# LOGOSC Small Business Development Centers

# 1014 Greene Street

# Columbia, SC 29208

# Phone: 803.777.4907

# Fax: 803.777.6876

**www.SCSBDC.com**

**Just Because It Happens Doesn’t Make It News:**

**How to Write a Successful Media Release**

You have an upcoming event. You need people to attend. You have no budget to buy advertising (paid media), so you are hoping to gain coverage through local newspapers, TV stations, radio stations and blogs (earned media). But as your event approaches you don’t receive much coverage. What went wrong?

First, don’t be hard on yourself. You cannot guarantee coverage. You cannot control what other news breaks that day. A news director may have had your story ready to be aired, but a coup in South America usurped your story. Perhaps the assignment editor didn’t have the resources (staff/budget) to cover your event or maybe your event was scheduled at a time when multiple other things happened and competition for media coverage was unusually high.

With the economic downturn and the internet taking advertising dollars from traditional media, there have been massive layoffs in the communications industry. Today, a single reporter is probably covering their old beat plus three others they may not be particularly interested in covering. Hundreds of news releases cross the desks of these people every day, all begging for attention.

How can you make your story stand out in all the communication clutter? There are basic things you can do to improve the chances of having your story picked up.

1. **Do your research.** Read the publications and watch the programs where you’d like coverage. Nothing makes an editor/news director happier than a mention of a specific section or program where you think your story would fit. It shows you are aware of their content. Better yet compliment them on a similar story they ran, a simple courtesy. Make each media gatekeeper feel they are the only one receiving your information. Never send mass emails with dozens of media sources listed in the To: section. That will kill your story! Make calls before sending information to affirm you are connecting with the correct person. Media people are a liquid bunch, so check the accuracy of your media lists at least every six months.
2. **Timing is key**. All media live by deadlines. If you don’t know a deadline, call and ask. Information has to be received in the appropriate timeframe. Deadlines are short for online sources, sometimes a day or two. For traditional newspapers, a week out is usually good, but longer for feature articles. If you are looking to book a guest on a television talk show or video podcast, it is important to work months in advance. National magazines have the longest lead time, the minimum being around 6 months.
3. **Write the story**. Never send out a release unless you have a good story. You want media sources to value the information you send. This is a business of quality, not quantity. Stressed reporters love it when a story comes in ready-made. Learn how news stories are written. They are not blow by blow accounts; that’s why they are called *stories*. Start with a good headline. Ask yourself why people should care about your story. Use quotes to break up the copy. Include experts if possible. The media love experts. Be interesting. JUST BECAUSE IT HAPPENS DOESN’T MAKE IT NEWS! Remember: WHO, WHAT, WHEN and WHERE are only information. It is the WHY that makes the story.
4. **Form is important***.* In addition to using the correct format, news releases should follow a form called the inverted pyramid style. This means the most important information goes at the beginning (your hook). The less interesting information is pushed to the bottom of the page (date, time, etc .) Check out the *Associated Press Style Book*. All major media sources adhere to the AP style of writing. Your attention to this detail means reporters won’t have to retype your story, so they can move forward. Never send a PDF that can’t be copied and pasted or your story will be sent directly to trash. *If you have an event, but not a story, then you should direct your information (media notice) to people who manage calendar listings, not editors or reporters.*
5. **Provide good pictures.** Publications prefer to run stories with images (graphics or photographs). Stories with high quality images (300 dpi or dots per inch) will win out over stories without pictures. JPEGs are usually preferred. Always identify people in photographs and give information about them (captions). Mention those people in the body copy of your story if possible.
6. **Connect with editors, reporters and news directors.** Give them a call before you send a release and ask about their deadline. Talk briefly about your story and then follow up with your release in a timely manner. Wait a couple of days and send an email to confirm they received your release. Calling attention to your story in a polite way increases your chances of being heard above the constant communication clutter. Be persistent, but nice. Nobody *has* to run your story, so don’t badger. If your story gets placement, follow up with a thank you email or note. Courtesy will be remembered.