

# Earned Media

**It's important to get the word out about the Under YOUR Influence Web site so that we can all work together to protect the lives of teens!**



## ***Why Earned Media is Important***

Earned media coverage can be one of the most powerful tools in your integrated marketing communications program. Unlike advertising, earned media often carries more weight and credibility in the minds of consumers because it is delivered and received through the recognized filter of a credible third-party organization or person such as a newspaper reporter or columnist, TV or radio anchor, or reporter.

## ***Some Key Steps to Successful Earned Media Coverage***

### ***Build Relationships with the Media***

Good media contacts and relationships are often the key to good media coverage. Get to know key journalists, and make sure they know you. Then use these relationships to help you secure steady coverage for your organization. Recognize that a good relationship should be mutually beneficial. Always try to be helpful to journalists, return all calls promptly, learn and respect their deadlines, and always be honest and forthright with them when you want to be helpful to them, particularly in those times when you must explain why you cannot.

### ***Perfect Your Pitch: Add Value to Gain Coverage***

News editors and reporters first and foremost are interested in covering stories they believe are interesting and add value to their readers/viewers/listeners. Put yourself in the minds of their audiences, determine why your news is important to their audiences, and pitch your stories to the news editors and reporters with that in mind. This simple approach should help you gain better press coverage.

### ***Create Opportunities for News Coverage***

It seems obvious that if you do not offer reporters something of importance to cover, then you will not gain any coverage, yet many organizations do not build a sustained and steady program of coverage opportunities to advance their cause. Building a sustained series of news releases, news conferences, announcements, events, etc. that feature fresh and interesting news angles is key to generating good earned media coverage.

### ***Follow-Up, Follow-Up, Follow-Up***

Journalists are busy people with many stories to sort through. Do not expect them to pay much attention to your news releases, news conferences, or op-eds you give them for placement, unless you are willing to take the time to aggressively work the telephones to follow up. Moving your story from the bottom of their stack to the top is a vital step to generating good press coverage. And often the only way to do that is to work the phones to get the attention you want and need.

## ***Using All the Tools in Your Toolbox to Generate Earned Media***

Favorable media coverage can greatly enhance your effectiveness in delivering key messages to target audiences. This section quickly summarizes a variety of earned media tactics you can use to help publicly communicate your statewide plan.

### ***News Releases, Advisories, and Announcements***

A key to generating good press coverage is to give the media something to cover. The easiest way to do this is regularly issue news releases, advisories, and announcements about any significant development likely to interest the media's readers/viewers/listeners in your area. Examples might include new national or state

statistical or survey information; official proclamations; new programs, approaches, or marketing techniques being used to reach target audiences, etc.

A release is simply your story written up in a journalistic form. On receiving your release, news editors will glance at the headline or the lead (the opening paragraph) of the release to get the gist of your story. If it fails to attract their attention or interest, then the release will get discarded. The most effective releases typically seek to convey only one central message or point with enough appropriate information to support that message.

To generate an attention-getting release that will stand out from the hundreds of others editors see daily, make sure your story is timely, unique, interesting, informational, unexpected, or even a little controversial. Make sure it speaks to the interests of the editor's readers/listeners/viewers. And make sure it always covers the journalist's five Ws—Who, What, When, Where, Why—and whenever possible, the “How” as well. Be sure to cover all of the facts, but keep your releases simple and succinct.

Unlike more fully developed news releases, media advisories are sent out in advance of events, announcements, and press conferences to provide just enough information about the five questions to invite and facilitate press attendance and coverage at the event. Advisories and releases always should carry a contact name and phone number as a reporter's point of contact for questions and follow up.

### *News Conferences*

Consider a news conference to announce important events, results, or achievements. The press conference has an air of importance and credibility because it uses a news format to present important information. But be sure to arrange a press conference only when your news is of significant importance, likely to generate sufficient media interest, or is visually interesting resulting in better television coverage.

The goal of a press conference is to bring all of the key players together to publicize your announcement, to share dramatic visuals, and to deal with any questions for follow-up at the same time. But organizing such an event can be very time-consuming, so if issuing a news release can do the job just as well, then opt for the news release.

### *News Interviews, Editorial Boards, TV, and Radio Talk Shows*

Inviting members of the media in for one-on-one interviews, going to a newspaper for an editorial board (a group interview with perhaps a number of editors and reporters), or scheduling a local TV or radio talk show interview can be very effective ways of explaining and promoting more complex announcements, trends, or stories.

Reporters or interviewers generally ask questions to get the interviewees to respond in an interesting, illuminating, lively, or even entertaining way. Consider in advance how to respond to all of the basic or difficult questions you expect to encounter, and practice your answers. Identify your core messages, and concentrate on getting those points across. Think through the real “news angle” of your message by putting yourself in the minds of the media outlet's readers, viewers, or listeners. Even if the questioner tends to stray, try to reinterpret any difficult or “off-the-wall” questions to get your point across.

### *Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor, and Blogs*

Another very effective way to generate press interest about key initiatives and announcements is to submit a guest editorial, commentary, or letter to the editor to newspapers for publication. NOTE: these typically need to be directed to the newspaper's opinion page editor and not the standard news reporters you may usually deal with. Strong op-ed pieces or “Letters to the Editor” need to be informal, persuasive, and entertaining, yet succinct and to the point.

### *Feature Stories and Testimonials*

Life-and-death highway safety stories touch real lives through heroism and tragedy. The news media love to share these kinds of human-interest stories with their audiences. Do not overlook the opportunity to humanize your news story, announcement, or press conference as you develop your earned media plans.

### ***Generating Media Coverage***

There is not much magic about attracting media coverage. As long as you have something newsworthy to cover, building coverage simply requires time, work, and diligence to reach out to and follow up on the telephone with the targeted reporters.

Make enough calls in advance of your event or announcement to identify and build the right press list and contact information for those reporters most interested or appropriate for your story or issue. Find out how they prefer to receive information from you—via e-mail, fax, or regular mail. Learn and respect their deadlines. And once you send them your information, follow up to make sure you know they received it, to see if they have questions, and to ask for their coverage.

### ***Getting Started: A Quick Earned Media Checklist***

Before beginning any earned media effort, see if you can answer the following questions to assist in the development of a simple press promotion plan:

#### *Message Development*

1. What are our behavioral/communications objectives in this assignment?
2. Who are the primary audiences we are trying to reach and persuade?
3. What do we want them to do?
4. What is the key benefit they will get from doing this?
5. What are three major points, statistics, or core messages that may make this benefit more believable/valuable to them or might help stir them to action?
6. What must we say? Are there any legal, institutional, or corporate requirements in delivering this message?
7. Have we answered the five questions—Who, What, When, Where and Why—in our materials?

#### *Tactical Development*

1. What media do we want to target with our message?
2. Do we have contact names, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses to reach them?
3. Are there partnerships and alliances we can add/include to help attract more media interest?
4. What approaches should we use to deliver our message? (e.g., News Release, Media Advisory, Letters to the Editor, News Conference, Special Event or Announcement, TV/Radio Interviews, Editorial Boards, Radio Talk Shows, Feature Stories/Testimonials, Web Blogs, etc.)
5. What is our schedule, timeline, and deadlines for using these approaches to deliver our messages?
6. What is our plan to follow-up with these media targets to ensure/encourage coverage and placement?
7. What is our plan to collect and report on coverage of our message?

*Source: The National Highway Traffic Administration*