

# The Sources *HotLink*

Tips and Practical Ideas to Get Positive News Coverage

Number Twenty-nine

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March 2004

## Why Publicity Sometimes Fails

BY BARBARA FLORIO GRAHAM



*You've done everything you can think of to publicize your new product launch, event, or small business. But nothing seems to work. Barbara Florio Graham explains*

*why, in this article adapted from Five Fast Steps to Low-Cost Publicity.*

### 1. Lack of Definition

What business are you in? What is your unique selling position? Have you clearly stated in all your promotional materials exactly what your business, event, product or service will do for those who respond to your publicity? How will they benefit?

Where do you fit in relation to others who are similar? Make sure you set yourself apart from the competition, not by putting them down, but by showing the special characteristics that make your product/service/event different.

Do you need to reposition yourself? If there's a lot of competition in your field, you may have to promote your company as a better alternative for some special reason.

Do you need to clarify how you define yourself? Perhaps your promotional materials need to be punched up so they stand out from others. You may need to take a second look at your logo, your slogan, and your core message.

### 2. Lack of Planning

Make arrangements well in advance. Do not change!

Look for opportunities before they occur.

Watch deadlines. If you're not absolutely sure, call and ask!

Act professionally and prepare professional materials.

### 3. Unrealistic Goals

Don't expect the media to treat features as news.

The media can never guarantee coverage, as their priorities change hour by hour.

You may increase public and media awareness without receiving any direct media response to your efforts. This is always a hard lesson to accept, but sometimes what you do today may pay off much later when you approach the media again and someone says, "I remember you..."

If this is your first venture, you may have to be satisfied with a limited response. Don't let that discourage you.

Analyze your plan to be sure you did everything possible, and then move on.

### 4. Acts of God

If something important occurs, it will capture media attention and your effort may be overlooked. One event I promoted hit the front pages of both daily newspapers as well as CBC and CTV local and national newscasts. But that had more to do with luck than anything else. It was a slow news day, in the middle of the summer, and our event took place on Parliament Hill where, just minutes before, major media had just finished covering a press conference. But if it had rained, or a plane had crashed, or fire had broken out in the city...

### 5. Lack of Response (almost always because of 1, 2, or 3)

*Barbara Florio Graham is the author of Five Fast Steps to Better Writing, Five Fast Steps to Low-Cost Publicity, and Mewsings/Musings. Her website is [www.SimonTeakettle.com](http://www.SimonTeakettle.com).*



## What's new with you?

When you have news to share with the world at large, *Sources* and *HotLink* can be of great assistance to you in getting the word out.

As a *Sources* listee, you're entitled to all the support we can provide. For instance:

*HotLink* gives you the unique opportunity to brag about your latest public relations accomplishments to your colleagues and fellow listees. We'd love to tell everyone about how a specific marketing communications strategy (including your *Sources* listing) has worked for you. Your testimonial is greatly appreciated and can provide a learning experience for someone else. Send a quick E-mail to the editor at [lfenske@sources.com](mailto:lfenske@sources.com) or give her a telephone call at (416) 964-7799. You provide the details and she'll write the story for a future edition of *HotLink*.

Also, any organization, corporation or individual listed in *Sources* has the opportunity to post news releases to the *Sources* Web site – free of charge – for up to four releases a year. Just E-mail your release (maximum 700 words) in plain text to [postreleases@sources.com](mailto:postreleases@sources.com). Let us know how long you would like the information to be posted and we'll do the rest. We can even provide the media with a link to your Web site.

We make it all so easy. Just give us a call.

## Things change.

And when they do,  
you need to tell **Sources**.

Please advise our staff of any changes to your contact information, descriptive paragraph or chosen subject headings as soon as they happen. We'll make the necessary revisions to your online listing within a week. The print edition takes a little longer ...

Just give us a call at  
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or e-mail [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com).



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# 7 Ways to Get More Mileage from a Case Study

BY STEVE SLAUNWHITE

As I mentioned in my previous **HotLink** articles, case studies are a valuable addition to your public relations' arsenal. They not only explain the success of your product or service *in action*, they also tend to have high editorial acceptance and readership rates. After all, everyone loves a good story.

Many practitioners, however, make the mistake of using case studies only within the public relations channel, and not broadening their focus to include sales, advertising and marketing. The fact is case studies are highly versatile. They can benefit your company at multiple points along the communications spectrum.

Here are just some ways to leverage the benefits of a case study:

1. **Use it in a press release.** A case study can quickly be abridged and reformatted into a press release. Be sure to note that a longer case study version is available.
2. **Mail or e-mail it to prospects and customers.** This is a terrific way to keep in touch, raise awareness about a new product or service, and even convert prospects into customers.
3. **Give it to sales staff.** Sales people love case studies. They use them in presentations, to illustrate key points, and as testimonials. A case study is often more convincing than a brochure.
4. **As a speaking topic.** If your executives speak at industry meetings and conferences, a case study makes an excellent presentation. The content can easily be converted into PowerPoint™ slides. The printed case study itself can be used as a handout.
5. **In lead-generation programs.** A case study can make a terrific "free giveaway" in an ad, e-mail, direct mailer and on a website. In direct marketing, we call this strategy an information premium. It's a proven lead-generator.
6. **For testimonials.** Testimonials help make benefits believable. The quotes you gleaned from happy customers for the case study can also be used - with permission of course - in ads, brochures, websites and more.
7. **As a trade show handout.** Case studies are a great way to break through the clutter of flyers and brochures that permeate trade shows. One of my clients even had a case study enlarged and printed on a trade show exhibit wall!

Case studies take a lot of work to plan and prepare but are well worth the effort. If you leverage them throughout sales, marketing and PR, the return on investment multiples fast.

*Steve Slaunwhite speaks, writes and consults on the strategic use of copywriting in marketing communications. He can be reached at [www.steveslaunwhite.com](http://www.steveslaunwhite.com).*



"Forget the Web! Head to **Sources** when you want to find reliable experts and authorities on any subject.

**Sources** is an indispensable research tool for any reporter, writer or editor."

Dianne Rinehart, Journalist, former Editor-in-Chief,  
**Homemaker's**

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# Meeting the Media Face-to-Face



The following is an excerpt from *Media Relations* by Allan Bonner, first in *The Allan Bonner Communications Series* published by *Briston House*, 2003,

ISBN 1-894921-00-3.

Sending out media releases, fact sheets and other prepared materials is a good way to start. However, apart from paid advertisements, trade or community-based publications, you will find very few people in the news business who will just take your words and use them the way you intended.

Reporters like to report and editors like to edit. So if your release generates some interest with the media, you can expect phone calls from news people asking all sorts of questions. The questions may be factual, suggestive, off-base, pointed or argumentative. How you respond will have a direct bearing on whether your media release gets tossed in the waste basket, is filed for future reference or used as the basis for a feature article on you.

What follows is a detailed guide to help you deal with news people when you meet them face-to-face, over the phone – or even “live” on the air. Remember, too, that you don’t have to send out a media release to attract media attention. Depending on your interests, your business or your proximity to a big news story, you could get a phone call at any time.

## When a Reporter Calls:

- Ask for some think time
- Take notes
- Ask “what is your deadline?”
- Find out who they represent
- Find out if they are the journalist, researcher or producer
- Ask what the segment or article will be about

- Discover what approach they are taking
- Ask what research, reports and documents have been seen? Offer your own
- Ask what areas of discussion they would like to cover?
- Find out where the interview will take place
- Ask who else will be interviewed?
- Discover date of airing or publication
- Ask how long the interview will last?
- Ask yourself the outcome if you do not cooperate
- Be prepared to tape the conversation

Always call the reporter back. If you decide you are not the best person to deal with the issue, call the reporter and say so. If you can suggest an alternative, so much the better.

## How to be a Good News Source

- Help build the story
- Prepare, rehearse out loud
- Be convincing, not combative
- Have the audience think well of you
- Grab the good words, good concepts and moral high ground for yourself
- Never forget you’re talking to a journalist – it’s not a conversation
- Stay cool and firm
- Show caring, knowledge and action

*Allan Bonner is a former political aid and journalist, now offering media training on five continents. Books can be ordered and he can be reached at [allan@allanbonner.com](mailto:allan@allanbonner.com).*

## Are you going unnoticed?

Over 80% of the companies and associations listed in *Sources* draw on the recognition power of their logo. They choose to draw attention to their listing by including their logo in print and online.

Likewise, the majority of individuals featured in *Sources* include their photograph along with their descriptive paragraph. It puts a face to their name.

Logos and portrait photographs are important graphic elements that enhance your listing. They make you instantly recognizable and more likely for an inquisitive journalist or researcher to call you for more information.

To find out how to include a logo or photograph in your *Sources* listing, give us a call at (416) 964-7799 or E-mail [sources@sources.com](mailto:sources@sources.com).



## Sources Works!

“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!”

*Ann Douglas, Author*

## HotLink Resource Shelf

Here's a list of new releases that will keep you busy for a while. Watch future issues of *HotLink* for our reviews. Happy reading!

### **MEDIA RELATIONS**

By Allan Bonner  
Briston House, 2003, 176 pp., \$24.95  
ISBN 1894921003

### **GUIDE TO MEDIA RELATIONS**

By Irv Schenkler & Tony Herrling  
Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, 144 pp.,  
\$27.95  
ISBN 0131405675

### **TOWARD THE COMMON GOOD: Perspectives in International Public Relations**

By Donn James Tilson, APR &  
Emmanuel C. Alozie  
Pearson, 2004, 464 pp.  
ISBN 0205361382

### **THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS**

By Fraser Seitel  
Prentice Hall, 2003  
ISBN 0131020250

### **HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OUT OF EVERY MEDIA APPEARANCE: Getting Your Message Across on the Air, in Print, and Online**

By George Merlis  
McGraw-Hill, 2003, \$25.95  
ISBN 0071416714

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Edited by Jane Johnston &  
Clara Zawawi  
Allen & Unwin Academic, April 2004,  
480 pp., \$52.95  
ISBN 1865089222

### **PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION: How to Deliver Effective Written and Spoken Messages**

By N. van der Merwe & Evelyn Howard  
Juta Academic, April 2004, 384 pp.,  
\$37.95  
ISBN 0702156590

## It's the Law

BY MARK LAVIGNE, APR



After working more than 14 years as a media relations consultant and five years as a journalist, I've come to the conclusion there are six basic laws that govern successful media rela-

tions. They are:

- **content**
- **context**
- **organizational access**
- **proactive response**
- **relationships with the news media**
- **luck**

Content must be tightly written, with a focus on the facts and an avoidance of hyperbole. It must be constructed in an electronic format and delivered to the news media on an electronic platform. The inundation journalists suffer, plus continued merger mania in the news business, means they have very little time to research or sift through (useless) information to mine the news.

Context is placing your organization's news within the ebb and flow of the daily news diet. It also includes timing, especially in relation to what else is going on.

Organizational access is very important. The news media operate on a much tighter schedule for everything compared to regular business responsiveness. A radio journalist needs the information or interview requested that hour, not the next day. Television needs it the by the same afternoon, at the latest. And print overnight!

Proactive response is essential in creating a two-way flow of information between the organization and news media. The more proactive an organization is over time, the less severe the reaction by the media if there's a crisis. If the news media know your organization as open and honest through years of access, then the worst part of a crisis (what are they hiding?) may be mitigated.

Relationship with the news media goes hand-in-hand with access. Over time, if your organization and PR practitioners have been open and honest with the media, that access and honesty go a long way in raising your organization's credibility and position on a journalist's priority list. You must keep in perspective the amount of information bombarding the news media these days!

When all five of the above concepts are integrated, over time, success will be attained with the art and science of media relations. However, always leave room for luck.

Speaking of luck. I would love to hear from public relations personnel about any "good luck" rituals you are in the habit of practicing. We all know how athletes have their rituals. How about PR practitioners? Do you carry a rabbit's foot? Do you schedule events for a particularly "lucky" day or time? Let me know...

*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.*

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## Sources *HotLink*

*HotLink* articles provide valuable advice and informative tips on how to get the most visibility with the media.

To search the archives, go to the website:

[www.hotlink.ca](http://www.hotlink.ca)

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