meantime, call the

Nunavut Public Affairs office in Iqaluit: (867) 979-

5822. Also worth a visit is Nunavut's Information Gateway [www.nunavut.com](http://www.nunavut.com). They have loads of information and a great collection of links.



## Editor's Picks

# Websites Worth A Visit

Sick of waiting through endless keyword searches? You're not alone. The World Wide Web can be the greatest boon to your information searches or the biggest cause of headaches. Lists of useful URLs have saved my sanity on more than one occasion – here's a few that might help yours when your looking for facts, support, resources or links about world events and media relations.

### <http://www.cprs.ca>

Check out the virtual home of the Canadian Public Relations Society. It lists awards, accreditation, programs, special events, resources, chapter locations, and links to other public relations sites.

### <http://www.iabc.com>

Keep abreast of the industry internationally. The International Association of Business Communicators' useful resource and networking site for people involved in employee communications, marketing communications, public affairs or public relations.

### <http://www.usprnet.com>

Home to the American group, The National Public Relations Network. This site features a professional directory of over 2,500 public relations agencies. Information and articles on relevant public relations issues, such as speech writing and trade shows, are a boon to those seeking tips without a lot of chatter.

### <http://www.ragan.com>

If you want to know more about technical communications, this site offers reports on video, online resources, Internet, Intranet, CD ROMs and news bulletins. A gold-mine for techies and non-techies alike.

### <http://www.crtc.gc.ca>

Current news, news archives and social issues relating to communications are some of the topics relating to public relations on this easily navigated, novice-friendly site.

### <http://www.eycan.com>

Ernst & Young's Web contains a wealth of information. Its articles, ideas, question and answers, and links are especially valuable. E&Y's media survey is justly famous, and can be found here.

### <http://www.newswire.ca>

This site offers press releases, government sites and survey results. To find information on public relations in Canada, start a search based on organization, date or keywords. Or find information and links to American public relations sites at <http://www.prnewswire.com>

What Internet bookmarks make your life easier? Call Kirsten at *Sources* (416) 964-7799 or E-mail your favourites to [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com)

## Put Yourself in The Spotlight!

Display advertising puts your listing in the limelight every time a reader opens *Sources*. Bell Canada, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, CN and many others use advertisements to direct journalists to their listings and also to raise awareness about their specific services like resource materials, hot-lines, media directories or World Wide Web sites. Call Michelle Hernandez at (416) 964-7799 to find out how advertising in *Sources* can get you rave reviews!

## Media Relations – The 10 Commandments

Reprinted with permission from the Simon Fraser University World Wide Web site at: <http://www.sfu.ca/mediapr/>. The SFU listing is on page 297 of the Winter 1999 edition of *Sources*.

1. Respond as promptly as possible to media requests and try to respect their deadlines.
2. Make it clear at the outset whether you're speaking for yourself or on behalf of your organization.
3. Try to be frank and open during an interview.
4. Practice making your points in 20 to 30 seconds.
5. Use uncomplicated language and avoid jargon.
6. Rephrase questions in your responses to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.
7. Don't try to cover up bad news. Often, the impact of bad news can be reduced by being first to bring it to public attention.
8. Avoid emotionalism, unsubstantiated statements and off-the-record comments.
9. Take some time to collect your thoughts before answering difficult questions. If necessary, tell the reporter you'll get back to him or her with your response after the interview.
10. Say nothing within earshot of a reporter, or within range of a microphone, that you don't want your mother – and the rest of the public – to hear you say.



The image shows a screenshot of a web browser window with a red border. The browser's menu bar includes 'File', 'Edit', 'View', 'Get', 'Bookmarks', 'Questions', and 'Directory'. The address bar shows 'http://www.sources.com'. The main content area features the text: 'Get HotLink on Your Computer! HotLink is now available in digital format! No more passing your single issue around until it's dog-eared. Just call 416-964-7799 or E-mail sources@sources.com and we'll start sending HotLink to your E-mail address.'

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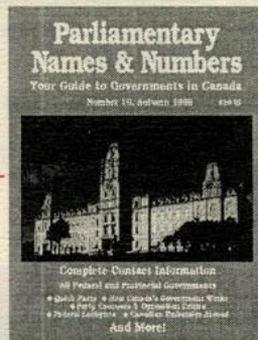
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