Put on a Press Event - Get Press Attention

**PRE-EVENT**

- Build your list of media contacts: Comb through website contact lists
  - Newspapers (email addresses and phone numbers)
    - Reporters
    - News Editors/Assignment Editors
    - Opinion Editors
  - TV News / Radio (email addresses and phone numbers)
    - Reporters
    - News Desk
    - News tip lines
  - Statewide or special-interest publications/online press outlets/blogs
- Build relationships with key reporters/editorial boards (make appointments; don’t “drop in”)
- Determine LOCATION and TARGET that will attract the most press attention:
  - Does target have the power to fix the problem?
  - Does target have ability to get message to decision-maker?
  - Is location easy to get to for press and participants? Easy, free parking?
  - Does it provide a good visual backdrop?
  - Is there shade? If not, will a canopy work?
  - Is room big enough/not too big?
  - What about sound? Need a sound system? Megaphone? Is there traffic or airport noise?
- Determine MESSAGE:
  - Easy for public to understand and connect the dots (avoid wonkiness and make connections)
  - Be timely - take advantage of current events/public sentiments
  - Use humor when possible
  - Use lists (i.e. “the county’s five worst polluters”)
- Choose a START TIME and DAY that best suits participants/target/press: 10-11:30 am on Tue, Wed or Thu is best for the press (try for 12 pm live TV coverage). Weekend coverage is much harder to get.
- Determine BEST FORM for press event: You need to “make” news to get attention
  - Rally (needs demand and a large crowd)
  - Stand-alone press conference (announcement or demand)
  - Decision-maker visit (i.e. make appointment to meet or make delivery)
  - Water activity (a paddle, shoreline human chain, cleanup, flotilla)
- Identify and confirm emcee/key spokesperson
- Find a volunteer to act as “media liaison” (to greet reporters, provide materials, connect them to spokespeople)
- Identify, invite and confirm speakers who can succinctly tell a compelling story (# of speakers depends on form of press event but fewer is better - no speaks for more than 5 minutes ever)
- Determine Visuals (MUST HAVE)
  - Hand-made posters
  - Props (i.e. jars of slimy water, poster-size photos, maps, costumes, cute kids)
- Designate a photographer to take photos of the entire event (that way even if press is a no-show you will have photos for the press release and social media)
- Recruit participants through social media, phone-banking, and email - if you can’t get at least 20 participants there then rethink your plans
- Draft and send PRESS ADVISORY* to press contacts via email - call to make sure they got it (send it 3 even 5 days in advance and then the day before and the early morning of)
• Prepare PRESS RELEASE* in advance (gather quotes beforehand)

**EVENT**
• On the morning of the event, make press CALLS to sell event/confirm they are coming; email advisory again with “TODAY” in subject line (make sure they know that you will have good visuals)
• Arrive 30 minutes early at the location
• Make sure all attendees sign in (use a clipboard) so you can turn them out again the next time
• Have copies of press release/fact sheets to hand to reporters
• Have participants stand behind speakers if possible (for good visuals)
• Start as promptly as possible - don’t anger reporters who arrived on time by waiting for stragglers

**POST-EVENT**
• Plan B if press is a no-show: Take as many of the participants as possible directly to the closest newspaper office and ask to speak with reporter, news editor or opinion editor
• Add important details (especially # of participants if high) to already prepared press release
• Get photos/press release onto social media and sent by email to reporters (those who came and those who did not) as quickly as you can after the event and before 5 pm
• The day after, send news clips and photos to all attendees (makes them more likely to show up the next time)
• Most of the time, when a reporter hears from the public it is negative. COMPLIMENTS go a long way; if a reporter nails it, send a “thanks and great job” by email/phone call/social media

*ABOUT THAT PRESS ADVISORY:*
• Never put too much info in an advisory (if you put too much they won’t need to come to the event)
• Include basic who, what, where, and when so they are enticed but left wondering what is coming
• The exception to the “be vague” rule is when you have a big name speaker that will draw the press
• Always include in the advisory that there will be visuals (identify them if they will entice attendance)

*ABOUT THAT PRESS RELEASE:*
• You should be more detailed with the who, what, where, and when and you should add the why and how too. Aim to keep release no longer than a page and a half.
• Don’t say who you are coordinating with before you say what you are doing. Put the most important information at the top.
• Use concrete language, and explain how your activities will benefit real people in the real world

ABOUT PRESS CONFERENCES:
• Reporters have no time for conferences that deal with info they can get in other ways; make sure you have some genuine news
• Press conferences should not last more than 20 minutes - DO NOT DELAY GETTING TO PUNCHLINE
• For press conferences have one key spokesperson, then introduce others to answer questions
• Reporters think in terms of headlines and lead paragraphs and so should you
• Develop a list of key statements that you can drop in when responding to a reporter’s questions
  o Preface key statements with indications that they are worth remembering like “The crucial issue is…” “There are 3 things to remember…” or “What’s really important is…”
• If reporter asks questions that get off the desired track, get back on it with “That is a good question but the real issue is…” or “That is a good question but we are here today because…”