

How to Build a Powerful Media List



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The reporters, editors and producers who cover health issues, medical, lifestyle and other news beats constantly change. Therefore, it's important to update your broadcast, print and Internet media lists now, so you'll be pitching your newsworthy story ideas to the right people.

Helpful Media Research Tools

There are numerous directories and online services available to help you update your media lists quickly and accurately:

Printed Media Directories — Bacon's (www.bacons.com), Gebbie Press (www.gebbieinc.com) and other annual media directories are valuable because they list the names, addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail addresses of key editors, writers and producers.

However, there is a continuous turnover in media personnel, so it's still a smart idea to call the publications and TV/radio stations to confirm that certain contacts are still in place.

Online Media Directories — Bacon's (www.bacons.com), Burrelles Luce (www.burrellesluce.com) and other companies offer online media lists that are regularly updated, so the contact names are current. Such services can be pricey but worthwhile if you're planning to pitch the media stories year-round.

Customized Media Lists — Bulldog Reporter (www.bulldogreporter.com), Media Distribution Services (www.mdsconnects.com) and other companies prepare customized media lists for your special needs.

If you don't have access to, or the budget for, such services, you can still put together an excellent media list by doing the following:

Maximizing Your TV Media List

When researching and updating your TV media list, keep in mind there are many TV editors and producers who may be interested in your story ideas. Among them:

- Daytime News Assignment Editors
- Evening News Assignment Editors
- Weekend News Assignment Editors
- Planning Editors
- Health/Medical Reporters and Producers
- Sports Assignment Editors
- Guest Contacts for In-Studio Morning/Midday/Afternoon Shows
- Guest Contacts for Public Affairs Programs

It's to your benefit to include as many of these contact names on your updated TV media list as possible.

How to Contact TV Stations:

Television stations' phone numbers can be found in your local yellow and white page phonebooks, as well as online. Such free Web sites as www.superpages.com and www.switchboard.com be extremely helpful.

Google (www.google.com), can help you locate TV stations' Web sites, which contain valuable information. After you log onto Google, type in the local TV station call letters you're researching, and you'll find a Web link to the station's home page. You can also key in "ABC Chicago," for example, and you'll find a link to the local Chicago ABC-TV affiliate's (WLS-TV) home page, which has contact information.

Who to Ask for at TV Stations:

When calling TV stations, ask to speak to the TV news assignment desk. People who staff the desk can usually tell you the names of the reporters and producers you're looking for, as well as their phone numbers, fax numbers, mail and e-mail addresses. When connected to the desk, identify yourself and your organization and explain that you're calling to update your media list for an upcoming event.

Pitching a Story to a TV Reporter/Producer:

There are many ways to convince a TV producer or reporter to cover your NAW special event, health/medical or human interest story. Such options include:

Cold Calls — If you're confident and persuasive on the phone, consider asking to be transferred to the producer/reporter after learning his/her name. Be sure to identify yourself and ask the reporter/producer if it's a good time to talk.

They're often on deadline but may be available to listen to a quick phone pitch. Afterwards, they may ask you to e-mail them more background information before making a final decision. If you reach their voicemail recording, leave a brief message about why you're calling; offer some key details; and slowly leave your phone number twice.

When pitching an in-studio interview for your spokesperson, on a morning, midday or afternoon show, tell the guest contact what he/she would talk about, why the information is helpful to their viewers and what visuals, if any, they could bring to the show. Such visuals could be tabletop exercise equipment, brochures and pamphlets, or B-roll — background video you shoot and edit — which contains interesting visuals of a medical/health procedure.

Morning show producers who schedule guests work odd hours and can be especially difficult to reach on the phone. You may have better luck reaching them by calling between midnight and 3:00 a.m.

E-mail — Most TV producers and reporters have become dependent on e-mail and often use it as their exclusive form of communication. To attract their attention, include a catchy headline to your note, and keep your e-mail concise. After e-mailing the note, follow up with a call the following day.

Fax — Some TV producers and reporters still insist on receiving faxes. If this is the case, fax only a few pages so you don't tie up the station's fax machine.

Regular/Overnight Mail — Some producers and reporters will request press kits, usually after they've decided on covering a story. If your press kit is extremely impressive, it may help determine whether a TV station covers your story or not. After mailing a kit, wait several days before following up.

Maximizing Your Radio Media List

To pitch a story idea for radio coverage, contact stations that are:

- All-news
- Talk radio
- Sports radio
- Non-profit (e.g. an NPR affiliate or college station)

In addition, research radio stations that broadcast:

- News updates
- Public affairs shows

How to Reach Radio Stations:

Just like the TV stations, you can find the phone numbers of your local radio stations by researching them online at www.superpages.com, www.switchboard.com and www.google.com.

To find out which radio stations are heard in your listening area, consult the radio listings page of your local newspaper. You can also key in "Chicago radio stations" on Google.com, for example, and you'll be provided with many helpful links.

Pitching a Story to a Radio Reporter/Producer:

You have several options in securing radio coverage:

On-site coverage — For a special event, a radio station may assign a reporter to attend and file a story. The all-news radio station would be most likely to assign such a reporter.

Contact the news assignment editor to pitch your story. Some stations also have specialized reporters and producers, who you may also want to speak to.

If a celebrity will be hosting or attending your event, also contact the morning drive-time shows at the local rock, pop and adult contemporary stations. At those radio stations, pitch the morning show producers.

Phone Interviews — A radio station may be interested in covering your event, but unable to send a reporter. They may, however, agree to do a phone interview with your spokesperson. Offer this option to the producer you're speaking with.

In-Studio Interview — Many live talk-radio shows prefer to interview their guests in-studio, instead of over the phone. When updating your radio media list, ask the radio station receptionist if the station has any health/fitness or general interest shows and who the guest contact person is. Some stations also have public affairs shows which do taped interviews during the week and air them over the weekend.

Maximizing Your Print Media List

Be sure to peruse your local newspapers and magazines regularly to see which reporters cover health and medical issues, as well as education stories, community events, calendar listings and human interest stories. Also, frequently check the publications' online editions. Some offer articles on their Web sites that are not in their print versions. Lately, more newspapers are including their reporters' e-mail addresses at the end of their articles, making them more accessible to reach.

When updating your print media list, include reporters/editors from the following sections of your local newspapers and magazines:

Business Section — If your company is doing a special promotion, the newspaper's marketing writer may be interested in knowing about it.

Calendar Listing Editors — Many papers have editors who compile weekday and weekend activity lists. Be sure to send materials at least 2-3 weeks in advance of your activity.

Community News — Some publications have reporters who write up blurbs about upcoming local events.

Education Writers — If you're planning activities involving students, be sure to include these journalists.

Food/Nutrition — Many food sections include nutrition information.

Health/Medical — Some big city newspapers have several reporters covering this beat.

Lifestyle Section — Most papers have lifestyle sections which include fitness, health and exercise articles.

Metro Desk/City Desk — Editors at this desk assign breaking news stories and should be kept regularly updated on your event(s).

Photo Editor — Inform the photo editors about the exciting, visual activities that will be taking place at your event, as well as VIP attendees, to motivate them to send a photographer.

Sports Section — Some sports sections also have fitness writers who may be interested in your story or event. Also, be sure to contact them if you're planning any events with local sports teams or celebrities.

Maximizing Your Internet Media List

Many people seek out local special events activities by visiting Web sites instead of consulting their local newspaper. Therefore, it's important to research and submit event listings to appropriate online publications.

To find out which Web Sites cater to your local area, visit www.google.com. Also, www.digitalcity.com, www.citysearch.com and www.craigslist.org invite not-for-profit groups to list information about their events, free-of-charge, on their Web sites.

Final Parting Tips

Plan ahead. Do not wait until the last minute to alert the media about a special event or interview possibility. The more advance notice you can give reporters and producers, the better.

Choose a spokesperson who will represent you well. Make sure he or she is articulate, knowledgeable, engaging and well-groomed. When pitching the media, briefly describe your event, focusing on what makes it newsworthy and visually exciting, and who will be attending (e.g. VIPs, local celebrities, business leaders, your spokesperson).

Many TV stations cannot confirm attendance until the morning of an event. Be sure to have the TV news assignment desk phone numbers handy so you can call them first thing in the morning to double check to see if they will be covering your event.

If a station does confirm, find out the name of the reporter who will be attending; when he or she will be arriving; and his or her cell phone number. Also, give the assignment editor your cell phone number in case the reporter needs to reach you.



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