

Resources for Amazing Events



Top 10 Tips for Media Engagement

These ideas can help you engage the media
and your community in a special event.

1. Look for the Hook:

- Tell a compelling story of one animal—a dog who survived a hoarding situation or a cat who was found in a dumpster—and then broaden it to the bigger picture of animal rescue
- Share interesting backgrounds of staff, volunteers or adopters—the human interest angle is compelling, too
- Have you reached a milestone, celebrated a birthday, hit a record number of adoptions—think about a “Top 10 List” or even a “Top 3” format for your story

Note: Seizing on what’s trending in popular culture is effective at generating buzz. For example, one shelter, in conjunction with the release of the iPhone 6, held a promotion called “There’s a Cat for That.” According to the press release, the shelter “has the best selection of smart, sleek, beautiful felines around, and it’s never been easier to download one into your home.”



2. Pitch It Good:

- Learn as much as you can about a reporter (what she covers, the types of stories he's done in the past, the days/hours worked) before making your pitch, and tailor it accordingly
- When pitching a story over the phone, make sure you identify yourself and your organization—and before giving your spiel, ask if he or she has a few minutes to talk
- When pitching a story via email, keep it short and make your first sentence the most relevant one

Note: The subject line of an email should be ten words or less to keep the reader's attention and to prevent the message from being cut off. And be careful of things that trigger spam filters, like the word “free,” using exclamation points or all capital letters.

3. Time It Right:

- Send press releases around 10-14 days before your event so outlets can run the story in weekly community newspapers, online, etc. prior to the event
- Send a media advisory two to three days before, encouraging them to attend the event in person
- Newspaper reporters often have a deadline around 10 a.m. or 4 p.m., so you may want to avoid calling at those times

Note: Press releases and media advisories are similar in that they both serve the purpose of getting media coverage of your event. A media advisory is typically shorter and has the very explicit purpose of getting media to attend your event (kind of like an invitation) and is usually sent to outlets that you think are likely to attend. A press release can be longer and is designed to elicit coverage before the event as well.

4. Show and Tell:

The words you use in your press release and media advisory are important, but a picture may be what gets a member of the media to read your documents in the first place, so

- Make sure the subject's eyes are in focus
- Shoot from interesting angles and points of view
- Be careful of distracting backgrounds

Note: For more helpful photo tips, check out [*Top 10 Tips for Compelling Event Photos*](#).



5. Request Their Presence:

- Invite the media to your event and make sure you've shared everything you've got going on, from activities to special adoptions promotions to the participation of local celebrities and influential community members
- Provide a prominently marked check-in table for media and assign a trusted staff member or volunteer to greet each member of the media, answer questions and give a tour of your facility if desired
- Pass out prepared media kits with all the key details and photos and/or videos about your organization

Note: If broadcast media can't attend your event, 45 minutes to an hour before the evening broadcast, send them a press release with event highlights and be sure to include a few high-quality photos and/or a brief video. They may be able to run a quick segment if you make it easy for them.



6. Say It Succinctly:

- Go into an interview with a clear message of what you want the audience to take away—and find a way to share that message or messages repeatedly
- If you are asked multiple questions, answer the easiest one that allows you to get your message across
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question—simply tell the interviewer you will get back to her with an answer

Note: When you are interviewed on camera, unless you're told otherwise, look at the interviewer, not the camera.

7. Consider the Source:

- TV outlets can include network and cable stations in larger markets and public access and online shows in smaller markets
- Radio stations in larger markets may be syndicated—but don't forget podcasts and smaller stations, including college radio stations, which often have a large following
- Online calendars are a great way to reach the community—plus, reporters are sometimes assigned the task of scanning community calendars for events to cover

Note: Both television and radio stations are required by Federal Communications Commission regulations to run short public service announcements free of charge. You can usually find out the proper format for a particular radio or TV station by consulting their website. Newspapers too (especially smaller ones) often have a community event listing.

8. Get Social:

- Use engaging photos and/or short videos in all your social media posts
- Use the hashtags like #cleartheshelter or #megamatch for national exposure or create your own hashtag for a local event to make it easier for people to follow you
- Use free tools like Google Analytics to see how your posts are performing and tweak them as needed

Note: Designate one person to be in charge of social media during your event—it's a full-time job!

9. Diversify Your Portfolio:

Consider other channels besides traditional and social media to get your message out, such as

- Newsletters
- Email blasts
- Bulletin boards at local businesses
- Your website
- Church/school bulletins and programs
- Bumper stickers
- Bus and taxi ads
- On-hold phone messages
- Email signatures
- Billboards
- T-shirts

Note: Sponsors may be willing to cover the costs of some of the alternatives—ask early to increase your chances.



10. Be in the Know:

For more tips and tricks consult media experts such as

- Mediabistro
- PR Week
- PR 2.0
- Ragan's PR Daily
- The Publicity Hound
- Public Relations Society of America
- Peter Shankman
- Harvard Business Review

Note: Consider recruiting a PR firm to assist you in developing a pro bono media and marketing campaign.

