



How to Write a Media Relations Strategic Plan

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One of the most perplexing outreach efforts we see in higher education is the proverbial Media Relations Strategic Plan.

Reason being: most institutions have a media-centric promotions approach – as opposed to using integrated marketing as the engine that drives your communications – so the media plan becomes the institutions sole media/marketing/PR/communications roadmap. And often it is complex, voluminous and unwieldy.

Big mistake. The media relations strategic plan should simply lay out in a focused, strategic manner how your institution is going to reach out to the media to systematically tell your success story and, ideally, control the message and flow of information to the media. See recent articles on enhanced media relations on our website, www.simpson-communications.com.

If you simply wait for the media to call, they control the message and flow of information to their readers, viewers and listeners. Your goal should be to manage your media effort so you maximize the chances that the media cover those issues you desire. This isn't black and white. As we know, in dealing with the media you can do everything textbook perfect, then pick up tomorrow's newspaper to see that your efforts have backfired.

So a Media Relations Strategic Plan should be designed to maximize the chances your media outreach controls the message and flow of information, and then best tells the success story of your institution. Steps in building the plan:

1) What is the annual goal of the MR Strategic Plan? What are you trying to accomplish, and be specific? Set some concrete, specific and *measurable* goals, such as:

- Re-do the annual, monthly and weekly story planning efforts of our Media Relations' beat reporters to develop a list of stories to pitch to the media that underscore the following key messages and themes: insert here the key messages and themes the institution is advocating. This may include: 1) the quality of undergraduate education; 2) the quality (read this *accessibility*) of faculty; 3) job opportunities for graduates; 4) the high value of the institution – total costs



versus benefit for prospective students, etc. These are messages or key themes the institution sets – not beat reporters in the Media Relations' department.

- Increase by XX percent the coverage *we generate* of the institution by key media (list here newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, websites, etc.). This is the one time you can count clips as a means of evaluating your media success. If the local newspaper ran XX news and feature stories *you generated* last year, determine by a reasonable percentage the amount you want this to increase.
- Have the president conduct XX editorial boards and one-on-one interviews with key newspapers and TV and radio stations listed under key audiences below. This is where ideas such as regular "reporters' lunches" come into play.
- Teach XX sessions of media training to key faculty, staff and administrators in this calendar year. One of the greatest ways to you can enhance your media coverage is to enhance the way your key administrators, faculty and staff respond when the media calls.
- Seek regional and national media coverage using new tactics and techniques such as: 1) the creation of a "media web site" that is customized for any and all media that come to your university's web pages. There is much information out there on these media sites, so we won't elaborate – other than to say make it relevant and user friendly for the media, then market its availability extensively; 2) consider using the major news story marketing services such as Newswise (www.newswise.com) and Ascribe to (www.ascribe.org) extend your media reach nationally in an affordable and effective manner.

2) Target your audiences. By this, we simply mean who are the specific target media you are going to reach this year? List them by name, and ensure that you include local, regional and national media. Are your targets *just* the news pages, or do you include editorial pages, features and sports? Again, be specific.

3) Key messages: What are the key messages you would like the media to cover? It is absurd to suggest that you can call a reporter and ask them to cover a story that features "the quality of our undergraduate education," then stand by the door awaiting their eager arrival. But it is equally absurd to allow your beat reporters to decide the key messages that underline stories they are pitching to the media -- or conversely, to let the media decide with no assistance from you the stories they are going to cover in a 12-month period. If your institution has begun a strong technology push, for example, ensure that this dominates the stories you market to the media.

4) Strategies to reach key audiences: How are you going to reach out to reporters and editors more effectively than in the past? Be creative here, and expansive.

5) Evaluation: How are you going to measure the success of your media relations effort? While many fret over this step, it is relatively easy, we believe. Everything must be measurable; otherwise you may be wasting precious time and resources in your outreach. The key to good evaluation is good goal setting in step one above.



Ensure that you can measure – in some qualitative or quantitative fashion – the specific goals you set.

There are many ways to develop a Media Relations Strategic Plan. We prefer an approach that is simple, focused and measurable.

As always, we welcome your comments and thoughts

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