

Working with the Media

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Introduction

The media are influential in our society; they are pervasive in what we read, hear and view on a daily basis. We now live in the world of constant news updates in which people rely on the media to provide them with the latest information.

While the traditional print and electronic media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television) are still important outlets, content is increasingly found online. Social media (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, web sites) now serves as the primary news source for many people.

Today's recruiter must be media savvy in understanding how both traditional and new media thinks, works and communicates. Remember when it comes to news coverage, you don't have control over what is reported, but you **can** have input.

This module will help you to better understand how the media works, how to promote your organization/service in the media, and how to effectively deliver your message to your audience.

General Considerations

The media and the public participate in a symbiotic relationship. The public's interest both *drives* and *is driven by* the work of the media. In working with the media, there are a few general considerations to keep in mind.

The media's main motivation is to inform and educate the public. Print, broadcast and online outlets may run various types of stories: from investigative and news articles to editorial/opinions and columns. Bad news often garners more coverage than good news because conflict creates a dramatic story. All outlets strive to be first to cover the stories/ issues in their communities and persuade their audiences to read their publications, watch and/or listen to their newscasts, visit their web sites and follow their Twitter accounts.

You may approach the media with a story idea through a press release or the media may approach you for a story their outlet is already covering. For instance, your local media outlet may receive a press release from the Ministry on a newsworthy issue, and wish to seek your advice on the local impact of the issue. Regardless of who generates the story idea, you need to understand that with all interview requests, your comments could be quoted in an article.

In the physician and nurse recruitment realm, the media tends to focus on politics, spending, and the provision and delivery of health-care services. Be aware, there are many instances of individuals who have offered information to the media and upon reading the story discover their quotes have been taken out of context or misinterpreted. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to convey your message as clearly as possible, to minimize the chance of misinterpretation.

A Media Plan

A “media” or “media relations” plan is designed to promote your organization, highlighting its expertise, events, new programs and accomplishments. The framework below will assist you in developing and creating the core of your media plan in six steps.

Step 1:

List and define your goals. These goals must be in line with your overall marketing plan. For more information regarding a marketing plan, please refer to the [Marketing Module](#). You may want to focus on one or more of the following goals:

- Establish your expertise among your peers, the press, or your potential clients;
- Build goodwill within your community;
- Create and/or reinforce your organization’s professional image;
- Inform and create favourable perceptions regarding your recruitment;
- Assist in introducing a new recruit to your community;
- Generate interest in future events;
- Mitigate the impact of negative publicity.

Step 2:

Determine the target audience(s) you want to reach.

Step 3:

Define objectives to help you achieve your goals. It is important that your objectives be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. For example, “Place five community recruitment success stories in media outlets frequently read by post-graduate residents.”

Step 4:

Develop your plan. Determine your key messages and decide which media outlets to target. Make sure the media outlets you select reach the audience(s) (viewership and readership) with which you wish to connect. Then decide which communication vehicles would be most appropriate to use. Examples may include:

- Media advisories;
- News releases;
- Articles;
- Profiles (such as success stories);
- Letters to the editor;
- News conferences;
- Media tours.

Step 5:

Develop a schedule. Look for ways to create synergy in your organization by matching your media plan with other marketing and sales efforts. For example, a “Health Care Appreciation Week” consists of several events and allows for opportunities to feature/give prominence to health-care workers in your organization.

Step 6:

Track the results of your media efforts and review the results. Did you achieve the defined objectives of the particular effort?

Contacting the Media

Creating a Media Resources Inventory

Before you reach out to the media, you need to know whom to contact. Creating a media resources inventory will be helpful in this respect. This is a comprehensive list/database of all media outlets with their respective beat reporters, assignment editors and contact people. Find out if a media inventory already exists that you could use; ask the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Office/other local government agency. This will save you the time and effort necessary to compile your own.

If you need to compile your own media resources inventory, the [Media Contacts](#) in the Resources section can help you get started. Also, [monitoring the media](#) will help you identify specific media outlets and reporters who are covering “health” and other beats.

Once you have compiled your media resources inventory, you will identify the media outlets and key individuals with which you wish to work based on your media plan. In smaller communities, you can contact them and introduce yourself/your organization.

Media Advisories, News Releases and Press Releases

The usual way to contact the media is through media advisories, news releases and press releases.

A media advisory usually outlines the schedule or details of a time-sensitive event you or your group is involved in or hosting. The information included in a media advisory includes the “WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY” for an event and is usually no more than a page long.

A news release is a tool to quickly communicate the newsworthiness of an issue. An effective news release is one that describes impact on people—i.e., the readership/viewership the media outlet represents—and includes timely developments. While news releases will sometimes be printed as they are written, they generally provide background for a story. That said, if news releases are clear and concise, some small media outlets may publish the news release or use part of it in a news brief.

A press release typically describes your organization’s position on an issue, reaction to an event, or an announcement of a new program. It should include background on the issue, event, or new program, and a quote by the group’s spokesperson when applicable. Whenever possible, releases should be one page in length.

Media advisories, news releases and press releases are usually e-mailed to a media contact, distributed to the media via a newswire (e.g. Canada Newswire, Marketwire or Cision) or sent as a matte story. If holding an event, send a media advisory a few days before and follow up with a call. When sending a news release, send in the early morning if possible in order for the news desk to assign a story to a reporter. Fridays —especially afternoons — are not the best time to send a news release; breaking news may supersede your story and take priority by the following Monday.

Read [Tips for Writing a Media Advisory](#) and [Tips for Writing a News Release](#) for step-by-step guidance.

Handling Media Inquiries

Chances are at some point the media will respond to one of your releases or contact you for a story the outlet has initiated. As a recruiter, you're likely the public face of your organization, and may be approached for an interview. When the media contacts you, it's important to respond in a timely fashion. Simply ignoring a media request is not a good strategy. However, before you agree to an interview you must understand what is being asked of you and the implications of what you are going to say about the topic.

In responding to media inquiries, you must first:

- Determine the nature and scope of the inquiry;
- Clarify the angle of the story;
- For a radio or television interview, find out whether it will be live or recorded, the format of the program, and who else will be taking part;
- Determine if you/your organization wishes to comment. Sometimes you want to take the lead in delivering information and sometimes you don't;
- Ask for the reporter's deadline;
- Ask if the reporter will fact-check quotes;
- Speak with your communications department and/or consult your colleagues before committing;
- Confirm there is time to prepare your messaging;
- Decide who is best in your organization to act as the spokesperson.

Preparing for the Interview

If you agree to an interview, it's wise to prepare for it ahead of time. Unless you're a naturally articulate and strong communicator who is comfortable speaking "off the cuff," a media interview can be intimidating—especially when reporters represent hundreds, thousands, if not millions of viewers and readers.

Unless you prepare before an interview, you may find yourself in dangerous territory. You may comment on or hypothesize about issues you weren't prepared to address. Post-interview, you may remember things you could have said or said differently—all because you didn't prepare.

Media Training

Media training is the best way to prepare for interviews. While everyone wants to be part of a "good news story," the reality is news and the issues of the day are not always positive. That is when you will really appreciate the value of media training.

A skilled media trainer will coach and prepare you for a variety of interviews—from in-studio to telephone to on-air, as well as from panel to stand-up to scrum/ambush interviews—for both the print and electronic media.

He or she will also help you:

- Understand your role in answering questions;
- Craft and simplify your organization's key messages;
- Show you how to frame your answers;
- Use your messaging effectively throughout the interview;
- Practise your answers during simulated interviews; and
- Increase your confidence as a subject expert and/or spokesperson for your organization.

While media training does not guarantee you will ace interviews, the lessons learned will provide you with solid preparation for an interview.

If You Do Not Have Access to a Media Trainer

If you do not have access to or cannot enlist the services of a media trainer, you can still prepare for interviews yourself. Write down a list of questions in advance, the more challenging the better, and practise your answers out loud to yourself or with a partner. If you have the time, you may even want to record yourself with a camcorder and play back your interview to determine if any changes need to be made.

Be sure you know your facts and remember to frame your responses to match the media outlet's local, provincial or national audience. You will also need to find ways to bridge your answers to your key messages and repeat the messaging.

*Your local **Regional Advisor** has been media trained and can share his/her experience with you.*

The Interview

During an interview, keep the following in mind:

- Be cognizant of the story angle and deliver a few key messages;
- Make sure you understand each question;
- Try to advance your organization's interests rather than simply answering the reporter's questions;
- Talk only about matters in your sphere; do not speculate;
- Stay on message and do not let your guard down. Reinforce your points; don't be afraid to be repetitive;
- Use evidence and examples to support your points;
- Remember, nothing is "off the record." Any comments, on or off-camera, and before, during or after the interview may be used by a reporter.

During a television interview (in which how you look is almost as important as what you say), keep the following in mind:

- Get comfortable in your chair: don't fidget, swivel or rock;
- Lean forward slightly;
- Avoid gripping the chair, clasping or wringing your hands;
- Avoid playing with objects or drumming your fingers;
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer or audience;
- Use natural hand gestures to emphasize your points and make sure they are in sync with what you saying;
- Smile slightly but avoid trying to "win over" the interviewer;
- Dress appropriately for a TV interview: do not wear clothing with horizontal lines; if wearing white, wear under a dark-coloured jacket.

Post-Interview

While still fresh in your mind:

- Write a brief report; state the nature of the inquiry, interview date, name of the media outlet, reporter, topics covered, date of airing/publication/posting and a summary of your responses.
- Notify your stakeholders about your participation in the interview, the nature of the inquiry and your responses.
- Monitor the media afterward to see the result of your interview.
- Follow up with the media outlet if necessary. For example, if there is a factual error, you may choose to do any one or a combination of the following:
 - Write a letter to the editor;
 - Call the reporter to explain the error;
 - Call the News Editor to request a “correction” notice;
 - Request the copy be updated online so the error is not “picked up” by others and repeated.

If you have further questions, ask your local Regional Advisor.

Maintaining Positive Relationships with the Media

- Respect deadlines. Most news stories are time-sensitive and journalists must meet deadlines, which are not flexible. Be sure to respond to any interview requests and follow-up interview questions in a timely manner.
- Understand the nature of the relationship. While you may not be able to control the angle of the story, depending on the story, you may want to establish yourself as a go-to person for comment. Set the tone from the outset by being as forthright as possible; however, understand the media are not your friends.
- Nurture individual relationships. You may find it mutually rewarding to become acquainted with individual journalists who deal with specific issues/beats. While maintaining good relationships does not guarantee positive media coverage or any coverage when promoting your organization or event, such relationships can be of value to both parties. Depending on your community, you may want to thank a reporter for the coverage or for supporting your cause or writing a balanced article. A note or letter of appreciation can develop and strengthen a relationship.
- Follow up on factual errors promptly. If, for whatever reason, your organization has released incorrect information, contact the media outlet as soon as possible. Often, the least damaging way to deal with mistakes is to simply own up to them. If the media report is factually incorrect, contact the reporter, columnist, editor or blogger.

Media Monitoring

Recruiters require a broad perspective and knowledge about health-care issues locally, provincially and nationally. It's quite likely you or your organization already monitor the media in some way, in hard copy or electronic format; however, if it's not your current practice, you'll want to get started.

Monitoring the media helps you keep abreast of these issues and provides you with insight into what your communities are reading and learning. It will also help you evaluate the general tone and themes of the news stories and features.

Additionally, it's necessary for you to know what the media are saying about you and your organization. For example, are you or your organization's efforts being cast in a positive or negative light?

Other issues to be aware of are:

- Physician recruitment and retention initiatives;
- Health policy;
- Hospital and Emergency Department issues;
- Community reaction, such as letters to the editor.

Google Alerts

Signing up to receive Google alerts that notify you via email when your company or topics of interest are mentioned online will help you keep abreast of what is being said.

Online Media Monitoring

A web-based, media-monitoring service will enable you to:

- Search, view and download clips;
- Track current as well as archived news and pertinent information regarding coverage of your organization;
- Provide you with the up-to-date alerts on local, provincial and national issues;
- Supply you with specific intelligence on controversial topics;
- Track the effectiveness of your media relations activity.

Media Contacts

Television and Radio

- Public Service/Community Relations Director – contact for public service announcements (PSAs), editorial rebuttals, talk shows or community calendar listings.
- Promotion Director (sometimes called Creative Services/Community Relations/Public Affairs Director) – contact for developing a station-wide promotional campaign for your organization or events.
- News Director/Assignment Editor – contact for news items.
- Editorial Director – contact to offer editorial comment or to respond to a station editorial.
- Community Bulletin Board Director – contact when announcing meetings for your organization's events.
- Program Director – contact at large radio and TV stations; this individual is in charge of all programming except news (and sometimes in charge of special documentaries and magazine-type programs).
- Sales Manager (sometimes called Marketing Manager) – contact for air time.

Newspapers, Magazines and Other Publications

- City Editor/Assignment Editor – The City Editor at the newspaper determines what news to include in the paper. A larger paper will have a City Desk that includes an Assignment Editor who coordinates the day-to-day job of assigning stories.
- Features Editor – If the publication is large enough to have different sections, many of them may be under the direction of the Features Editor, with specific editors for different topics.
- Business Editor/Sports Editor – Most newspapers have separate sections for both business and sports. These may be appropriate if you can find a business or sports angle for a health-related story.
- Advertising Director – This person is in charge of advertising, and can help you with ideas for your ad design, size selection and mechanical preparation.
- Other key people: beat reporters (health, life section), editors of community calendars, Op-Ed Editor (opposite the editorial page), columnists.

Online Publications and Social Media

- Web Editor – Contact the editor of a web site, who is responsible for assigning stories.
- Bloggers – Contact bloggers who cover health-care topics.
- Facebook and Twitter Account Owners – Send a message to Facebook or Twitter account owners who post/tweet about health-care topics.

Writing a Media Advisory and News Release

Tips for Writing a Media Advisory

- Create a media advisory template:

Place your logo here.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date

Your name and title
Organization
Address
Email | Phone number

MEDIA ADVISORY
Headline

ATTENTION: ASSIGNMENT EDITORS AND PHOTO EDITORS

Include two or three short paragraphs describing the event.

Who:
What:
When:
Why:

Include a boilerplate, which is a short statement of facts about your company that are generally no longer than three of four lines of text.

- Write the media advisory text:
 - Create a brief headline describing the event;
 - Write two or three short paragraphs describing the event. The first paragraph needs to capture the reporter's attention, so make sure your lead is descriptive and catchy;
 - Create a section at the end with a line for each of the following categories: who, what, when, where and why. Each category name should be bold and in all caps with the corresponding information typed normally;
 - Be sure that you check the accuracy of the facts and follow your organization's approval process before distributing the media advisory.

Tips for Writing a News Release

- Write NEWS RELEASE at the top, along with your organization name and logo;
- Indicate the date of issue and mark "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" unless it is embargoed. (An embargo is a note at the top of the press release telling journalists not to leak or print the story before a particular deadline.);
- Highlight the impact on people or community in a snappy headline;
- If you are unable to show impact in the headline, write a sub-head to achieve this objective;
- Summarize your content in the first paragraph: WHAT is happening, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, and by WHOM. Your content must immediately grab an Assignment Editor's attention;
- The news release need be no longer than a page-and-a-half; use short paragraphs and simple sentences;
- Use a quote by an identified person from your organization to tell your side of the story;
- Type "-30-" at the conclusion of your press release, which signals the end of the press release;
- Provide the name and contact information of the person at your organization with whom the media can follow up. It should also include a phone number where this person can be reached. To create consistency, try to provide the same name and number each time;
- Be sure that you check the accuracy of the facts and follow your organization's approval process before distributing the news release;
- After sending your news release, follow up with a phone call to the newsroom to confirm it was received.

Stay informed. For further updates on Working with the Media and other modules, sign up for the Recruitment Essentials [mailing list](#).

For more information or questions,
please contact your local Regional Advisor:

www.healthforceontario.ca/ra