

MEDIA RELATIONS 101

These tips and information are provided by Joan Stewart, a media relations speaker, trainer and consultant with The Summit Group in Milwaukee, and by Alice Adams, a Texas-based writer and PR consultant.

Have you noticed? Some people manage to get their names/pictures in the newspaper all the time...and the same folks can also be seen on television and heard on the radio. So what's their secret?

First of all, they know the difference between advertising and public relations. And secondly, they have developed a relationship with their local media.

Advertising means space you pay for – and in large newspapers, space doesn't come cheap. But, when you pay for space, you control what's in that space, where it appears in the newspaper and when it appears.

Public Relations also means getting your name/cause/message into print or on TV, but it differs from advertising in these ways: (1) It is free – you don't pay for PR...but, you also have no control over the message. (2) You can't control when it appears. (3) You can't control when it appears.

Media relations are the groundwork you lay so you can get good, positive public relations. And from past experience, I can tell you media relations is nothing more than:

- (1.) Being a **professional** in your field.
- (2.) Providing **accurate and credible information** in the format the newspaper, radio or television station requests.
- (3.) Being **on time** when they ask for information – and returning phone calls on a timely basis.
- (4.) Understanding what your local newspaper and TV/radio stations consider **newsworthy**.
- (5.) Understanding that with every media relationship, there's a learning curve – and rather than bombarding them with 50 pages of information about your business, **spoon feeding a byte of information at a time** is best.
- (6.) Understanding that some newspapers have **departmental editors** who may cover different parts of the neighborhood. Large newspapers have agricultural editors, business editors, lifestyle editors, food editors, etc. Get to know each one!

Now, a couple of pointers about media relations:

(1.) **Your Professional Image.** If you don't have letterhead and business cards for your business, it is a good idea to have these when approaching the media. They don't have to be expensive but they do need to provide you with a professional image on paper.

(2.) **Slow News Days.** Every newspaper, radio station and TV station has these. These are the days when there are no double murders, no political skirmishes, no sensational headlines.

These are the days when media needs "nice" stories – about decorating emu eggs at Easter, about the artist who creates necklaces out of emu toenails, about how emus help conserve the land or how to make an emu cake, etc. It is a good idea to provide a list of "feature ideas" your local media can tap into when a slow news day occurs.

(3.) **Talking To The Media.** Let's say somewhere in the U.S., a "killer" emu is on the loose and terrorizes a shopping center. When this news comes down the wire, your local media may call you for an interview

(since you are a local expert). So, when they ask you how many "killer emus" exist in the U.S., how are you going to respond?

The best possible answer is to ignore the question and talk about your own agenda (like politicians do.) Say, "Yes, I can understand your concern, but right now we're focusing on some exciting new research into the healing properties of emu oil." Or, you might want to say, "We've just received word that emu meat is now included in the American Heart Association's list of heart-healthy meats. Always, always be positive – and when a negative question comes your way, focus on the positive activities of your state association or the AEA.

(4.) **Be Persistent – and Consistent.** Don't pester or "bug" a reporter to run your story, but consistently offer high quality press releases and information for them to consider. Don't phone an editor day after day. If they don't call back, call once more and then fax or email the information. Be persistent – and be consistent.

Be professional. Be positive. Don't "bad mouth" another industry. Don't sulk when they don't pay attention to your "big deal." Just be consistent in high quality information, professional ethics and a positive attitude about your industry and its achievements.

With those preliminaries out of the way, let's get down to business. The following are some steps to take in building a professional relationship. Media types are busy. Never take too much time getting your message across.

1.) **Introduce yourself.** Start by calling the reporter who covers your industry and scheduling an appointment for a brief (5-10 minute) "hello, how are you introduction." Most reporters have three times more to do than there are hours in a day. They may be free for lunch, but don't count on it – and don't take it as a brush-off if they just don't have a clear calendar. Ask to stop by and leave some information anyway. Then take your fact sheet about your business, information about emus in general and perhaps a press release.

Also, if you can't meet, find out which they prefer you to use to submit information -- by email or fax. Leave your business card and encourage him or her to call on you for background, etc., when needed.

2.) **Get to know local freelancers** who write about agriculture, food, health care and small business. If you're not sure who they are, call the publication you want to get into and ask.

3.) **Offer to help provide background** or research into agriculture, the emu industry, health, etc., whether it's an interview source or a suggestion for Web sites where reporters can find statistics about your industry. Position yourself as such a valuable source that the next time the reporter is looking for a story, your name will come to mind.

4.) **Email or fax the reporter about a new trend you're seeing**, i.e., more meat being sold to upscale restaurants, more emus being exported, etc.

5.) **Suggest yourself as the local angle to a national story.** If more farmers are leaving the industry, suggest a story about how emu farmers are supplementing traditional operations to maintain the farm. If heart disease continues its skyrocketing course, talk about heart-healthy recipes with emu.

6.) **Piggyback on a holiday** – like emu eggs at Easter or emu egg gifts for Christmas or the gift of emu oil to treat sunburns, insect bites, etc., for the Fourth of July or Labor Day. And what about some emu recipes

for Thanksgiving? If the newspaper doesn't want the story, they still might want a photo. Same goes for TV – they might want a picture essay of the farm at Thanksgiving.

7.) Sometimes the best media relations begin through the media meeting you at a **volunteer function**. At a race, if the local massage school uses emu oil and you donate and are on the scene, this gives you a good opening. Or, for your local public television station, donating emu oil or emu meat for an auction is also a way to get the word "emu" on everyone's lips.

8.) **Being up front and honest, being professional, making a good appearance and understanding deadlines** are also good ingredients for positive media relations. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you'll find out and then call them back – and do it...as quickly as possible.

9.) When providing press releases from the AEA, if the media wants photos, there may be some files they can select from the AEA web site. If not, **offer your operation for photos** and be a gracious host when they come to take pictures, to interview you, etc. Even if they can't stay for a glass of tea, offer to have them take a cold can of soda with them.

10.) Remember this – **media people are hard-working people** just like you. They are paid to report the news, to provide feature articles of interest to their readers and broadcast news and stories that will touch their viewers or their listeners.

Never hesitate to submit a press release or an idea for a story – such as hatching eggs or demonstrating how to etch eggs for gifts. Even if they don't use it immediately, the reporter or editor may need something fast during a slow news day.

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