



10 Tips to PR Like a Pro

Public Relations, or PR, is a critical component of informing your community about the work they do and motivating them to be a part of it. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 12:14, *“For the body is not one member, but many.”*

PR is a great way to encourage people to join in your mission and offer a variety of ways they can lend some support. Here are some helpful tips to improve your ministry’s PR efforts and relationship with the media, as well as suggestions to help you manage a crisis like a pro.

1. Change Your Attitude

Be honest about the value of media and opt for a more positive approach.

Do you think of the media as a bunch of insensitive reporters looking for the BIG story no matter what it takes... or normal people trying to get out important information?

Evaluate the media’s influence in your life with honesty and appreciate its contribution to keeping us all informed. When you recognize the far reaching impact and importance that the media has in your daily life (between TV, radio, Internet, social media and other sources), you’ll soon recognize that the media has a lot to offer and it’s in your best interest to find advisors in the industry that can help guide you.

2. Be Proactive in the Relationship

Take the initiative to visit local media before they visit you.

Knowing how television, radio and print media work – and they all work differently – puts you ahead of the game and makes it easier to develop a healthy working relationship with your local media.

Schedule a visit with your community’s network stations and top radio groups or stations, then work your way through the list of local papers, cable stations, and independent radio stations. You’ll be surprised how open each will be to your visit and how many will thank you for your time.



RELEASING GENEROSITY

Treat each organization as you want *your* organization to be treated. Learn how they'd like to receive press releases, and other communications, who is the best person to call, and when the best – and worst times – are for telephone calls. Take notes and ask for advice.

Give them a list of helpful guidelines that will make their visits with you more productive and always have a copy ready for visiting media. Guidelines can include:

- Please call this number before arriving at our ministry. An approved staff person must accompany you to ensure your safety and the safety of our guests.
- Please do not bring cigarettes or alcohol into our parking lots or facilities.
- Please do not use a camera without a staff person present. Because many of our guests are finding refuge from abusers and others who may do them harm, you must have their permission for photos.
- Here is a schedule of our daily activities. We appreciate your patience with us to preserve privacy during classes and counseling sessions.

3. Understand the Media's Needs

Their job is to inform in a brief amount of time or space. Help them do it.

Your one-hour tour and interview may result in a 30-second news piece or a single paragraph on page 3.

As boring as it seems, most reporters want to know:

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Why
- ...And sometimes How.

If there's time or space available to convey more, they'll pick and choose what's most interesting to their particular audience. As you learn each station's reporting style, play to it.

The job of the media is not to protect you or your donors, say what you want them to say or help people in the community to like you. Always exercise caution when interacting with the media.



Don't disappoint a reporter by failing to tell them the best times to arrive for a story. They may remember next time if they don't get what they expect today, so plan carefully.

4. Lights, Action, Color, Story!

One size doesn't fit all for TV, radio and print.

Television viewers see and hear. Radio listeners hear. Newspaper readers... read. But we ALL interact if we can! A barbeque contest has activity, color, lively conversation and, believe it or not, smell and taste. When you hear the sizzle of steaks, whether on TV or radio, you can smell and taste them cooking!

Ensure that visiting reporters and their camera operators are getting what they need for their particular venue. Even stories for print may get better play if you include a bright photograph showing activity and "noise."

5. Be Ready When They Call You

Be proactive—plan for unsolicited visits and calls.

Perhaps you didn't plan to be part of a media event, so you feel threatened rather than excited about what's to come. By planning, you can act rather than react when you get an unsolicited call.

- Take time to learn how each medium works and build relationships.
- Create a media team that sets policy, works proactively to avoid potential problems and prepares a positive defense when problems arise.
- Educate your team and set ground rules for initial contact, interviews, etc.
- Educate the entire ministry staff about your media policies.
- Protect your ministry by insisting it meet city codes and attends to possible future problems (ramps for the disabled, squeaky clean kitchens, staff and volunteer background checks, etc.)
- Always ask "What is the worst case scenario?" when implementing new programs and services.
- Find a personal mentor in each medium to help guide you and your team.

6. Don't Make the Same Mistake Twice

If the issue or complaint is valid, address it and correct it.



RELEASING GENEROSITY

Learn to recognize potential problems the media might pick up on *before* they occur. Take a weekly walk through the ministry to look for issues. Follow up on staff reports and prayer requests. Address any internal problems now to avoid them turning into future media problems.

7. Tell *Your* Story First

When you release the story first, you get to spin it your way.

Break the story first! Look for a media angle when you note potential problems. If your emergency shelter is a wreck after a winter of overcrowding, present the need to the media and ask for community support BEFORE an irate homeless person complains to the local media.

8. Represent Your Ministry with Dignity During a Crisis

Keep your goal in mind as you respond to questions and accusations.

Check your indignation at the door. Know the truth about what happened and prepare a statement that answers who, what, why, when, where and how.

Don't try to correct the story through another medium... or even another station or paper within the medium that broke the story.

Stay calm in the midst of inflammatory statements and questions. Don't take the bait!

Offer a different and more positive spin, if possible (your media team should come up with this ahead of time).

Use humor and story when appropriate. While few of these will make it into broadcast news, they may help the reporter better understand the situation.

Thank the reporter for his or her time.

9. Manage the Crisis Nehemiah's Way

Prayerfully and with wise counsel, handle the crisis and move on.



RELEASING GENEROSITY

As much as you'd like to avoid it, sometimes an unexpected crisis will occur despite your best efforts. If you are dealing with challenges, turn to God's word for comfort and a game plan to see you through it with virtue and grace.

1:4 Grieve and pray.

2:5 Ask for help and advice.

2:11-17 Examine the problem with a trustworthy team.

2:18 Build your defense with confidence.

4:1-12 Resist distractions and fear; stay on course.

4:13-23 Let the team do its work, while everyone else does theirs. (Keep your sword in one hand and your hammer in the other.)

8:9-18 Give thanks, review and move on!

10. Don't Let Bad Press Live On

Release a positive story that will help the public forget the negative one.

A story can be quickly forgotten or remembered for years, depending on your next action. Remind the public of the good your ministry does with a new story that accentuates the positive.

Tell your staff to let go of the old story. God's mercies are new every morning—let the past be the past while your ministry moves forward in your work.

Now that you have a better understanding of how to make public relations work for you, be sure to check out the [BDI Academy Library](#) for more helpful resources to guide you along your communications journey to build better engagement in your community!

This strategy sheet is provided to you by Brewer Direct's Academy and can be located in the Library. If you'd like to discuss the ideas found here or want to know more about the Academy, contact Shellie Speer, Senior VP, Academy at sspeer@brewerdirect.com or (719) 210-6207.