



PUBLIC RELATIONS 101

News Values

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One of the hardest things to explain to a client is that an editor's role is not to promote her or his organization or business. An editor, whether it is for print, broadcast or electronic medium, makes decisions based on what she or he perceives as the needs and interests of her or his readers, listeners or viewers. So what criteria are being used?

When an assignment or planning editor reviews possible events or stories to cover she or he goes through a list of items that will determine the newsworthiness of a story. Knowing these "news values" will help you design events that will gain coverage or "spin" your story in a way that will attract an editor.

Here is a list of the most important news values:

- **Impact** - Does the story impact residents in the communities served by the news medium? For instance, if you are having an event for your company and others aren't invited (it is closed), the event has limited interest. However, if you are having an employee event that will involve the collection of food or other items for a local charity, you are impacting others. The more people you can affect the more newsworthy it becomes.
- **Controversy** - This is one of the news values that most businesses or organizations try to avoid. Divisiveness over board decisions, employee contract disputes, legal charges, etc. will get you plenty of attention, but not the kind you want.
- **Emotion** - Human interest stories sell especially if they involve children, senior citizens and animals. It is true that the homicides and arsons usually lead the evening news, but

the news media also like the softer side. These pieces usually close television newscasts and make great feature stories in the newspaper.

- **The Unusual** - The old journalistic cliché goes that when a dog bites a man it is not news, but when a man bites a dog, it is news. Again since this may involve negative news it may be one of the values you try to avoid.
- **Prominence** - If you host an event and a prominent person with "star quality" whether it is an actor or politician or other figure known locally or nationally, your event goes up a notch in newsworthiness. Keep in mind if you plan a weak event (not many news values), but invite Julia Roberts you still have a weak event. Take the time to develop stories that are meaty and don't rely on stars who are often slow in committing and will zap up your time (and budget) with infinite details adding to your workload.
- **Proximity** - Again if your story hits home the editor will judge it important to her or his constituents. Also look for local angles to national stories. For example, during the

presidential election season, stories on local schools doing mock elections or debates are quite popular.

- **Timeliness** - Something that happened two weeks ago or has been done before is not new or timely.
- **Currency** - Look at national trends, holidays or upcoming events - things on people's minds - and see if you can connect your story or plan an event with these ideas in a non-contrived way. I once planned an event on women's and children's human rights on Mother's Day. Any other day of the year an event on human rights wouldn't be all that interesting to most editors, but pitched as a Mother's Day story it became more important.
- **Usefulness** - Providing people with solutions to every day problems is newsworthy. Consumer news falls into this news value.

Public relations is about consistency of message and steady visibility. Your one big shot deal isn't what is going to keep your name on the mind of your audience. A steady flow of stories whether it is a two paragraph news brief or 24-second piece on television is what makes the difference and tells your target audience that you are not only well and kicking, but are a major player.

