
HOW TO USE THE MEDIA TO BROADCAST YOUR MESSAGE

Whether we like it or not, the mainstream media has a massive influence on politics in the US. There is no question that we need to democratize our media, but as we do that we must also work *with* the mainstream media to broadcast the messages and values that are important to us as progressive activists. A fantastically well organized rally attended by 100 committed citizens is a beautiful thing. But if the media covers the rally, you will reach ten times that number with your message. If you want to talk to people outside the choir and bring new people into the struggle for social justice and human rights, media coverage is a must.

Telling a story or communicating a point of view to reporters and editors from mainstream publications is a special art. You have to be clear and brief and at the same time deeply thoughtful. You have to know certain tricks of the trade that will help your issue stand out from the hundreds of other interesting things happening in the world. This guide will help you get your important issues into the media's eye. It contains basic primers on how to write a press release, how to pitch a story, how to write a letter to the editor, and other important tips.

If you would like more guidance on how to work with the media, feel free to contact Global Exchange's communications department. GX's communications team is more than happy to put media skills into as many hands as possible. You can contact Jason Mark, jason@globalexchange.org and 415-255-7296 x 230; or Alvaro Rojas, alvaro@globalexchange.org and 415-255-7296 x 351. Best of luck!

PRESS RELEASE HOW TO

(Adapted from Salzman's "Making the News" and SPIN Project Materials)

What is a Press Release

- Informs reporters about your event, report, or issue.
- More detailed than the advisory—should tell all the information a reporter needs to write their piece.
- Envision, then write the press release as the news story YOU would want to see written.
- Sent out the morning of or the day before the event.

Elements

- **Headline.** This will make or break a news release—include the most important information in the headline, and make it punchy. The headline can be up to four lines if necessary, including a sub-head, if used, but keep it short (and remember to use a large font).
- Important information should jump off the page—most reporters will only spend 30 seconds looking at a release.
- Spend 75 percent of your time writing the headline and the first paragraph.
- Use the inverted pyramid style of news writing. Make your most important points early in the release and work your

way down.

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short. No more than three sentences per paragraph.
- Include a colorful quote from a spokesperson in the second or third paragraph.
- Include a short summary of your organization in the last paragraph.
- Mention "Photo Opportunity" if there is one. Be sure to send a copy of the release to the photo desk.

Structure / Form

- In the top left corner, type "For Immediate Release."
- Below "For Immediate Release," type the date.
- **Contact Information:** In the top right corner, type names and phone numbers of two contacts. Make sure these contacts can be easily reached by phone. Including the contact's home phone number, if appropriate.
- Type "###" at the end of your release. This is how journalists mark the end of a news copy.
- Type "MORE" at the end of page 1 if your release is two pages, and put a

contact phone number and short headline in the upper-right hand corner of subsequent pages.

- Print your release on your organization's letterhead.

How to Distribute It

- A release should be sent out the morning of, or the day before your event. In some cases, you may want to send an "embargoed" copy to select reporters ahead of time, meaning that the information is confidential until the date you specify.
- Generally, send a release to only one reporter per outlet.
- If your release announces an event, send it to the "daybooks." A daybook lists news events scheduled to take place in the region on that day. Someone from each major outlet reviews the daybooks each morning.
- **ALWAYS make follow up calls after you send the release. If your release is announcing an event, make the calls the morning before your event is scheduled.**
- Have a copy of the release ready to be faxed when you make the calls.

MEDIA ADVISORY—HOW TO

(Adapted from Salzman's "Making the News" and SPIN Project Materials)

What is a Media Advisory?

- Functions as an FYI that alerts journalists to an upcoming event.
- Gives basic information: the who, what, where, when and why.
- Sent out a few days before the event.

Elements

- **Headline.** This will make or break the advisory—include the most important information in the headline, and make it punchy. The headline can be up to four lines if necessary, including a sub-head, if used, but keep it short (and remember to use a large font – it's eye-catching!).
- **Short description of the event and the issue.** Make it visual ("Citizens will carry large placards and life-size puppets to the Governors Mansion to protest the latest cut in education funding.")
- **List the speakers at your event.**
- **Include a quote from somebody from your organization who works on the issue.** This quote should be the main message that you are trying to convey

to the press, and in extension, to the public. Therefore, it should be clear, well thought out and strategic.

- **Contact information.** In the top right corner, type names and phone numbers of two contacts. Make sure these contacts can be easily reached by phone. Include the contact's home phone number, if appropriate.
- **Include a short summary of your organization in the last paragraph.**
- **Mention "Photo Opportunity" if one exists and be sure to send it to the photo editors of local news outlets as well as to reporters – they don't always share information with each other!**

Structure / Form

- In the top left corner, type "Media Advisory."
- Beneath "Media Advisory," type the date.
- Type "###" at the end of your advisory. This is how journalists mark the end of copy.
- Type "MORE" at the end of page 1 if

your advisory is two pages, and put a contact phone number and short headline in the upper-right hand corner of subsequent pages.

- **Print your advisory on your organization's letterhead.**

How to distribute it

- A media advisory should arrive at news outlets 3 to 5 working days before the event.
- Fax or mail (if time permits) your advisory to the appropriate reporter, editor or producer at each news outlet on your press list.
- If your region has a "daybook" (you can find out by calling the newsroom of your largest local newspaper) be sure to submit your advisory. A daybook lists news events scheduled to take place in the region on that day. Major news outlets review the daybooks each morning.
- **ALWAYS** make follow up calls the day before your event, and have the advisory ready to be faxed.

PITCHING YOUR STORY

(Adapted from Salzman's "Making the News" and SPIN Project Materials)

- **Telephone calls are the most effective way to communicate with reporters.** Pitch calls are essential to an effective media strategy. Reporters are on paper overload—chances are they never saw your faxed release or advisory.
- **Target your reporters.** Contact reporters who cover your issue, and reporters you have a relationship with. If you have to make a "cold call," ask the general assignment editor or producer who you should speak to.
- **Find a "hook" for your story.** Show the reporter how your story is significant, dramatic, timely, controversial or impacts a lot of readers.
- **Always pitch the story first,** and then ask if they received your release or advisory. Immediately capture the interest of the reporter—they won't wait

for you to get to the point.

- **Keep the pitch short and punchy.** Reporters don't have time for long pitch calls, so get to the most interesting and important information in the first 90 seconds. Don't forget the Who, What, Where, When, and Why.
- **Be enthusiastic and helpful.** If you're not excited about your story, why should the reporter be?
- **Never lie to a reporter.** They may not like what you have to say, but they must respect you.
- **Be considerate of deadlines.** Pitch calls are best made in the mid morning (9:30 to noon). If you sense a reporter is rushed or impatient, ask them if they are on deadline and offer to call back.
- **Only pitch one reporter per outlet.** If you do talk to more than one person

(which sometimes is necessary), make sure the other reporter knows that you've talked with someone else.

- **Close the deal.** Ask the reporter if they are interested or if they are coming to the event. Most will not commit over the phone but they will think about it.
- **Offer to send information.** If they don't commit to attend your event. Offer to send them information if they cannot attend. (Remember to send the information right away.)
- **Don't get frustrated.** Pitch calls can be frustrating when reporters don't bite. But remember that every phone call keeps your issue and organization on their radar screen, and is an important step in building an on-going professional relationship with reporters.

HOLDING A MEDIA EVENT

(Adapted from Salzman's "Making the News" and SPIN Project Materials)

What is a Media Event?

- An activity intended to generate news coverage. They often involve gimmicky visuals, playful stunts, props, etc.

Hints

- Determine if your event is newsworthy. The more of the following characteristics it has, the more likely it will get coverage:
 - Novelty
 - Conflict
 - New data, symbol of a trend
 - Simplicity
 - Humor
 - Prominent figure involved
 - Action
 - Bright props and images
 - Local impact
 - Holidays, anniversaries.
- Build your media event—site, speakers, visuals—around your message and slogan.
- Make it fun. If you don't look like you want to be there, why should the press?
- Don't be afraid to employ stunts. Sexy and trendy events take precedence over long range things with the media.
- Consider timing. Is your event competing with other things? It is best to stage an event Monday through Thursday, 10 A.M. though 2 P.M.
- Find an effective location. Consider the following questions when choosing a location:
 - Is the site convenient? Reporters are busy and won't travel far for an event.
 - Is your site too commonly used for media events? Try to find a unique location, if possible.
 - If your event is outdoors, do you have a backup location? A little rain or bad weather won't ruin an event, but severe conditions will. Also consider if it is possible to postpone it if the weather is very bad.
 - Do you need a permit? Check with the local police department.
 - Arrange to have photographers take pictures of your event.
 - Display a large banner or sign with your organization's logo.
 - The event should last 15 to 45 minutes.
 - Distribute information about your issue and organization at the event.
 - Remember equipment. Will you need a megaphone, podium, or portable microphone?
 - Have spokespersons ready to be interviewed.
 - Find out which reporters attended the event. Follow up with the no-shows.

FUNDAMENTAL TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS

- Discipline your message! Use your slogan or message as much as possible.
- Familiarize yourself with three soundbites (with backup information). Write them down.
- Always turn the question back to your message.
- Anticipate questions.
- Know the opposing points.
- Practice—even people who speak all the time practice.
- An interview is never over even if the tape stops rolling. Everything you say to a journalist is on the record.
- Don't get frustrated by difficult questions—just stick to your messages.
- If you slip up, don't worry. Just ask the reporter to start again (unless it's live).
- If you need more time to think, ask the reporter to repeat the question or ask a clarifying question—or simply pause and think before answering.
- If you don't know an answer to a question, don't force it. Try to return to your message. If it's an interview for print media, tell the reporter you'll track down the answer later call them back.
- Tell the reporter you have more to add if he or she overlooks something you think is important.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR HOW TO

(Adapted from Salzman's "Making the News" and SPIN Project Materials)

What is a Letter to the Editor?

- Letters to the editor (LTE's) most often discuss a recent event/issue covered by a publication, radio station, or TV program.
- They are your chance to "sound-off" to your community about issues in the news. **They are widely read**—so make them an important part of your media strategy.

Elements / Hints

- It is much easier to publish a letter to the editor than it is to place an op-ed.
- Your letter has the best chance of being published if it is a reaction to a story in the paper. Respond as quickly as you can.
- Read the letters page—you will learn how to develop an effective letter-writing style, and you will see if someone has already responded with your idea.
- Keep it short and concise—150-200 words. The paper will take the liberty to shorten your letter to suit its format; the more it has to cut, the less control you have of what gets printed. Lead with your most important information.
- Focus on one main point and make a compelling case.
- Write in short paragraphs, with no more than three sentences per paragraph.
- Don't write too often. Once every three months is about as often as you should write.
- Avoid personal attacks.
- Put your full name, address and phone number at the top of the page and sign the letter at the bottom. You must include a phone number for verification purposes.
- Follow up to see if the letter was received.

GLOBAL EXCHANGE

For Immediate Release:
Tuesday, August 27

Contact: Jason Mark, 415-558-9490
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Anti-Sweatshop Activists Target Levi's Human Rights Group Will Protest Retailer's Refusal to Join Other Companies and Settle Saipan Lawsuit

When: Wednesday, August 28, 12:00 Noon

Where: Levi's Flagship Store, 300 Post Street (@ Stockton) in San Francisco's Union Square

Who: Walter Johnson, SF Labor Council; Nikki Fortunato-Bas, Sweatshop Watch; Carmencita Abad, former Saipan sweatshop worker; Medea Benjamin, Global Exchange; and dozens of protesters.

What: Labor and human rights activists will protest Levi's refusal to follow other retailers and settle a class-action lawsuit targeting sweatshop abuses on the US island of Saipan. Nineteen major retailers have already committed to a ground-breaking agreement that will help eliminate sweatshop abuses in the US territory. But Levi's, which likes to promote itself as a socially responsible company, is refusing to take the same step and work with non-governmental organizations to improve conditions in Saipan's factories.

"Levi's likes to promote itself as this very socially responsible company," says Global Exchange founding director Medea Benjamin. "Yet in recent years Levi's has closed dozens of factories in the US, slashing tens of thousands of good paying jobs. At the same time, Levi's is refusing to acknowledge its complicity with worker abuses in Saipan. Nineteen companies have already committed to improving conditions in Saipan—why can't Levi's do the same?"

In January 1999, Global Exchange, Sweatshop Watch, the Asian Law Caucus, and the garment workers union UNITE initiated a class action lawsuit on behalf of workers in Saipan, a US territory. According to the complaint, foreign garment workers in Saipan are often forced to work 12-hour days, seven days a week, in unsafe, unclean conditions that violate U.S. labor laws, while sewing clothes for America's leading clothing retailers. The historic settlement reached with 19 of the defendants will fund an independent monitoring program and require the retailers to purchase garments only from factories that adhere to strict labor standards in a comprehensive model Code of Conduct. Factories would be required to guarantee overtime pay for overtime work, provide safe food and drinking water and respect employees, basic human rights.

Human rights activists say the continued opposition from Levi's is unconscionable.

"Workers in Saipan continue to suffer from routine repression of their basic rights," says Benjamin. "That's why we will be out in front of Levi's on Wednesday, talking to consumers and urging them to contact Levi's and tell the company they don't want jeans made in sweatshops."

For more information about the Levi's protest or the Saipan lawsuit, contact Jason Mark at 415-558-9490 or jason@globalexchange.org. ###