



## Generating local media coverage

The media always want good local stories, or a local angle on a national story. Often you have a good story without realising it - follow some basic guidelines and you will find the media more receptive than you ever thought.

Identify and prepare the resources you have. These could include:

- A local person who was helped by your charity and is a lively interviewee.
- A family which gives a human face to recent statistics.
- A success story or the opening of a new facility.

### Key messages

Agree on the key messages you want to communicate through the media. These will inform your media output. Examples include:

- One in eight people in Britain is deaf or hard of hearing (RNID).
- Foyers are a positive force in the local community (Foyer Federation).
- Only a quarter of all adults say they are currently learning (Adult Learners Week).
- Labour is for the many not the few (Labour Party).

Before you start, plan your media approach:

### What kind of story do I have?

There are different types of 'local story'. Each one should be offered to the appropriate section of the press or broadcast media. The main categories are news, features and listings.

### News

A news item is one linked to a specific date, a one-off event or a new piece of information, like a forthcoming fund-raising event, new research findings with relevance to the local area, the opening of a new local facility, the participation or endorsement by a celebrity of a local event, or a local problem affecting your user groups. In short, something that will be new to readers.

Some fictitious examples:

- Vinnie Jones learns life skills with local teens.
- Local people learn hairdressing skills with David Bellamy.
- Homelessness reaches record levels in Hull.
- Cha Cha for Charity: tea dance at the manor - local people from 7 to 77 bop for Help the Aged.

### Features

Features come in all shapes and sizes and cover all sorts of themes. A 'human interest' feature is a personal story, one family's experience, a triumph over tragedy, anything that is centred on a person or people who have experiences readers can relate to. Examples of analytical features are an opinion piece, a survey based on in-depth research, and a look at the background to current statistics.

Some possible examples:

- Refugees in Birmingham - an update. An in-depth article with statistics, personal testimonies, and strong quotes from your spokespeople.



- Profile of X, a local charity member, a person helped by your charity.
- Conservation in Northern Ireland: local issues - local solutions.
- A personal view: dispelling the myths about disabled people in the workplace.

Feature articles depend more on personal contact - you need to catch the imagination of a journalist or an editor by suggesting a feature they can get their teeth into. Ideally it should be someone you have spoken to before and whom you know to be interested in your work.

### **Events listings/diary**

When you want to promote a forthcoming event try to make sure it is mentioned in the 'forthcoming events' sections of all local papers.

Contact local radio as they will often cover an event if they know about it in advance and can send a reporter down. They are much less likely to cover an event retrospectively.

### **Advertising**

This is a commercial transaction whereby your organisation pays for a space in the paper or broadcasting airtime to advertise a service or to request something from the public. This is separate from editorial coverage and is not normally a major part of charity and voluntary organisations' local media relations.

### **Do I have photos?**

Are there good quality photos available, or a photo opportunity for the press?

Photographs can make all the difference, especially in local newspapers. A story is much more likely to be printed with a good photo. Even just a photo with a caption is a good way to get coverage. Get to know a local photographer with news experience, and build up a bank of good pictures. Good visuals are central to successful television coverage too so think about a good picture-opportunity if you're targeting television.

### **Which media should I approach?**

You or someone in your team should become familiar with the local media: the main newspapers and magazines, the free press, the local radio and TV programmes.

You need to identify all possible outlets for your story, from mainstream local papers to the trade and free press, and all public and independent radio and TV stations.

Remember, no outlet is too small: often the freesheets circulated in residential areas are more widely read than national dailies.

### **Getting to know the media**

Do you have any media contacts already? Personal contacts with journalists, whether from previous coverage, family and friends, or just a friendly phone call, can be the quickest way to a story.

If not, identify the contact name of the right person for your type of story. This is not difficult, just looking through your local paper you will see stories about similar themes to yours – make a note of the section and the writer, and try to place a similar story in the same section yourself.



If you are 'cold-calling' a newspaper or local radio, just ask for the name of the most relevant person to your story: the news editor, features editor, environment correspondent, picture editor for photos.

Do you have access to a media guide or database for local media? The following are a good place to start:

- The Media Guide (a Guardian publication, 4th Estate, updated annually) is good value at £15.00 from bookshops. It contains a comprehensive list of radio, print and TV outlets, nationally, regionally, and locally.
- Benn's Media Directory is in many public libraries.
- Local press agencies also serve as a useful channel through which to get your story in the local media.
- Contact the umbrella organisation for charities or voluntary organisations in your local area.
- The Newspaper Society at [www.newspapersoc.org.uk](http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk) has information on local and regional newspapers.

Finally, make a list of all appropriate media to contact for your particular story, in order of preference. Then work your way down with your story idea.

### **When do I want this to go out?**

You also need to establish a time frame. When do you want this coverage, and what are the media deadlines to get it printed/broadcast by then? Be careful: copy deadlines can be surprisingly early.

Television and radio broadcasters are generally more flexible, although if your news is not groundbreaking then don't expect it to transcend deadlines.

### **Getting in touch**

Make sure you read, listen or watch the publication or programme. Start with a phone call to the newspaper or broadcast outlet, to find out which department or journalist deals with your type of story.

The first time you call, ask whether it is a good time, or would it be better for you to call another time. Once you have them listening ask about their deadlines – when do they go to press, when do they have a news meeting, when would they like to be contacted. Ask what kind of stories they are interested in – and listen.

Make sure you get their direct phone line if they have one, their fax number, e-mail address, and any other relevant details. Be ready to fax them immediately with your press release or another clear, snappy document.

Keep a note of the journalist's responses – it might be worth making a file. Then, each time you call them make a note of when it was and what was discussed. When you call again, remind the journalist what you discussed before. This helps build the relationship. Invite them to any event your organisation might have – once you meet face to face they are more likely to remember you. If you know a journalist personally, do call them first and offer your story or ask their advice about placing it.



### **Be creative**

If your organisation has relatively little exposure in the local media try thinking up an interesting story to feed them. Rack your brains and try to think whether:

- A local person associated with your organisation is doing something unusual or interesting.
- Something you've come across while working for your organisation has moved/intrigued you; if so, then it's likely that other local people will be interested too.
- There are ways in which your organisation can provide a local angle on national issues.

Another useful method of hatching ideas for stories is to identify those anecdotes which you yourself would use to describe what is lively and interesting about your organisation. These stories will probably work well for the local media.

Identify whether your story is exclusive as this may affect the type of coverage it receives. It is important to bear in mind however, that giving an exclusive to a reporter may mean that other journalists and publications may not cover it so it may not be a risk worth taking.

It is important to remember that once you have created a story you need to keep the momentum going. Editors always appreciate a regular source of ideas or information and they will not hesitate to approach you when they need a story.

### **Be accessible**

It is important when you have a story to run in the local media that you are accessible. When contacting the media, always give your contact numbers including that for your home or mobile phone. Don't be alarmed by this. You are only likely to be called at home in exceptional circumstances. However, your being accessible out of office hours may prove the difference between a story being run or pulled.

### **Be persistent**

If your story doesn't get aired or gets bounced from the front page to half a column in the paper's bowels, don't despair. It doesn't necessarily mean your story is not newsworthy. Agendas change all the time. Editors have a range of stories to juggle and stories often get overtaken by events and dropped. Therefore if your story does not succeed at first, and can stand the test of time, get in contact with newspaper or broadcaster to try and find it a new angle or slot.

### **Establish your expertise**

This is a more long-term approach. You can establish yourself with local media as the first port of call, the expert on your issue, whom journalists will want to consult again and again.

If a big story breaks (nationally or locally) in your organisation's sphere, the most knowledgeable member of your team should call the press to offer a quote or an interview immediately.

Surveys and reports: if you have done some new research on a local issue, let the media know.

Always give full contact numbers (including home telephone) for easy access to the relevant expert.

Keep up the effort! Don't forget, you are not going to get every story you suggest to the publication – don't take it personally!



Check list:

**Identify your own team**

Agree on who your media representative or PR person should be.

**Identify your best spokesperson**

An articulate, friendly, well-informed and easily reachable person you can field to the press for interview. Always give their home or mobile number for easy access (they will only be called at home if a story is likely to go ahead, so it's worth it).

**Be ready**

Have back up photos, case studies and people prepared for interview.

**Identify your story and your media outlet**

Who, where, when, what are you doing?

Do you have photos to go with the text?

Which media should you send it to?

**Be creative**

Find a way to link up local events with the 'buzz' of a national issue.

Organise events with local people or in a local venue if you possibly can, but if not, focus on some appealing aspect of what you do and the people you work with.

**Write a press release and follow it up**

Be persistent. When you are rejected, keep working down the list of possibles. It is more satisfying to get a nice story in a small local freesheet than nothing at all in the Manchester Evening News.