

The Sources *HotLink*

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

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Video News Releases

By WILLIAM WRAY CARNEY



The following is an edited excerpt from "In the News: The Practice of Media Relations in Canada" by William Wray Carney (published by The University of Alberta Press, 2002).

Video News Releases (VNRs) are just that: broadcast-quality videos intended for release to television stations. They typically contain a "story" in television format, complete with reporter, just as a news release imitates a news story. The story is 60 to 120 seconds in duration. It also contains a B-roll, which is additional footage a station can use depending on the angle it wishes to take. For example, the main VNR describes a new product or service and is promotional in tone; the B-roll might contain visuals of how the product is manufactured, how it is used and how it was financed (for the business media). Because of

their extensive preparation and distribution time, VNRs lend themselves best to feature stories, particularly in the fields of entertainment, business and science. They can, however, be used for hard news or breaking stories; for example, the most-used VNR in 1993 was a series of four releases sent out by Pepsi in response to a rumour about product safety.

Most advertising agencies can arrange to produce VNRs. They are costly to make (in the range of \$20,000), duplicate and send out (about \$6,500), but they are still cheaper than a national advertising campaign, for which the same amount of money might buy time on one major market alone. VNRs are used extensively by television, just as print news releases are used by all media. A 1992 survey indicated that all of the responding television stations used VNRs in their newscasts. However, as with news releases, TV reporters use VNRs as a tip to their own story. The station will edit the release, particularly the B-roll, and adapt it to its own purposes.



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6 Tips for Writing a Successful VNR

BY STEVE SLAUNWHITE

If you're like most business communicators, you've written your share of press releases, backgrounders and media kits. So scripting a Video News Release (VNR) can be an exciting change of pace.

That is until you realize how high the stakes are. If your VNR isn't picked up by the media, thousands spent on production will go down the drain.

Don't panic. A VNR is essentially a press release on video. The key difference is how it is planned and written. Here are six tips that can help.

1. **Start with a treatment.** This is a one-page description of what you envision seeing and hearing. A treatment helps you and others determine if the VNR is newsworthy and worth the investment. It also helps your production company establish a preliminary budget.
2. **Get the interviews right the first time.** In a press release, you can edit a quotation for clarity and impact, and delete the ums and aahs that infiltrate everyday speech. On video, however, what you see is what you get. So carefully review questions and key messages with interviewees. Be there during the shoot to ensure you get the sound bites you need.
3. **Write for the ear, not the eye.** Just because a voiceover reads well on paper doesn't mean it will sound

well on screen. Here's a tip I use: Read your script into a tape recorder and then play it back. When you do, I guarantee you'll rewrite it.

4. **Stay with the fundamentals.** Given all the sight and sound possibilities of video, it's easy to get carried away. However, don't forget your public relations 101 lessons. You're not scripting a Hollywood blockbuster, you're writing a newsworthy, broadcast-ready press release. Keep it simple and informative.
5. **It's a release, not a commercial.** We all know that a press release should not be overly promotional. The same holds true for a VNR — times ten. In general, broadcast journalists are even more sensitive to hype than their print and online counterparts.
6. **Don't forget the B-roll.** This is additional footage that broadcasters use to customize the news segment. If your VNR is an automotive launch, for example, your B-roll might include shots of the car in the driveway, on the road, surrounded by a happy family, on an adventure trek. As the writer, scripting the B-roll is just as important as the VNR itself.

Steve Slaunwhite is an independent copywriter and consultant specializing in marketing communications. He can be reached at www.steveslaunwhite.com or 905-846-2620.

The Benefits of Reaching the Media

Gayle,

We talked in May and you "convinced" me of the merits of a listing in **Sources**. I wasn't convinced, but "relented" and agreed to a listing.

Well, here is what happened: Shortly after the issue came out, I received a call from a freelance writer. She writes for the *Globe and Mail*. Weekly, there is a personal financial profile of an individual and an expert is asked to comment. Well, I was the expert (she found me in **Sources**) and the article was published. The article led to me receiving two calls from prospective clients who have substantial amounts of money to invest. Am I convinced about the merits of listing in **Sources**? That goes without saying. Many thanks for your persistence and professionalism.

*Dick M.A. Hass, B.A.
Free 55 Financial (a division of London Life)*

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From the Editor...

There's no such thing as a slow news day

The war in Iraq and the SARS outbreak have dominated the headlines for weeks, reminding us of how impacting news reporting is on our daily lives. As news stories (and casual conversations) gradually return to regular topics of discussion like politics and the weather, the panic seems to be over – at least until the next time.

As you breathe a sigh of relief let me assure you that while crises may come and go, the news is never slow. It just oscillates between the everyday and the life threatening.

Regardless of their specialty, journalists are always on the frontlines of communicating what's happening – 24/7. They can't always predict where any story will take them or whom they'll need to talk to in order to get the necessary facts and comments. One thing is for certain; they will always need quick access to people in the know.

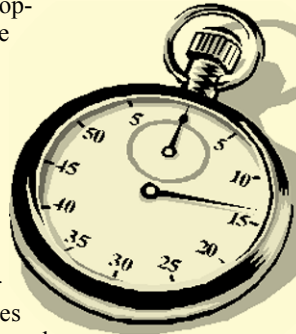
So you may be sitting there thinking "the media never calls to speak with me". Or you have already made the assumption that if they haven't called by now, they never will. Well, consider this – is your expertise relevant to today's news story? Do you have any way of knowing for sure when you will be of interest to a roving reporter? Or better yet, have you done all you can do to make yourself

known as a contact/expert in your given field of endeavour?

Listing in *Sources* is a major step in the right direction. Next to the telephone book, the *Sources* directory is the most used resource a Canadian journalist has for finding spokespeople relevant to any particular story. The heart of your listing is the descriptive paragraph. Some organizations print their mission statement while others address journalists directly. Whatever format you choose, make sure you provide a brief, compelling introduction to your organization so *Sources* users clearly understand who you are and what you do.

The next thing you can do is keep reading your *Sources HotLink* newsletter and visit our Web site (www.hotlink.ca) regularly. We've crafted *HotLink* to be your perpetual guide to getting positive news coverage. With each new issue we offer the best advice available from industry insiders. Like the media, we appreciate your comments. If you're feeling "out of the loop" let us know what we can do to help you improve your media relations. After all, it's only a matter of time before a reporter will call ...

Lynn Fenske, *HotLink* Editor



"At the i-channel, we are always looking for articulate and informative experts to appear as guests on our programs. We are constantly using *Sources* to help us with our research. It is an invaluable resource, that's unprecedented in Canada."

— Abbe Edelson, Associate Producer, i-channel

HotLink Resource Shelf

For those of you forced by budgetary constraints (inherent in non-profits, small business or volunteer organizations) to be self-taught and self-sufficient, here are a couple of books to aid you in becoming and remaining proficient communicators. Both are concise, illustrated, easily referenced little volumes, part of the *One Step Ahead* series from Oxford University Press – a series designed for "all those who want and need to communicate more effectively in a range of real-life situations".

Publicity, Newsletters and Press Releases

By Alison Baverstock

Oxford University Press, 2002, 96 pp.,

\$12.95 Cdn

ISBN 0-19-860384-3

Written by an accomplished marketer and teacher, this book focuses on how to effectively use words to generate publicity. Starting with the basic strategies for crafting messages (what to say, how to say it, who to say it to), the author provides valuable lessons in how to be persuasive and compelling in print. The focus is on newsletters and press releases as PR fundamentals. Included are a number of invaluable writing and production checklists, as well as troubleshooting techniques for handling customer complaints, errors in reporting and setting up focus groups for valuable feedback.

Writing for the Internet

By Jane Dornier

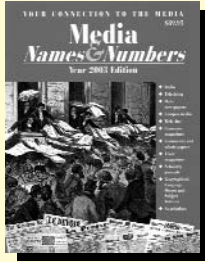
Oxford University Press, 2002, 128 pp.,

\$12.95 Cdn

ISBN 0-19-866285-8

Here's ample testimony that Internet communications don't read the same as print communications. The urgency of the Internet requires emphasis on brevity and clarity. Also consideration must be given to positioning (letting the reader know where they are and where they can go next) and the reader's purpose – are they visiting your site for factual information or for recreation? On paper there are a number of ways to keep your reader engaged, online the choices are limited, particularly when most online readers are in a hurry to "get to the point." Don't try to build and maintain a Web site without reading this book. All the tricks and techniques are here for grabbing and holding your online audience.

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How to Make Your B-roll Work

By MARK LAVIGNE, APR



Television news is one of the most powerful and trusted news media these days, and to get a softer story into the TV newscast one must follow one paramount rule – have moving pictures.

In congested news markets such as Toronto, getting a videographer or camera assigned to your story is a challenge to say the least. If you're lucky, you may get one or two cameras out to your news event. That leaves another three or four stations, not including the networks that will not cover your story because they are not there with a camera.

PR practitioners can maximize their TV impact by investing in B-roll and hiring a news videography service. One such service provider is Permanent Images Video Production Inc. (www.videotoronto.com). It's principal, Steve Dekter, is a 15-year veteran of Toronto's television news business, where he has worked as a front line camera operator and producer for the likes of CTV, Global, CNN and ABC News.

Steve offers his top ten tips to maximize the pick-up of your B-roll:

1. Hire a videographer with news experience – wedding video won't cut it!
2. Shoot it in Beta cam format.
3. It should be in edited, eye-catching footage and delivered in a timely manner.
4. Don't shoot shots – shoot sequences. Tell the story.
5. Produce a shot list to use as a rough guide.
6. Allow for time to light the shot properly.
7. Shoot as a news videographer would shoot it – don't make it too polished.
8. Keep the B-roll visually entertaining.
9. Work with the camera operator/producer to capture the best shots and sequences.
10. Hire a staging company when it is a news event so lighting, backdrop signage and audio feeds are all present and in working order.

Dekter adds that "at the end of the day, don't forget this is news, not a movie."

Distribution of B-roll is dependent on budget and timing. If it is a relatively hard news story with time sensitivities, courier delivery of the tapes will be necessary for a one-market focus, or through satellite if it's of national interest.

Ensure concise hard copy news materials accompany the BETA tape and make sure the B-roll is not too long – less than ten minutes is ideal. TV stations don't have the time or staff to go through long tapes!

Mark LaVigne, APR, is President of the Canadian Public Relations Society (Toronto) and runs a media relations and media coaching firm based in Aurora, Ontario. He can be reached at (905) 841-2017 or mark.lavigne@sympatico.ca.

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