



ARCH STREET COMMUNICATIONS

ASK THE EXPERTS



As seen in the Federal Highway Administration's "It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air" Summer Newsletter for air quality and transportation professionals.

With all the things a busy air quality program manager has to do, you may wonder, “Why should I care about media coverage, and can it really help me?”

The answer is a resounding “Yes.” Publicizing your air quality efforts is a great way to build support for your program and increase your likelihood of success. Fortunately, getting the media attention your program deserves is easier than you think. In fact, every year, thousands of stories about air quality outreach and education programs such as yours appear in regional media, with local project staff generating many of them.


And you don't have to be a media pro to get good coverage—you just need to do your homework!

We sat down with Nora Madonick, an award-winning public relations specialist and founder and president of Arch Street Communications to learn how. With more than 25 years of expertise in strategic media and public relations, her clients include national and local transportation, air quality, and environmental agencies, for which her company successfully delivers scores of publicity placements, including national television interviews, trade features, news mentions, and case stories.

Q. Sounds good ... how do I get started?

A. The first steps are to become familiar with the newspapers, magazines, and news Web sites for your area, and to look at local radio and television programming—to learn what media outlets are available and who covers your topic, or topics related to it. Then decide which reporters and editors you should target.

The first place to check is your public affairs or press office or that of one of your



partners. If you don't have access to such a resource, you have several options. You can check the Yellow Pages, although it won't have the names of the reporters, program directors, or general managers. You will find them in the "Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook," which is at most libraries and is only available in hardback. Note: It only covers stations within city limits.

If you're not sure which newspapers are in your area, you can find a good listing of U.S. papers and their Web sites at the US Newspaper List. For a good listing of broadcast media, see the list of State Broadcaster Associations.

Once you have this information, use it to build your media contact list. This important directory should include the names of editors, reporters, and producers and their mail and e-mail addresses, phone/fax numbers, and pertinent notes and reminders. An Excel spreadsheet is a simple, efficient way to organize and update the information.

Q. I've completed my media list. Should I start calling everybody on it?

A. Not so fast. Now that you know the media that serve your area, you need a plan. Start thinking about your public relations goals—what are you trying to accomplish? Do you want to increase program awareness, get people to take an action, build public support?

When thinking about that, you'll need to identify your audiences—both the ultimate audience, which is the reader/viewer, and the one that receives your materials, the media. You also need to designate a spokesperson for your program and determine his or her availability for interviews. If possible, also try to have someone who can speak about your program in another language—someone who represents a heavily-populated non-English speaking community in your region.

Now's also the time to pull together your press packet/media kit—any materials you have, such as a fact sheet, brochure, photographs and press releases on your previous outreach events, logos, and other resources.

Once these items are organized, it's time to decide on your message.

A great way to get your ideas flowing is to write the headline of your dreams, which should point you in the right direction. Once you know what you'd like the news to be, you need to back it up. Reporters love facts, numbers, and data, which is a perfect opportunity to use the *It All Adds Up* factoids and information you've gathered in your evaluation efforts. (See the *It All Adds Up* seasonal fact sheets or the Download Center for more information on evaluating your program.)

Now you're in good shape to start making some lasting media connections.

Q. Should I approach each news medium differently?

A. Yes. There are many media outlets, which is why it's important to know which media your target audiences are likely to use. The goal is to focus your efforts where they will have the greatest effect. In addition to radio, TV, and newspapers, people also get their information from newsletters and the Internet, each of which requires a different approach for getting the best results.

Newspapers, whether daily or weekly, focus on who, what, when, where, and why. What is the news and how does it affect our readers? It's most important to answer "why should I care," because newspaper reporters have short lead times to develop stories and must choose quickly from a large pool of news items. Think like a reporter and you're more likely to get results.

Magazines have a longer lead/development time. In other words, it could be months between the time you've successfully pitched a story and the publication date. That means you need to plan way ahead. Think about stories that are best suited for the magazines you are targeting. Magazine articles are more feature-oriented. Think profiles, notable program results, or a particular angle that might be compelling to the magazine's readers.

Television news stations, including the local affiliates of national networks, always focus on regional issues, so be sure to contact them about your initiative. The most important thing to remember about TV is that it is a visual medium—viewers need something to look at. That's why television is the perfect opportunity to get your public



outreach events and activities publicized—because people are doing things.

Radio is another great medium for placements. One of the most effective ways to get out your message is by using a 10-second ad to sponsor the traffic and weather reports during peak drive times (see the *It All Adds Up* ads). If your local station includes talk radio, you may be able to place your spokesperson on a show, especially if you can tie your news to trends or statistics (for ideas, see the *It All Adds Up* seasonal fact sheets). Radio DJ's are an invaluable resource for helping you spread the word to the public before and during air quality fairs and activities. It's a great, spontaneous way to draw to your event listeners, especially drivers, who otherwise wouldn't have known about it.

Web sites are another good way to reach today's audiences. Most newspapers, TV stations, and magazines also have an online publication, which is frequently updated. However, the editors and writers of the online versions are often different from those of the traditional versions, so you may need to make separate pitches. Remember, as with all media outlets, it's important to understand who the Web sites target and what information they cover.

Daybooks are another important tool for you. Daybooks give the media a calendar of events in their area. News services, such as the Associated Press, maintain daybooks and distribute them to journalists. Assignment editors frequently check them to decide what to cover. You must pitch the daybook editors about a week in advance, pointing out what is newsworthy, and what makes your event appealing to the media, along with the event schedule. Your listing will be very simple—no press releases or media kits required—just who, what, when, and where, along with contact information.

Q. Is there anything I should avoid doing or saying when pitching to the media?

A. Before you call the media to pitch your story, you need to be prepared to speak competently and quickly about your message. The best way to do that is to develop a set of pitch points—the main ideas you will convey during your call. Have facts and figures to back up your story, along with your list of spokespeople. Keep your calls upbeat and helpful. Always be informed, resourceful, and friendly.

Know when to pitch. If you sidestep this critical factor, you risk losing the eyes and ears of busy editorial teams. Newspapers have short lead times. Magazines have long lead times. Radio talk programs often book guests well in advance. So make calls early to find out your media outlets' lead times.

To publicize an event, get started a month or two ahead. About a week before the event, fax or e-mail a news advisory to everyone on your media list. Then, follow-up with phone calls to gauge interest. The day before, send the advisory again and make a few last calls.

If you don't get the coverage you were seeking, give it one more shot by faxing or e-mailing a news release immediately following the event. It's still possible to land a day-after story.

Q. I want my program featured in the big regional papers—how do I make that happen?

A. First, don't underestimate the value of small newspapers! Newspapers—big and small—are a great way to reach a broad audience, including area residents, decision-makers, elected officials, and business leaders. Believe it or not, the rules for pitching to small and large newspapers are similar: Familiarize yourself with the paper, send a press packet/media kit to the right reporter, then give them a call.

When you call, resist the urge to immediately ask if they received your materials, and whether or not they plan to use them. Instead, take the opportunity to introduce yourself and your organization. Let them know how you can be a resource to them. Mention a few facts and figures to grab their attention. The *It All Adds Up* seasonal fact sheets provide dozens of compelling factoids worth their ear. But don't go overboard! Your main objective is to use the call to build a relationship and develop a good rapport. Be sure to check back from time-to-time to keep the reporter in the loop about your program. The idea is to make the reporter receptive to news about your campaign. Be smooth and remember, getting a placement in any newspaper is an accomplishment that will further the success of your program.

Q. What additional resources do you recommend?

A. www.italladdsup.gov is one of the best resources available for air quality and transportation professionals who are planning a media outreach campaign.

The *It All Adds Up* seasonal press release templates are excellent time savers to help you get started.

The *It All Adds Up* Exchange is a great place to find leads and get advice from others who are working on public relations and media outreach.

I especially recommend the *It All Adds Up* comprehensive media and public relations resource tool kit. The kit is chock-full of useful information featured in a user-friendly, step-by-step format.

Good luck!

For more PR tips and information from Nora Madonick, please visit: <http://www.archstreetcommunications.com>.



845-855-7077

info@archstreetcommunications.com

www.archstreetcommunications.com