

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO **PROACTIVE** **MEDIA WORK**



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## INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of Beginners' Guidance Notes produced for cultural services officers working in the London Boroughs.

It is part of a programme - run by Visit London with London Cultural Improvement Programme, and funded by Capital Ambition - to develop the marketing skills of non-marketers working in London's local authority cultural services.

For all the guides in this series, case studies and other local tourism resources [click here](#), or click on the coloured boxes opposite.



**VISIT  
LONDON**  
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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO  
**CUSTOMER  
RELATIONSHIP  
MANAGEMENT**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO  
**SOCIAL MEDIA**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO  
**MARKETING  
EVALUATION**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO  
**WEBSITES**

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# 1 UNDERSTANDING PROACTIVE MEDIA WORK

## What do we mean by Proactive Media Work?

Public relations people use a very wide range of communications methods to influence opinions and get messages across - from one-to-one briefings and lobbying, to formal presentations and corporate entertaining.

But this guidance note focuses on using the media for PR purposes. It is about getting 'free' editorial coverage in both traditional media and social media.

And it is about *proactive* media work as opposed to *reactive* media work - i.e. when *you* take the initiative to communicate, rather than responding to an enquiry or situation.



## Benefits and risks

People are much more likely to trust editorial coverage than paid-for advertising or an organisation's own marketing materials. So it's great if you can persuade a journalist to carry your story or key messages as editorial.



But of course you can't guarantee coverage, or control how your story is used. So you need to be prepared to draw a blank. And you also need to make sure you are ready for the media to look at your story from every angle.

## Social media

Social media is revolutionising the way that news is spread. Social media channels - such as blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, YouTube films, and Flickr photo libraries - are the new platforms for making news, influencing opinion, reaching the press and spreading the word.

And social media is a great way to establish yourself or your organisation as an interested party, a trusted source of information or even an authority in your field or sector - interacting via Twitter, starting your own specialist blog, and posting comments on others' blogs and forums. This can make you more interesting to the media as a source of ideas and information.

There is more advice about social media in the 'Social Media' guide of this series.



# 2 THE ESSENTIALS OF PROACTIVE MEDIA WORK

## The fundamentals

Before launching any proactive media campaign you should be thinking about:

- **Objectives** - what are you trying to achieve?
- **Audience** - who are you trying to reach?
- **Message** - what do you want to say?
- **Routes** - how are you going reach them?



## Planning a media campaign

### 1. Identify and research your media outlets

Once you have identified your target audiences, and worked out which media they consume, then it should be straightforward to decide which media you need to target - from mainstream national and local press, TV and radio, specialist publications and local community newsletters, to social media.

Then - with the help of your organisation's PR team if you have one - build up a media database with contact names and details, and keep it updated.

Many journalists now go to specialist blogs and other online resources for story ideas - for example Culture 24 [www.culture24.org.uk](http://www.culture24.org.uk), a not-for-profit online publisher that brings news, reviews, links, listings and resources together under one (online) roof. So you'll need to send your news to these 'news consolidators' too.

And journalists are increasingly using social media such as Twitter and Facebook to find ideas for stories - so you need to make sure that your news and pictures feature on as many social media outlets as possible. For example, does your organisation have a Twitter feed or a blog you can add your news to? Does the local press have a Flickr feed outlet for uploading images?

Don't forget to keep an eye on and add comments to specialist blogs on your topic - including key journalists' blogs. And it's a good idea to set up Google alerts on key topics so that you can keep up with how these topics are being publicised and build an archive of ideas.



You'll want to research the media you plan to target - to make sure that you understand what sort of stories they're interested in, what angles they may be looking for, and the style of copy and images that they use.



## 2. 'Make' news

There are lots of people out there with acres of space to fill - newspaper columnists, magazine journalists, broadcast media, bloggers and tweeters. They are all looking for 'news'.

Good PR people know how to make a news story out of thin air. So how do you make your product, service or event newsworthy?



You need a hook to hang it on - something topical you can associate it with. It could be a shared reference - e.g. seasons, events & festivals, anniversaries. It could be a trend or something that's hot at the moment - something in the 'zeitgeist'. It could be a current news story that you can add a fresh perspective or dimension to.

There are some tried and tested techniques for creating a newsworthy buzz:

- Stage an event that is designed to attract media coverage
- Create a photo opportunity - e.g. someone in costume, access to behind the scenes
- Get a quote from an expert and/or celebrity
- Do a piece of research - it could simply be a straw poll of visitors' views on something topical
- Discover something - e.g. something 'lost' in your archives that you've unearthed
- Find a quirky connection - for example a connection with somewhere/something on the other side of the world, or something very old and conservative that has a connection with something contemporary and radical
- Find a superlative you can use - e.g. the largest, the oldest, the smallest, the strangest, the longest, the only, the best, the favourite, the rarest.

## 3. Prepare your materials

If you can, prepare your media kit and any other materials well in advance, bearing in mind that some print media have long deadlines for editorial - sometimes several weeks before publication.

Tips on writing a news release:

- Keep it short - ideally one page
- Answer the questions: who?, what?, where?, why?, when?
- Keep the main message in the headline and the first paragraph - and tailor these for specific media, to make your news as relevant as possible



- Include a quote - you need to make sure this person is fully briefed and will be available for follow-up interviews

- Include your name, mobile phone number and email address at the end of the release - make sure you will be available to respond quickly to any media calls



- Include an interesting image if you can - it will get you noticed and give you much better odds of achieving coverage, even if it's not ultimately used
- Supplement the news release with a specially prepared bullet-point list of background info, and URL link(s) for more info online.



#### 4. Circulate your news, follow-up, sell-in

Circulate your news to your database of contacts and be prepared for media enquiries. Will you be the spokesperson for enquiries or is there a designated senior member of staff? Make sure you know how to contact this spokesperson once media enquiries start to come in.



Follow-up with phone calls to journalists and editors. They are bombarded by hundreds of emails and press releases each day so get yours noticed by making contact as soon as it's gone out and to make sure that the news has reached the right person. Ask them if they need any further information and give them your contact details.

Sell-in by using your social media channels to spread the news further. Post comments on journalists' blogs and link to them in your own social media interaction (journalists always appreciate being mentioned). Interact with relevant Facebook pages, blog posts, Twitter feeds, YouTube films and Flickr photo libraries then link back to your own website or blog.

Make sure you put your news release on your website. And send it to your stakeholders, asking them to spread your news via their own channels.



#### 5. Evaluate

Plan time for evaluating your media coverage. Did your news release have the right impact? Did you get the coverage you wanted? If not, then try to work out why. This will shape your media activity in the future.

If you're doing some visitor research build a question into a survey asking them how they found out about you/your service - and make sure they can tick from a range of different media.

If budget allows, use a clipping agency or online tracking agency, and record your successes. Or think about doing this yourself on a smaller scale by setting up a google alert using keywords specific to your release or campaign, that alerts you whenever your 'news' has generated response.

Media coverage can be evaluated by an EAV - equivalent advertising value that measures press activities against what it would cost to buy that space in advertising.



## Organising a media visit

One of the most effective ways of getting positive media coverage is to host journalists' visits. These are time-consuming. They need a lot of preparation and then 100% of your attention during the visit. But the resulting coverage should be worth it.

Journalists usually prefer to visit on their own and to have the visit tailored especially for their needs, ideally with an exclusive story or interview. But of course there are economies of scale for you if you can organise a press trip for several journalists at the same time. For a group visit, you'll need a particularly strong 'hook' - a reason for them to visit at that particular time, e.g. a one-off event, a premiere, rare access.



Whether you're entertaining a group or just one journalist, you need to:

- Talk to them in advance of the visit, so that you can tailor the visit to their needs - including lining up interviews, photo opportunities, behind-the-scenes access, permission to film etc



- Find out what sort of coverage they think could result from the visit, and what angle they might want to take, so that you can come up with appropriate ideas, information and contacts
- Get local partners on board to help host them, e.g. transport operators, tour guides, venues, restaurants, and hotels (if you need to offer overnight stays) who may agree to offer complimentary accommodation or special-rate deals

- Plan a detailed itinerary - email them a draft, and be prepared to make changes - be as flexible as possible
- Prepare comprehensive press packs, including fact sheets, a map, and contact details
- Welcome them in person on arrival, and make sure they have everything they need for their visit
- Make sure they have your mobile phone number - and be prepared to be available (ideally in person but at least on the end of a phone) throughout their visit
- Follow up on the visit afterwards, in case they need any further information.

It's worth bearing in mind that an itinerary you plan for journalists could also - at a different time - be used to familiarise or update Elected Members with your offer/service - although it's important to remember that Members will appreciate being accompanied and shown round during their visits.

Find out about the protocol in place at your authority for hosting Members' visits. And always involve your Corporate Communications and Democratic Services teams if you are planning to involve Elected Members.



# 3 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

## Best practice examples of successful proactive media work

### VISIT LONDON - ONLY IN LONDON

In spring 2009, Visit London launched a campaign to encourage visitors to the capital to explore unique and unusual places in London. For the media, Visit London created a series of photo-opportunities and interactive events such as recreating high tea in 'high places' working with attractions such as Westminster Abbey and the Roundhouse, bringing a 17th Century Game to life in front of Buckingham Palace, and showcasing some of London's hidden gems by bringing Little Ben, a replica of the famous Big Ben, to life. While the campaign relied on eye-catching images in unique London locations, it was equally important to have a compelling news hook to gain interest from the media. The campaign was very successful and reached both national and international audiences.



### QUEENSLAND CARETAKER

Tourism Queensland advertised for an island 'caretaker' willing to spend six months exploring the land and waters around the Great Barrier Reef for a salary of £70,000. The post, billed as 'the best job in the world' attracted 35,000 applicants and generated an estimated £50 million of PR for Queensland. Within hours of the appointment of UK's Ben Southall, over 1,000 websites were running the story.

### MUSEUMS AT NIGHT

[www.culture24.org.uk/places+to+go/museums+at+night](http://www.culture24.org.uk/places+to+go/museums+at+night)

Museums at Night 2010, promoted by Culture 24, saw thousands of night owls enjoying a weekend of night-time adventures as hundreds of museums and galleries unlocked their doors for a variety of special events. The aim of the event is to extend the reach of museums. In 2009, a massive 80% of night visitors rated their experience as eight or above out of ten.



### Making news:

- Museums 'open their doors' at quirky times
- Museums present a 'fun and unstuffy' profile to appeal to wider audiences
- Museums shake off their 'serious' nature
- Museums across Europe encourage visitors to 'beat the ash cloud'
- Museums celebrate Guardian Family Friendly Museum award winners
- Museums celebrate food themes.



**News hooks:**

- London's Natural History Museum created a unique dinosaur sleepover event for kids
- One of the most haunted houses in the land, the Treasurer's House in York, opens at night
- Romans Return at Corinium Museum in Gloucestershire
- Ghostly twilight tales and mysterious journeys at Norwich Cathedral
- Beat the 'ash cloud' to experience Nuit des Musees across Europe
- Stockport Museums gear up for a food themed Museums at Night

**News channels:**

- Lots of National Press: e.g. The Guardian - a weekend of after-hours events, The Telegraph - Museums open at night, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>
- Worldwide press: [www.worldeventsguide.com](http://www.worldeventsguide.com)
- Regional press
- Local Press and Events Listings: Time Out, [www.viewlondon.co.uk](http://www.viewlondon.co.uk), [www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com)
- Social media: Museums at Night Blog, Museums at Night Facebook page, Twitter feed, Museums at Night Flickr.

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY READS**

<http://cityreads.co.uk/>

**Making news:**

- It celebrates annual World Book Day (March)
- It celebrates books and the joy of reading
- It celebrates libraries and learning
- It promotes local community interaction
- It celebrates Festivals
- It celebrates 'volunteering'

**News hooks:**

- The 2010 book is From Russia with Love - so all things 'James Bond'
- Brighton Festival citywide book events
- The No. 7 bus (007) as a collection point for books
- Bedroom Bond event at Brighton's MyHotel

- Celebrity talks - crime novelist Sue Walker, Ian Fleming's official biographer: Andrew Lycett

- One-off screening at local art-house cinema.

**News channels:**

- Local press: The Brighton Evening Argus
- National press: The Telegraph 'Ian Fleming still has a licence to thrill'
- Local Radio: Brighton Festival Radio
- Social media: Facebook page, Twitter feed, Blog.



# 4

## TOP TEN TIPS

1. Develop a good relationship with your Borough's Communications team - keep them informed about your projects, discuss your ideas and plans for achieving media coverage with them, and tap into their expertise.



2. Be clear about who you want to target - then make sure your proactive media work is focused on the media that your targets consume.
3. Make sure you consume the media you are targeting too: you need to know what sort of stories and pictures they like to cover - and journalists appreciate it if you have done your homework before you contact them.



4. Try to form relationships with key journalists - position yourself as a good source of information and ideas.
5. Read and listen to what journalists are saying about your sector, and then comment on their blogs, with links back to your own blog/website.
6. Make a habit of looking for news angles - get your colleagues to help with creative brainstorming about linking your offer with the seasons, festivals, anniversaries, trends and topical subjects.
7. Plan ahead, some magazines and broadcast media plan features and programmes weeks or even months in advance.



8. Look for opportunities to host media visits - they're hard work, but worth it if you put the effort in.
9. Make sure you put your news online, and share it with your stakeholders - asking them to help you spread it further afield via their media channels.
10. Look for examples of best practice media work in your sector and use these to inspire your own creative ideas.



# 5

## GLOSSARY



### Copy editor

The last professional to see and approve written material before it is delivered to an audience by a media outlet. Responsible for its accuracy, grammar, and length. Writes the headlines, intros and picture captions

### e-PR

Online PR that uses social media

### Exclusive

A news story offered by a PR practitioner to a single newspaper title, radio, website, or TV station

### Exposure

The extent to which the target audience becomes aware of a person, message, activity, theme or organisation through the efforts of PR

### Lead time

The period of time that reporters and journalists need to prepare stories and information for publication or broadcast

### Opinion formers

Influential people - including journalists - who have the power to shape public opinion

### Press pack

A branded pack handed out to the media by an organisation. It normally contains background material, photographs, illustrations and news releases

### Public relations

The art and science of managing and delivering communications between an organisation and its 'publics'



**Social media release**

A news release format designed for the online media world with links, videos and pictures

**Syndicated**

A report that appears in more than one media outlet simultaneously

**Teaser**

A promotion that is intended to arouse interest in the main campaign that follows

**Viral campaign**

A communications campaign designed to exploit the potential of the internet to spread messages rapidly. The audience is encouraged to pass a message on to all of their email contacts

**Zeitgeist**

The 'Spirit of the Time'

