

Working with the Media

Remember that the media is now 24/7 and that journalists no longer (and most of them never did) work 9-5. The advent of BBC and Sky rolling news and the ubiquitous websites mean that news is constantly fed to and from news rooms worldwide. The viewing audience's thirst for news is seemingly unquenchable and our colleagues in the media are paid to seek to satisfy it. We can no longer plan press conferences at 5pm to 'hit' the 6 o'clock news, news is shown as it happens, where it happens and live into our living rooms and on to our computer monitors. Don't think of it as alarming – think of it as an exciting challenge!



Here are three key underlying factors to bear in mind. Editors want to sell newspapers. Broadcasters want people to tune in to their channel. Journalists on the whole like the rest of us are there to do a decent day's work for a decent day's salary and to be professional in the delivery of that aim. Anything you can do to help any of those groups to achieve their purpose puts you on the plus side, if you have a good solid story which you can articulate well, you are well ahead of the game. Be positive!

Relationships

The importance of building strong relationships with your local media cannot be overstated. Do your research - find out (by scouring local papers and watching/listening to local TV and radio news) who would be the appropriate person to cover your stories. Regional TV nearly always has a forward planner and these are the people to contact with your Club's media diary and with advance notification of events, planned press announcements and press invitations. Get to know your appropriate local reporter and take her or him out for a coffee or some lunch. It is well worth the investment! Find a date in their diary with plenty of notice and ideally have a story to make it worth their while to meet you. Take with you information about the Club, any recent newsletters, a Club history if you have one and any other useful information. A copy of the SIGBI Quadrennial Report or a couple of recent issues of the magazine are good PR tools to give journalists too. Another way of getting to know them is to invite them to speak at a Club meeting, that way they feel you are interested in them too. They might do 'a day in the life of a local news hound!' in some cases this has worked so well that female journalists or news editors having spoken at a meeting, have been recruited into the Club, probably the best relationship of all!

Research

Find out how your local media works. For weekly papers - what is the time and day of their weekly deadlines? Find out about dead times too, often the summer is a quiet time for local papers and the papers published in the period between Christmas and the New Year are notoriously hard to fill.

Don't forget to get to know the local free newspapers that are distributed door to door in your area. They will also usually take press releases and often have a diary of local events section which you can make use of to promote your forthcoming activities.

Local radio and TV is a very important market. Targeting the right programmes with your stories is important too. Think about when you listen to the radio – in the car, on the way to and from work and over breakfast. These are the best times to get to potential members and key audiences. Local radio will often work with local groups, if approached, for example they might be prepared to have a Soroptimist in the studio as a breakfast show or drive time guest, maybe to review the papers. If you have a big public event coming up, ask if they will interview you about it in advance (and if they do, ask afterwards if you can come back after it is over to report on how it went)

Watch for what are known as news 'hooks' in the news. Look for topical stories that could be linked to work you Club is doing. For example a big Government or Campaign Group Report comes out about domestic violence. Suggest to your contact in the local media a local angle of the Club working with the local women's refuge, or campaigning for a new domestic violence suite at the local police station. Often local media like to pick up on national stories but as they are unlikely to attract the main spokespeople, they are often happy to run with a local angle.

Don't ever assume a story is over just because it has been covered by the media. Often journalists will run a story again six or nine months later, because it can be linked to a new news hook or because it forms part of a bigger feature. Don't ever say to a journalist with a question about a positive story 'Oh we've talked to you about that before!' – just dig out your carefully filed press release and briefing and go for it again. This time you might be reaching a new audience and more potential new members

Don't leave women's interest magazines off your distribution list, but remember that their lead time is about three months. They are unlikely to be interested in very local events and issues but they might be interested in bigger issues and campaigns like drink spiking, trafficking, domestic violence, rail safety, etc.

When to complain and how to complain

Hopefully this will never happen to you, but if it should it is important to ensure that the complaint you are making is legitimate and directed to the right place. If you feel you have been misreported or a story is inaccurate or misrepresents the organisation of your views in some way, you may have grounds to complain. You can also make a complaint if privacy has been infringed (eg by the taking of photos without consent) or if you are being or have been harassed by a journalist. The law, as explained elsewhere, is especially strict on the infringement of the privacy of children. You should first consider if your grounds for complaint are genuine, substantial and can be proved. It is always better to approach the journalist who wrote the story or article in the first place to seek their explanation or apology. If that does not work or is not appropriate, you should approach their editor, and only if you can prove you have failed to get a satisfactory outcome from these (written) approaches should you go to the next stage which is to make an official complaint to the regulators.

For the UK, you will find on the Press Complaints Commission website www.pcc.org.uk the code of practice for printed newspapers and on the Ofcom website www.ofcom.org.uk the broadcasting code of practice. These sites also detail the process for making an official complaint.