

A special issue for clients and organizations with something to say

TIPS FOR THE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

MAKE A PLAN

Begin with a calendar. Mark the date of your event or action deadline. Next, start two lists: one with categories of people who should know about it--your "audiences." The other with the most important points you must make.

To be an effective communicator, you will want to know everything about your event: Who, What, When, Where and Why--the five news W's.

MAKE A STATEMENT

A NEWS RELEASE heralds something new. Lead with the most important new information and answer the five "W" questions in the first two short paragraphs. Then fill in the details, starting with the most important. Good stories can be cut from the bottom without losing the impact or message. Visually interesting photos with descriptive captions also make a good impression.

A PRESS CONFERENCE is the ultimate exclamation point to reinforce your message. But, never assemble reporters simply to hear you read a news release. Show them the importance of a situation or the true spirit of an event. Attract their attention.

A PRESS KIT is also effective. Use it to provide subject

background and to give color and interest to the information. Include photos whenever possible.

FACT SHEETS give essential, concise details on stories already familiar to news people. Use them liberally.

USE CLASSIC MEDIA

PUBLIC SERVICE

ANNOUNCEMENTS for non-profit organizations serve a multitude of purposes. Broadcast stations are obligated to tell the community about your responsible concern.

It can be a simple, informative statement, a professionally-produced consciousness raiser, or any variety of creative angles. PSA's should take just 28 seconds to read in a conversational style.

WEB SITES can organize all the details in one place. Just remember that for the press, a web site is like a file cabinet. You may have great things in there. But, you should not expect reporters to dig in there by themselves. You still have to show why the story, biography, picture, video or sound clip is important.

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POSTERS and handouts get attention and communicate facts.

PERSONAL CONTACT, letters, and telephone calls are appropriate for special individuals who you think might be supportive.

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EVENTS also make friendly, conducive environments for people to learn more about your organization and ideas.

MAKE A POWERFUL IMPRESSION

Be active. Present what you are doing now, using strong verbs in the active voice.

Be clear. Find the right words that say exactly what you mean.

Be direct. Expose the most important thought or (see back page)

information in your lead paragraph. Use only necessary descriptors and modifiers as you expand the story. Do not confuse your audience with words and phrases like "re-evaluation", "subsequently", "...is to be...", "... in the process of...", etc.

Be conversational, but concise. Use imperatives, such as "Do the right thing", instead of "The right action should be taken." Illustrate with precise examples.

Be responsible. Stick to what you believe. State facts and attribute them to people who know the subject. Use direct quotes.

Take command of your language. Every sentence has a subject (noun) that does or is (verb) something (object or complement). You can color that basic frame with descriptive adjectives and adverbs. Maintain a sense of time, staying in the active present and referring to the past or future only when necessary. Remember that real news is never old. Maintain a sense of importance without slipping into side thoughts or events. Remember that news always affects people.

People always make news. Wherever appropriate, convey the feelings that go with the facts by showing the person's role in the situation, their personality, and their emotional involvement.

Know your place. On behalf of yourself, your candidate, organization, business or event, you have chosen to give information. To get that information to the public, you will work with a newsperson who has chosen the responsibility of finding what is most important to that public on any given day. You both have important tasks.

Introduce yourself and your concern. Tell who is affected by that concern. If timing is

important, say so in the beginning. Demanding a publication date or page location probably will not help.

Make news people your partners. Once you are known, do not insist on hand-delivering everything. There is no need to read a release over the telephone or call to assure that it was received.

Reporter turn-offs: extremely long stories, flocks of empty "news releases", unnecessary press conferences when the story can be told on paper, irresponsible or opinionated statements, and demands that your material not be changed.

Keep in touch with reporters by letting them know when you do something important or noteworthy and by being available to answer their questions. Keep the lines open in both directions so that you can listen to their needs and suggestion, as well.

CREDITS: Jack Miller, San Francisco *Examiner* former business editor; John Brogan, author of "Clear Technical Writing" (McGraw-Hill), and Lisa Woske, *ConnectionS* editor.

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