



Your Guide to Working with the Media

In the digital communication age it is easy to overlook Public Relations (PR) in the school's marketing communication plan. While websites and social media have enabled schools to largely bring communication and media production in-house, nevertheless, PR can still deliver large, local audiences at little or no cost. This is especially true of local weekly papers that still maintain sales and readership despite the decline elsewhere in daily press.

What is PR?

Public Relations is any editorial coverage you receive without having to pay the publication or media. As a school you're used to engaging with local publications trying to sell you advertising space. You may also be invited to purchase advertorials, that is a feature that includes a certain word count along with a picture or advertisement. This is not PR, you are paying the media directly for your coverage when, for a little bit of effort, you can obtain good coverage for free.

Why is PR important?

PR is a good way to tell your story and to engage parents and the wider community. Surveys show that people who read news and articles in their local papers are far more likely to retain and act on the information than if they read it in an advertisement or online. Readers are 5 times more likely to trust their local newspaper over a social media post.

So how do I get PR coverage in the press?

Start by having a look in your target publication. What types of story and feature articles do they publish? What angle does the publication report? Begin by tailoring your news or feature story to the publication's editorial style. Can you provide a great photograph? Pictures are worth a thousand words and often a good photograph or photo-opportunity will sell your media coverage for you. Here are a few pointers:

Who?

We read newspapers because we are interested in people and events. We want to know what other people are doing or experiencing in our local community. *Who* might also be a celebrity, a sports or TV personality that you have invited to speak to school. *Who* may be you as school Principal, still a figure of both authority and respect within the community. Now double that, what if there are 2 school principals talking about the benefits of their *Shared Education* partnership. Now that is newsworthy!

What?

While you know and understand the benefit of *Shared Education*, the wider public does not. *Shared Education Week* gives you the opportunity to tell the story of your partnership, how it came about, developed and evolved. *What is it and what's different* about it? *What's the benefit* of the partnership? *What's the extent* of your partnership and *what outcomes* do you hope to achieve? *How many pupils* in your partnership have already experienced *Shared Education*? *What have they done together* and *what have they achieved*? *What do they say* themselves? Have you achieved *unexpected outcomes*?

Why?

There are two parts to this question, *why do you deserve coverage* in the media and *why are you engaged in a Shared Education* school partnership? *Why is this so different* from every one else's story and therefore deserving of coverage?

Where?

If it's a local newspaper then *where is the local connection* and *where is your event happening*? It's amazing how far local newspapers will stretch themselves to find the local angle in a big national news story. However, when it comes to you, they'll want to explore all the local angles and connections. Local children, local graduates, local facts and figures as well as how these connect to the bigger story.

When?

When is your event taking place and at what precise time? Will you be offering a photo-opportunity for the newspaper and *when precisely will this be happening*? Photographers normally cover 4-5 different events in a day, so a precise time is vital for them. If a photographer is a little late can you recreate the photo-opportunity for him/her?

The News Release

This is how you contact the media with a carefully and concisely written press statement, a synopsis of the above. There is a layout and style you should follow. (See example templates provided).

News Release

Add your school crest (or 2 crests) at the top and then give your media contact information. Journalists are busy people, they don't want to have to hunt for the contact information.

Be sure to *title your document Press or News Release*. (Press for paper, News for other media e.g. Radio or TV)

Embargo

Below this list the issue date of your news release and then the word "*Embargo*". After this write "*None*", unless you want to indicate to the news editor that you don't want publication before a specific date and time. (For example, if you want to give them notice in advance of an impending event, along with dates, times, speakers and/or interviewees and photo-opportunities).

Headline

Compose an eye-catching headline. Remember, the first person your PR must interest is the journalist reading it. Avoid punning or funny titles - leave that to the sub-editors. Keep it factual and short. Journalists process maybe 20 PRs a day so you need to gain their interest.

Sub-head

You can add a sub-heading if you want.

The Stand or Lead

Can you, in 2-3 sentences, provide a synopsis of the story? Keep it simple. Don't try to pack too much into the lead paragraph. You have the rest of the PR to unfold your story.

Essentials Paragraph

Your next paragraph can give the who and when details.

Quotes

It's important to report the story as if it was being covered by the journalist live. We do this by providing actual quotations for the journalist to report in the paper. Make sure your quotes add to the story, and don't merely repeat information you've already given.

Sweeper Paragraph(s)

Use your final paragraph for additional information and/or to point the journalist and reader to other sources.

END

By adding the word "END" you're clearly indicating that this is the full PR and there isn't a 2nd or 3rd page.

Notes for Editors

You should add all non-essential information in this section. This is a good place to provide additional details and facts about you and the people mentioned in the PR. Number and separate each item of information.

Links

It can be useful to provide digital links to other resources, such as information or articles on your own website or as footnotes to statistics quoted in your PR. Don't over do it. Two or three links should suffice.

Photo-opportunity

If you're planning a photo-opportunity I would provide a separate heading for it here with information about what will be offered to photograph, who will feature in it and exactly when and where the picture can be taken. Remember, if children are to feature in a photograph, you will need parental consent.

CLOSE

When you finish the Notes For Editors section write the word "CLOSE" to indicate finish.

Distribution

You should distribute your *News Release at least 48 hrs before your event*. Where possible, send it via email to a specific journalist on the paper. *Add a read receipt to your email*. If you know your local editor or journalist ring them and speak to them by phone.

If you are hosting a significant event *give your publication at least 5 days notice of the event*, the main angle and any photo-opportunities you are laying on. *All media have a News Diary* and if your event is important enough the *News Editor* will put it into the diary for coverage on the day.

Local weekly press employ few staff but the journalists are always on the look out for fresh news and contacts. A good News Release, story and photo-opportunity, should spark a journalist's interest and garner good coverage.

If they want to check the story and develop it further they will contact you on the telephone number you supplied. Be prepared to answer their questions but remember the two or 3 points you want to get across and try and work these into your answers.

Ask if they will be sending a photographer and, if not, offer to forward them a photograph later. Don't email photographs speculatively as this will simply bung up their email inbox.

Media Pack

In addition to your News Release you may want to prepare a Media Pack for visiting journalists or photographer. This should contain a copy of the News Release, a Fact Sheet listing maybe 10 facts & figures about your schools and/or partnership, perhaps a copy of your school's prospectus, a separate list of names & details & biographies of main speakers, interviewees and-or people featuring in photographs.

Post Publication

Don't forget that if you gain coverage for your event to draw attention to it in your social media just in case some of your parents missed it. Often you can find the story in the *online edition of the newspaper* which makes social sharing so much easier.

There are a range of online only publications these days so don't forget to target these with your PR.

CLOSE