

YOUR MEDIA STRATEGY

Introduction by Graeme Addison

This three-day course combines media analysis with planning of coverage. It deals with routine news & information as well as crisis situations. Short instructional presentations are followed by personal exercises and group simulation games, with discussion afterwards. Feel free to introduce your own examples drawn from the work situation or past experience. Each day will begin with a review of the morning newspapers to develop your awareness of news issues and how to respond creatively.

FREE PUBLICITY

Media analysis is the craft of monitoring, breaking down and interpreting media structures and performance. *Media planning* is the craft of seeking and finding opportunities for publicity in media (paid: advertising, unpaid: editorial). The two skills go together. This is not a course in advertising but in “free publicity” via newspapers, broadcast stations and new media such as the Internet including social networking. Your media strategy will combine an understanding of the media system with an ability to pitch ideas and stories at journalists, bloggers and communicators to gain exposure for your organisation.

TRUST

Keep in mind that the objective of media publicity is to build favourable public opinion, or *trust* by your publics in your organisation. Media are means to this end. You need to develop trusting relationships with media, as the channels can reflect well or badly on your performance. Anything that contributes to trust is good, anything that detracts from it is bad. This is not about “spin” or putting misleading interpretations on the facts. It is about projecting clear and purposeful messages that can be believed and relied upon. This demands professional ethics, honesty, credibility and co-operation. How you handle your media liaison will determine whether you are credible or not, even in situations where your organisation has to face the music for something bad that may have happened. You need to be shrewd, fast and well organised in order to respond to situations. There is no reason why you should lose credibility in a media crisis: in fact, you and your organisation can come out of a crisis with enhanced credibility.

PUBLICS

Publics are those sectors of the populace whom you aim to reach with your organisational messages. As a whole, they are “the public” but the word publics implies that the general public consists of groupings according to such socioeconomic variables as age, education, income, language, locality and so on – the *demographics* of publics. Readerships and audiences of media are also divided up according to their values, loyalties, attitudes, views

and behavioural traits – the so-called *psychographics* of publics. A great deal of very expert statistical survey work and evaluative analysis is done by marketing agencies to profile publics. Based on what is known, media planners go about pitching their messages at publics via specific media. We say the media are segmented – like the segments of an orange – according to the publics they reach. Media planners examine the segments and decide which media best suit the messages they wish to project.

POLICY

While trust is the foundation, a carefully worked out *media strategy* is a complex tool of analysis and planning. It includes a *code of professional ethics* as well as your stated expectations of how journalists and other media representatives should gain *access* to you – the rules by which you operate. It also includes *standard operating procedures* for forms of media liaison, from sending out news releases and preparing media kits, to managing media events and setting up interviews. Basically, your media strategy sets out a set of principles amounting to a policy for the provision of information and opinion to the media, and we will call this the *Policy and Operating Procedures, or POPs* by which your media liaison is guided. It will also set out the responsibilities and roles of people in your organisation, along with timeframes for auditing and reporting back on media results (ie successes, failures, lessons and pointers to the future).

DOCUMENT

The first thing you need to do after the course is discuss your POPs with colleagues and sit down to draft a media strategy. You cannot do this in isolation and need to draw stakeholders from various departments of your organisation into the discussions in order to get buy-in. If you tried to impose a policy on the organisation it might lack broad support and become an embarrassment to your department when others breach the principles. Several examples of media strategy documents will be presented on the course. Use them as a basis for drafting and consultation, always remembering that words on paper are nothing in themselves: what matters is that the people in your organisation should embrace the spirit. It is highly advisable to run the media strategy document – or at least those parts of it that relate directly to journalists – past sympathetic individuals in the media, in order to get their advice and input. The bulk of the document may remain confidential and it should be revised at regular intervals.

CULTURE

Ultimately all of this amounts to building a *communication culture* in your organisation. A commitment to team building and team success is not something that happens overnight. Internally, it is important to campaign for more openness, for the breaking down of silos, and for management and staff to raise and discuss issues that may affect the reputation of your organisation. Building a corporate culture of collaboration is never easy because

organisations show inbuilt resistance to the exchange of information. But you must persist, stressing the benefits of communication.

MEDIA GAME

Externally, many organisations – and people within them – are suspicious of media and afraid of the consequences of publicity. This is often with good reason. You can easily be burnt by media, they make mistakes, they highlight what you would prefer to ignore. As soon as a story is in the open, players in the broader society may take issue with you and the whole thing becomes controversial. The media are not beholden to you and you do not control the end-product. You can only control what you choose to release and say. It is no good blaming the media, or the other players, for this. Learn to play the game yourself.

Use the links set out below and in the [Mediatholon](#) website pages to learn more about media strategy. And use your own observation to consolidate what you know!

Graeme Addison
Editorial Assignments
Vaal Cybercentre
writer@wol.co.za 084 245 2490

USEFUL LINKS

- **Writing a Media Policy:** <http://www.media-policy.org/> . Media-policy.org provides basic online guidance for anyone engaged in the task of writing a first media policy or modifying an existing policy. Samples of typical policies are provided under the headings of Government, Law Enforcement and Corrections, Education, Healthcare and Private/Not for Profit policies.
- **Creating an effective media policy, by Jennigay Coetzer:** <http://www.jennigay.co.za/articles/media-communication/creating-an-effective-media-policy>
- **Developing a Media Strategy: Make use of the media and have a greater impact**, by Romesh Vaitilingam:
http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/Developing%20media%20strategy_tcm6-7381.pdf
- **How to Write a Media Strategy**, by Anna Papadopoulos:
<http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/1717232/how-write-media-strategy-part>
- **Organizational Culture: Corporate Culture in Organizations**, in About.com Human Resources:
http://humanresources.about.com/od/organizationalculture/Organizational_Culture_Corporate_Culture_in_Organizations.htm

SAMPLE POLICIES

- **Montana State University: Media Policy Guidelines.**
http://www2.montana.edu/policy/media_policy/
- **Spoornet: Our Media Policy**
<http://www.spoornet.co.za/SpoornetWebContentSAP/html/media/mediapolicy.htm>