

The Sources *Hot*Link

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Twenty, Autumn 2001

The View from the Press Room

BY KEVIN RITCHIE

Walkathons and fundraising dinners are not news. That was the message hammered home by three members of the Canadian media and one social marketer during a media panel at the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's seventh annual Symposium. Charities like feel-good stories, but those stories are tough to sell to the media. News doesn't necessarily have to be good or bad, but it has to be *interesting*.

The panel, entitled "What's the story?" consisted of *The Globe and Mail's* André Picard, CBC Television's Alison Smith, *The Edmonton Journal's* Liane Faulder and social marketer Ric Young, president of E.Y.E. They posed their own questions to the sector: What story are you trying to tell? What do you hope to accomplish by getting your name in the paper? Will national coverage on the six o'clock news and a front-page story in a major daily really affect the way increasingly materialistic Canadians view philanthropy?

All four stressed that before charities start telling, they should first start listening.

André Picard, *The Globe and Mail*

There are two kinds of charity people, said Picard – those with no media coverage who want to know when they are going to get it, and those who've had coverage but are annoyed that journalists always seem to get it wrong.

"When Michael [Hall, CCP's VP of research] was describing the core supporters of the sector – married, religious, socially committed, stable, optimistic – I couldn't help thinking that they are the antithesis of newspaper editors," Picard said.

He characterized most editors as

middle-aged white men who are cynical, unstable, socially inept and irreligious. Charities just aren't part of their worldview. So instead of complaining about how the media doesn't seem to care, charities should court publishers, editorial boards and advertising reps at newspapers and TV stations. Tell them your donors work on Bay St., Picard said, or write a letter to the editor.

"You're doing a fundraising dinner. So what?" Picard said. "There are a dozen a week. What makes yours different?" Good stories are about tangible results. Reporters want to know what a charity is *doing*. How does a charity affect its community? What kind of work does it do and what does your story mean nationally and internationally?

Alison Smith, *CBC Television*

Before a charity can tell a story to a reporter, it must first understand *why* the story is being told. News is about the extraordinary, Smith said. If you want to see your story on the 10 o'clock news, you have to compete with hockey playoffs, tear gas in Quebec City and Stockwell Day.

"For the most part, I don't think Canadians or journalists, for that mat-

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Why I Am Listed in Sources

BY ANN DOUGLAS

Over the years, I have turned to *Sources* time and time again to track down experts to interview for whatever newspaper or magazine article I happened to be researching at the time. So when the time came for me to position myself as an expert — to let the media know about my bestselling pregnancy and parenting books — it was immediately obvious to me what I had to do: take out a listing in *Sources*.

Like many journalists, I turn to *Sources* on a regular basis. It's a great way to find experts quickly without a lot of hassle. I can't tell you how many times I've gone to the trouble of tracking down an amazing expert via the Internet or through word of mouth, only to find that they are unwilling to speak to the media. *Sources* saves me time by providing me with leads on experts who are not only willing to be interviewed: in most cases, they're downright eager!

When I was trying to decide whether or not I should invest my hard-earned money in a listing in *Sources*, I pulled out some of my old *Sources* directories. I discovered that the majority of high-profile experts that I had interviewed in the past are listed in the directory year in and year out — a clear indication that they feel that they're getting a lot of bang

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Is Your Web Site Media Friendly?

BY LYNN FENSKE

You've spent thousands of dollars to launch your Web site. It's a major component of your current communications strategy. But does it help or hinder one of your most important audiences — the media?

Unless you are a media relations specialist, it's easy to overlook what reporters, editors, researchers and broadcast producers require to gather news and information. Deadlines are brutal but the needs are pretty basic. Since they must work efficiently and expediently and mostly by telephone, what media people need first and foremost is a contact name and telephone number.

When tackling a new story, journalists will start with its principal players and who they already know relevant to the story. Masters at networking they have learned that people lead you to other people who can help tell the story. When additional research is required or facts need checking, then staff writers can turn to research assistants or librarians to assist in the search. Freelancers are left to do their own research. In each case the search begins in the same way. The Internet is second choice only to telephone directories and **Sources** print directory.

Who in your organization is designated and trained to handle media inquiries and where can they be reached? While the Internet can be a very expensive medium for providing such information, if it is not readily available from your Web site chances are you'll risk missing the call. When the media is seeking your comment or opinion relative to their story and they can't reach you when they need to, they will call someone else equally equipped to comment, likely your competitor.

To create a media friendly Web site, here's what you need to consider:

1. I'll restate the obvious. Include the names and telephone numbers of key personnel, particularly those assigned to handle media inquiries. And don't be sending anyone into voice-mail hell. If you depend upon

voice mail to manage incoming calls, be sure to check messages regularly and return calls promptly, particularly those from the media. A journalist on deadline always needs to speak to humans, so be available.

2. Publish E-mail addresses but only if you are willing to check messages regularly and reply expediently. Remember, media people need you urgently. They telephone first, resort to E-mail or the Internet second.

3. If you provide a press room or media centre on your Web site, be certain the information is timely and up-to-date. While archival information about your organization can be helpful in some cases, it has limited value to a news story. A journalist's job is to find out what's happening today, not yesterday.

4. If you have information on your Web site accessible only by accredited journalists then here's a really valuable piece of advice. Let journalists choose their own password. Or if you must assign them a password, then provide them the opportunity to change it to something convenient for them. This way, you are making it easier for journalists to use the same password(s) for access to different databases rather than have to work with and remember several different passwords, each of which works only with one particular database.

Media relations must be an integral part of any effective communications strategy. Don't try to hide from the media. More and more newsrooms are giving their reporters state-of-the-art computers that permit individual Internet access. As a result, more reporters are doing more of their own research as their story is being written. Be available. Be helpful. Return their calls. Don't rely on your Web site to try and hide an inability or unwillingness to handle media inquiries.

You really do want the media to call you and consider your personnel important contacts and resource people.

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Is Your Web Site Media Friendly?

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ple, particularly in times of crisis. With proper training and experience, your personnel can work with the media to provide clear images of what your organization is all about — in good times and in bad. As Michael Levine so aptly points out in the first paragraph of his book *Guerilla P.R.*, “our civilization is utterly dominated by the force of media. After our own families, no influence holds greater sway in shaping the text of our being than do the media that cloak us like an electronic membrane.” So stay media friendly, particularly on the Internet where more and more influence is taking place.

Lynn Fenske is a freelance writer specializing in communications and media relations.

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Overcome fear with clear thinking

Surviving and Thriving in a Crisis

BY LORRAINE WEYGMAN,
M.Ed. CHRP

Communicating effectively in a time of crisis can be a life and death issue. Tylenol and Perrier knew how to do it when their products posed a threat. Hydro-Quebec knew how to do it during the tragic ice storm of 1998. And now with North America under attack by terrorists, President Bush has become a master at it.

Understanding the human response to crisis and then knowing how to handle that response is a key feature.

No matter the size of the crisis, people have a similar initial reaction, that of fear. Fear of the known. Fear of the unknown. Sometimes the crisis is life threatening. Since people want to be protected from danger, crisis will always trigger a flight or fight response that manifests itself physically and/or emotionally.

Feelings of grief, loss, pain and confusion are abundant. Thinking becomes fuzzy and decisions are difficult to make. Stress responses often preclude illness. No matter the size of the crisis — personal or global — survival is the focus.

To overcome the fear inherent in a crisis and replace it with clarity of thinking and clear, honest communication there are a few steps all of us can take:

1. Breathe. It's a requirement of life. Why stop now? When we feel fear, we hold our breath. This contributes to a foggy mind and limits the oxygen to our brain and internal organs. So keep breathing!
2. Size up the situation. Gather information. Separate the facts from the emotions.
3. Generate as many ideas as possible to unearth the cause rather than the symptoms of the crisis at hand. Work co-operatively with others towards a solution.

4. Be ready for change. All crises demand some form of change. Observe how you as an individual resist and adapt to changes. Develop the two most important qualities necessary for adapting — hope and resourcefulness.

5. Take time to appreciate the positives in your life. It's natural and often necessary to recognize the negatives in a disaster. Yet crisis creates a time of transition, a time to shift focus from the negative to the positive and to create opportunities for constructive change.

6. Evaluate resources and take action. Make use of the personal qualities that give you strength. What resources outside of your self can be utilized? Your friends, relatives, colleagues, even the media can be of assistance to you in a time of crisis.

7. Share all that you know. Knowledge is power. Information minimizes fear but too much information at once can cause confusion, more fear and panic. Disseminate information in digestible bites and gauge how much you can handle at any one time. Be honest and let it show with body language.

Surviving and thriving in a crisis means joining hands for support and sharing information clearly, effectively and with respect for the human condition. Remember, you're never alone in a crisis — it just feels that way. We all understand what it means to be immobilized by fear and anxiety. Likewise, we know how comforting it is to communicate with someone who shares and understands the experience.

Lorraine Weygman is an accomplished author, motivational speaker and Human Resources consultant. A recent addition to the Sources Media Directory, she can be reached at (416) 630-6423.

Why I'm Listed in Sources

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for their buck.

Something else that factored into my decision to advertise in *Sources* was the fact that *Sources* publishes both print and online editions of its directory. I've hung around enough newsrooms to know that some journalists like thumbing through paper directories, while others prefer typing a few keywords into an online search engine. The only way to hit both groups of journalists is to offer the information in both print and online formats, as *Sources* does.

I also appreciate the fact that *Sources* is distributed to freelance writers as well as writers who are employed full-time by newspapers and magazines. The majority of magazine articles published in this country are written by freelancers rather than staffers, so it's important that freelancers have access to *Sources*, too. I'm glad I decided to take the plunge and purchase a listing in the *Sources* directory. Within a few weeks of taking out my initial listing, I had been called by one of the producers of Canada AM and booked on the show to talk about my book *Trying Again: A Guide to Pregnancy After Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss*. That interview was followed by a steady stream of requests from radio and newspaper reporters who were interested in doing interviews with me, too. Having a listing in *Sources* has certainly paid off for me: with any luck it will for you, too.

Ann Douglas is the author of 18 books, including The Mother of All Pregnancy Books, and the President of the Periodical Writers Association of Canada — Canada's national association for freelance magazine and newspaper writers. She can be contacted via her Web site at www.having-a-baby.com.

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The View From the Press Room

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ter, understand what the voluntary sector does," said Smith.

Go behind the jargon and the spokes-people, and give a reporter access to the people who are working the front lines – the people who are making the difference. "If you're trying to pitch me and CTV and *The Toronto Star*, I want to be sure that I'm getting the best example that you've got."

Smith also advised charities to consider their relevance to major news events. Reporters will often turn to experts to put a news event into a larger context to make it more relevant. For example, she said, there is a debate now surrounding mandatory volunteering in schools. "Lead the debate on issues," she said. "You shouldn't be afraid of that kind of conflict."

Finally, Smith pointed out that, even if a story doesn't wind up on the 10 o'clock news, it may still feature prominently on the network's Web site. The news pages at CBC get between 700,000 and 800,000 hits each day.

Liane Faulder, *The Edmonton Journal*

"There has to be a story to be told and it has to be newsy," Faulder said. "Our first business is news." Tough, gritty stories get attention because they are often linked to real people and real conditions in a city. "Don't be afraid to say the tough thing."

Faulder advised charity workers to call reporters regularly to mention what they think about an issue or about the reporter's last story. Or to give them story ideas. The reporter may not use your idea, but he may to call you when another story breaks.

She gave a couple of examples of "newsy" stories about the voluntary sector that had interesting people behind them. One was about a woman who had been extremely crippled with multiple sclerosis for years. Through alternative therapy, she recovered fully and led a walkathon. "I could've interviewed her for two hours," Faulder said.

Stories that expose political injustice also get a lot of press. An organization in Edmonton set up a "Quality of Life Commission," a forum for people on welfare to talk about how government cuts have affected their lives.

"We don't know what's happening unless you tell us," Faulder said. "Don't be shy to deal with controversy."

Ric Young, E.Y.E.

The voluntary sector must look harder at the broader picture if it is going to sustain itself. That was Ric Young's message. Young is president of E.Y.E., a social marketing firm that plans strategies and campaigns to promote social change.

"The most compelling story, it seems to me, is not the one we have to tell, but the one we have to hear and understand," Young said. He pointed to an earlier presentation by Michael Hall, VP of research at CCP, who said the lion's share of the sector's core support comes from religiously active Canadians.

Religious organizations are seedbeds of philanthropic values, Young said. But the religiously active are rapidly becoming a subculture. Only 25 per cent of Canadian attend weekly religious services, down from over 50% in the 1950s. "Perhaps we ought to start praying, whether we're believers or not, that this segment doesn't dwindle anymore," he said.

Consumerism and individualism are replacing the philanthropic impulse. But Young believes that all is not lost, provided that the voluntary sector can find ways to "tap the reservoirs of good will that exist among Canadians." He cautioned, however, against thinking that greater understanding of the sector is the key. "If only they understood us, all will be well – this is *not* the answer," he said. The sector should not assume that it has more to tell than it has to learn.

Faith communities provide a forum for discussions about values and relevance to society, he said. Likewise, the voluntary sector needs to take not just its story, but "greater moral conversations" out to the broader general public.

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See the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's Sources listing for more information.

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Use a wide range of tools to reach the media

Get A Digital Life: An Internet Reality Check

BY JIM CARROLL

Several months ago, I spent some time with the public relations team of a major Canadian company. There were about 30 people in the group, individuals responsible for a wide range of PR related functions. I walked them through a whole bunch of nifty tools and methods that they could use in their day to day activities, and even more time exploring the unique ways that journalists are using the Web today. I was trying to get across to them, as I often do with every group that I deal with, that it is a different world out there, and they've got to think differently about how they do their job.

One of my key messages was that they had better recognize that the Internet has come to play a huge role in the day to day activities of the average journalist. One fact I picked up from *Public Relations Quarterly* was that 98% of journalists were on-line in 1998, compared with 63% in 1997. Not only that, I stressed, but the target audience of the PR professional was rapidly becoming not just the journalist, but the public at large. Direct contact was more critical than ever, given the massive reach of the Internet. (Any PR professional who has had an issue spiral out of control on the Internet realizes the enormity of that last statement.)

Given this reality, I wanted them to understand that they needed to know how to use a wide range of tools to build a useful relationship with this wired journalist and with the public. They had to think of countless new ways of reaching this vast and disparate audience — merely E-mailing out a press release to a bunch of people on a list would no longer suffice. Bottom line? They had better begin to develop a wide range of skills beyond merely “working the media.” They had better think about using new technologies to reach their new, tech-savvy audience, whether they be journalists or beyond.

Since then, I've thought a lot about this issue, and I've come to realize that in many situations, the typical press release is truly a dead medium. The fact is, when

a press release is sent by E-mail, it is pretty well ignored, unless there is some type of significant news story involved. (Since I write for a number of publications, my mailbox gets flooded with useless, boring press releases on a daily basis. I ignore much of it.) A fax-release is treated with even less respect. If you wander into any media outlet, you'll find a lonely old fax machine sitting over in the corner, pumping out page after page after page of the same old PR drivel. I've noticed that the news folks around it often barely give each and every press release barely a glance. That's why telephone contact has been so critical. You've got a major story, you pick up the phone, and call your key contacts. That will always be the key to PR success.

But in this new world, that won't suffice. You've got to reach a wider range of journalists, many of who are bored with PR fluff. And direct access to the public-at-large is more important than ever before, particularly if you are in the midst of a raging battle for public opinion. Is there a way out? I think so — I believe that maybe it is time that PR professionals begin to think about doing something more in terms of the message, particularly with multimedia.

With the growing acceptance of audio and video on the Web, it is increasingly likely that an ever more tech-savvy journalist and citizen will be more amenable to a different type of message.

Why not issue a video-release? An audio statement? A ShockWave or Flash file with accompanying background info? Today, it isn't terribly complicated

to get audio and video onto the Web, once you have a useful infrastructure established.

Heck, for my own Web site, I've got scads of video and audio files from various TV appearances, speeches, my radio shows and other sources. I've equipped myself in my home office with all the gear, for less than \$5,000, to be my own multimedia powerhouse. If I can do it, any PR flack can.

And that's what Fortune 500 PR professionals need to be thinking about. If there is a major announcement forthcoming from your CEO, be ready to place an audio and video version of the announcement online. Dress it up a bit for some dramatic effect. Make it look professional. Link it to related information files on your Web site that round out the story... and you might find that the journalists you need to reach are a little bit more interested in what you have done. Not only that, but you might find the public will relate to it as well.

Who knows if it will work or not — but one thing is clear. In an era in which the standard press release is dead, something new is needed, and fast.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is an author, columnist and frequent keynote speaker. His latest book, “Get a (Digital) Life: An Internet Reality Check,” debunks the myths of the Internet, and paints an extraordinary view of the future. You can find his Web site at www.jimcarroll.com. Review copies of the book are available.

*See his **Sources** listing for additional information.*

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Getting the most out of your Sources Listing:

The January 2002 issue of the print edition of *Sources* is now being prepared for publication. This is the perfect time to make sure your *Sources* listing is as effective as possible. Take a moment to review:

Your Contacts

- ◆ Your *Sources* listing can include up to fifteen contact names. These names and their coordinates are vital because they enable the media to turn to you for information in your area of expertise.
- ◆ Whether you currently use one main number in your listing or you have several people on your contact list, make sure the person who answers the phone knows how to handle calls from the media and knows to whom the calls should be transferred.
- ◆ Review the skills of the people in your organization and select a diverse range of spokespeople who are experts in specific areas relevant to your listing in *Sources*.
- ◆ Besides phone numbers, there are several ways in which you can help the media reach you. Most listings include fax numbers; cellular phone numbers, pager numbers, after-hours telephone numbers and E-mail addresses are sometimes appropriate. Internet sites are also helpful; a direct live link can be set up from your *Sources* listing to your own World Wide Web site.
- ◆ No matter what combination of coordinates you choose, the media should be able to reach someone at your organization within a short period of time. A contact list that makes it easy for journalists to reach your organization means more interviews and press coverage.

Your Logo

- ◆ More than 80% of organizations listed in *Sources* raise their visibility in the print edition and on the *Sources* Web



site by including a logo. We need a good original copy of your logo to be able to reproduce it well.

Your Descriptive Paragraph

- ◆ Tell the media who you are and what you do. Fifty words are included in your standard rate. A sixty word French-language descriptive paragraph is also worth considering: Tell the French-speaking media you are accessible to them.

Your Subject Headings

- ◆ Your subject index headings are the most powerful feature of your listing. Make sure journalists see your name under all *Sources* subject headings relevant to your organization. Your choice of headings tells journalists, editors and researchers you have expertise in the subject they are looking up, and leads them directly to your company or organization.
- ◆ More than 19,000 carefully chosen headings reflecting a wide diversity of topics are available to you in the *Sources* Subject Index. To select or review the headings under which you want journalists to find you, start by going through the Subject Index in

your copy of *Sources*. Look for headings which are relevant to your organization, headings that best highlight your areas of expertise.

- ◆ To help you find the subject headings most appropriate to you, we have developed lists of headings arranged by broad category (e.g. Law, Health, Science and Technology) and by more defined sub-category (e.g. Criminal Law, Dentistry, Computers). We're happy to send you a list of headings in the category which is relevant to you. Just ask. You can also download them yourself from <http://www.sources.com/category.htm>.
- ◆ Remember, the number of calls you'll receive from the media directly relates to the number, newsworthiness and specificity of your headings.
- ◆ You get out what you put in! Extra attention to the content of your listing can result in more calls, more media awareness and greater success. If you would like some suggestions or guidance on improving your listing, or if you have not yet received your renewal or update package, call Dorothy or Andrew at (416) 964-7799.

Reach the French-language media with your message

Sources is used by the French-language media as well as the English-speaking media. French-speaking journalists, especially those working for radio or television, are often looking for spokespersons who can do an interview in French.

If you, or one of your media spokespeople, is able to handle enquiries in French, it's a good idea to include a French-language paragraph in your listing. Including a sixty-word French paragraph costs only \$99 per year.

Call Andrew or Dorothy at 416-964-7799 to add a French paragraph to your listing.

Define your objectives and follow through

Guerrilla Tactics for Maximizing the Results of Your Media Campaign

BY CAMERON FREEMAN

Media and public relations are much like front-line sales. They require strategy and persistent follow-through to be successful. Here is a breakdown of a media campaign to illustrate five guerrilla tactics for garnering media coverage.

Guerrilla Tactic #1: Clearly define your objectives

Canacable Inc., a technology provider, was launching an emergency computer help service, The Computer Care Association (CCA). LOOFAH Communications was approached to facilitate needed media exposure. The initial launch would take place in Kingston, Ontario, home to more than 12,000 small offices/home offices, 75% of which have one or more computers. Media objectives included:

- ◆ Create awareness of CCA as the “Canadian Auto Club” for small office/home office computer users
- ◆ Brand CCA membership as “Worry Free” computing
- ◆ Achieve a higher profile with existing clients and prospective new customers.
- ◆ Recognition of Canacable as one of the largest mobile forces of computer experts in Canada with a reputation for delivering friendly, responsive onsite computer solutions

Guerrilla Tactic #2: Tell a compelling new story

No reporter or editor wants to be a vehicle for “flogging” your product or service. Reporters and editors want stories that are newsworthy and of interest to their reading, listening, and viewing audience. A Kingston area Technology Fair was planned and scheduled making the CCA Launch story more newsworthy. The theme was “Technology made simple in the office of the future: Kingston Tech Fair showcases the ‘Worry-Free Computing’ Workplace.” It hit the right chord with the media and Kingston area small office/home office owners.

Guerrilla Tactic #3: Target the appropriate media, then follow-up and follow-through.

Sixteen Kingston area radio, TV, newspapers and community publications were targeted to receive media kits that included background info, media release, and sample CCA membership. To maximize the likelihood of getting media coverage, we followed up by phone with reporters and editors. Similar to a sales call, connecting to the right reporter or editor made the difference as to whether the story would be picked up or lost in the news shuffle. In our phone calls we not only confirmed receipt of the media kits, but also presented the merits of the story and how it would appeal to their audience. The results? Several interviews with newspaper, radio, and TV were arranged with the President of Canacable Inc.

Guerrilla Tactic #4: Train your spokesperson

A well-trained spokesperson is crucial to ensuring that your key message points are received and broadcast to your prospective audience the way you intend them to be read or heard. Coaching your spokesperson on media skills, for good news and bad, is an invaluable investment. It’s important that your spokesperson know the basics:

- ◆ Understand contemporary media
- ◆ Maximize opportunities in working with the media
- ◆ Minimize the risks in working with the media
- ◆ Control the media interviews
What kind of results can you expect?

Numerous calls to each of the Kingston media contacts helped create a receptive atmosphere and a keen interest in the Computer Care Association story. Several print, radio and television media relationships were established resulting in four interviews on radio and television reaching more than 90,000 people.

The *Kingston Business Journal* ran a two-page spread with the headline, “Worry-free computing come to Kingston”.

On the front page below the fold, *The Kingston Whig Standard*, ran the headline “Program like auto club membership for computers.” with a sub-headline, “If you’re suffering from a PC headache or need a computer solution to a pressing business matter, fast relief is just a phone call away”.

Guerrilla Tactic #5: Reprint media coverage

Reprinting your media coverage:

- ◆ Creates excellent 3rd party credibility
- ◆ Reinforces your sales collaterals
- ◆ Adds “weight” to the media kit
- ◆ Facilitate increased enthusiasm in the office workplace

Cameron Freeman is Director of Operations at Loofah Communications, a Toronto-based marketing company. Recipient of the International Association of Business Communicators, Ovation Award of Excellence 2000 in the category of Electronic Interactive Media, Cameron’s mission at LOOFAH Communications is: “to help you achieve yours.” Cameron has more than 15 years sales and marketing experience, including front-line experience in media relations, fundraising, and training and development. Cameron pushes the limits of Internet technology and marketing expertise to your business advantage. You can reach Cameron at freeman@loofahcom.com or 416-516-7826.

See LOOFAH’s Sources listing for more information.