

ImPRESSive

A MEDIA TIP SHEET FOR ADVOCATES

Fall 2002

FINDING THE HOOK: GETTING PRESS ATTENTION WITHOUT A TRADITIONAL PRESS CONFERENCE

Traditional press conferences are not the only way to get the media's attention. If you take advantage of upcoming press hooks and latch on to them, you can insert your organization and message into a story. If you know that an event is coming up and are certain that it will get the media's attention, you can easily inject your organization into the stories written that day by planning in advance how your organization will respond and working the phones the day of the event.

SCENARIO:



The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a controversial health care case that will affect your state, and your organization will have a response to its outcome. The Supreme Court has not yet come down with its decision, but you know that it will come down soon. In addition, you know that this is a case that will receive a great deal of media coverage.

Write your press statements well in advance because once the decision comes down, you will not have much time to hammer out a press statement. Responding early is key. Therefore, you'll need to write a statement responding to each potential outcome and have them ready for release for the day of the decision. Keep in mind that you will need to adjust the statements depending on the final language of the decision, but these should only be minor changes that can be done quickly.

PREPARING YOUR RESPONSE



First, figure out how your organization fits into the story. After this, you can prepare appropriate responses to the possible outcomes. Play out the different scenarios in your mind and assess how your organization would respond to each one.

- ❑ If the decision is in your favor, write a press statement supporting the decision and explaining why it is an important decision for health care advocates and consumers in your state.
- ❑ If the decision is not in your favor, write a press statement that explains why you oppose the decision and that also puts your organization in the context of the story.

ImPRESSive

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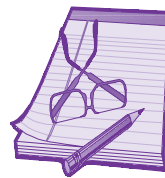
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In addition, think through how you will quickly get the information about the case the day it comes down. You will want to find out if the case comes down the very morning it happens, and you will want to find out how to get a hold of the final decision quickly. It is well worth your time to investigate different tracking and research options for finding out. This may involve daily calls to the Supreme Court hotline or another monitoring system.

You may also want to recruit people to share their stories with reporters about how the outcome of the case would affect them personally. These “real stories” should serve to validate your organization’s opinion on the Supreme Court decision. Call the individuals in advance, get the details of their stories, and ask them if they would be willing to talk to reporters about their stories. Let them know that you will call and get their permission before you pass along their information. If they agree, keep their contact information and notes on their stories on hand.

PREPARING YOUR STRATEGY



The next step in preparing for this upcoming press opportunity is to research reporters and to create a targeted press list. The idea is to anticipate which reporters are more likely to cover the story. This can be done easily by investigating who covers that beat and who has written about it in the past. Since the scenario in question deals with the Supreme Court but crosses over to health care, create a list that includes not only your health beat reporters and editorial writers, but also reporters who cover the Supreme Court.

Conduct a search of which reporters have covered this issue in the past. You can do this by searching on a news service such as Lexis-Nexis, if you have access to those resources.

Otherwise, you can also peruse clips or use search engines on the Web. Add any new reporters to your existing list and sort your press list by media outlet. The final list will most likely include several reporters from each paper, such as the health beat reporter, the legal/Supreme Court reporter, and editorial page writers.

It is important to take the time to research all the reporters that could potentially cover this story. Many times reporters who do not cover health care may not think to call your organization for comment. They will probably look at this story from a different angle. Your goal on the day the decision comes down is to remind them that this is a health care story.

Whenever possible, gather as much information on reporters as possible, such as phone

numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. This will ensure that your statement gets to each reporter. Make sure that you have a list that includes newspapers, wire services such as AP and Reuters, local television stations, and local radio stations. Your list should include any media outlet that is likely to cover this event.

When figuring out which reporters you think will cover this story, also think about whether local television and radio stations will cover this particular story, or if print reporters will be more likely to cover it. On the day of the event, you will want to get your statement to all three types of media outlets, but you will only have time to reach out to a more targeted list of reporters. As much as possible, try to anticipate who these targets might be.

Your Checklist

BEFORE the Day the Decision Comes Down

- ✓ A sample press release for a decision that rules in your favor.
- ✓ A sample press release for a decision that does not rule in your favor.
- ✓ A sample press release for any other anticipated ruling.
- ✓ The contact information and general stories of a couple of individuals willing to speak to reporters.
- ✓ The list of health beat reporters with their phone numbers, e-mails, and fax numbers.
- ✓ The list of reporters who cover the Supreme Court with their phone numbers, e-mails, and fax numbers.
- ✓ The list of any other reporters who have written on this case in the past with their phone numbers, e-mails, and fax numbers.
- ✓ The list of assignment editors of the major newspapers with their phone numbers, e-mails, and fax numbers.
- ✓ The list of radio and TV assignment editors with their phone numbers, e-mails, and fax numbers.
- ✓ The list of editorial writers with their phone numbers, e-mails, and fax numbers.

RESPONDING TO THE DECISION



Finally the day has come—the Supreme Court has released its decision concerning the health care case. You were able to get the information quickly by calling the court directly. The decision was not in your favor, and it is time to respond. You have already created sample press statements for each scenario, as well as targeted press lists with the names of reporters likely to cover this story. In addition, you have gotten a hold of the final language of the decision.

The first step is to make final changes to the press statement after reading through the decision. Remember that it is equally important to respond accurately as it is to respond quickly. Once you have finalized your press statement, get it out to your list of reporters. You can do this by blast faxing it to your press list or e-mailing reporters. Make sure to include all the names you have added to your press list.

WORKING THE PHONES



The next and most important step is to work the phones. Start by calling reporters who you know are most likely to cover the story. After this, call the remaining media outlets to see who is covering the story. Reporters will have already been assigned to a specific story that day and will quickly let you know if they are covering the story. If not, ask them who is covering the story. They will usually offer up that information pretty freely. If for some reason they do not tell you who is covering the story, call the assignment desk at the paper, and they will quickly refer you to the right person. Go down your list paper by paper, radio station by radio station, and TV station by TV station, getting the name of the reporter or producer who is covering this story. This should not take very long.

Once you have reached the appropriate person, you can start off the conversation by asking them if they received your statement on the Supreme Court decision. In addition, you can offer your spokesperson for comment by sug-

Sample Script for Talking to a Reporter Before Knowing If She/He is Covering the Story:

Advocate: Hi, this is Pamela from Health Care Today. Are you covering the Supreme Court's decision today?

Reporter: No, I'm not covering it.

Advocate: Do you know who at your paper is covering the story?

Reporter: Yes, I think it's Randy who covers court cases.

Advocate: Thanks, I appreciate it.

gesting that he or she can explain why this decision is an important decision in the health care field. In addition, pitch your organization as a resource for background information. After all, these reporters are working on an extremely tight deadline and will not have very much time to digest the information and write about it. Not only will they welcome help, but they will also want the piece to be balanced, which means they will want to include both sides of the story.

Making calls to reporters is necessary for a couple of reasons if you want to be in the story.

First of all, you may need to introduce your organization and explain why you fit into this story because they may not be familiar with you. Second, you want to make sure that they received your press statement. Reporters get hundreds of e-mails and faxes daily, and they do not have time to read all that information and make their often tight deadlines as well. Through your follow-up call, make a case about why your e-mail or fax should be read. In the majority of follow-up calls, you will find that most of the reporters have not yet seen your press statement.

Sample Script for Talking to a Reporter Covering the Supreme Court Decision:

Advocate: Hi, Randy, this is Pamela from Health Care Today. I wanted to make sure you received our statement on today's Supreme Court decision.

Reporter: I didn't get your statement.

Advocate: Oh, I would be happy to e-mail it to you. What is your e-mail address? This decision is a huge upset for all of us in the health care community. I'll get our director to give you a call. She can talk to you about the impact this decision will have on health care and the implications for the state.

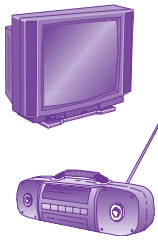
(send the reporter the statement and get your director to give him/her a call.)

- OR -

Reporter: Yes, I did get your statement.

Advocate: Great. This decision is a huge upset for all of us in the health care community. I'll get our director to give you a call. She can explain why this is the case, and she would also be happy to go over the decision with you if you have any questions.

HOW RADIO AND TV ARE DIFFERENT



Your approach to working with radio and TV should be very different from your approach to working with print media. Call TV and radio producers well in advance to give them the heads up that the case is coming down. Through this call, you will be pitching the story to them in advance by explaining the impact this decision will have on health care. If they seem interested in the story, you can present them with a package deal that includes an interview with your spokesperson the day the decision comes down and a real story as well.

For the TV and radio stations you have not been able to contact, call the assignment editor directly to ask who is covering the Supreme Court case and make sure this producer gets your statement and your pitch for your spokesperson.

Your local TV news may also be more enthusiastic about interviewing a person who could be directly affected by this Supreme Court decision. Your stories can help get your message out to these reporters. Therefore, when you find out that the local news is covering this story, ask them if they would like to include a vignette in their piece. You should also pitch your spokesperson as you did with the print reporters.

CONCLUSION

Getting into the story will entail a flurry of calls the day of the event. The most important thing to remember is that reporters will also be pressed for time and will welcome a call from an organization that is willing to supply them with the resources to write a complete piece that includes both sides of the argument. If you plot out your strategy in advance and dive into the calls the day of the event, you will be very likely to insert your point of view and spokesperson into the story. After all, the only way to get into a story without a press event is with a well thought out strategy and aggressive follow-up calls.





Next **ImPRESSive**:
Coming this Winter 2002

The Story Bank:
Using Personal Stories as an
Effective Way to Get Your
Message Out

A follow-up **ImPRESSive** to the July 1999 issue, *The Art of Story Banking*. From personal testimonials in articles to on-camera interviews on the nightly news, personal stories are becoming more and more important to reporters when reporting the news. This is especially the case for health care stories. Through the next **ImPRESSive**, learn why it is important to keep a story bank of health care stories, and even more importantly, how you can use these stories as a means of developing relationships with reporters and of getting your message across effectively.

ImPRESSive

Back Issues:

- * **On the Record & Off the Record: Controlling the Story**, July 2002
- * **Building and Maintaining Relationships with Reporters**, April 2002
- * **Tips for Interviews - Part III: Television**, January 2001
- * **Tips for Interviews - Part II: Radio**, December 2000
- * **Tips for Interviews - Part I: Newspaper**, October 2000
- * **Getting Your Message Into National Stories**, June 2000
- * **How to Shift Focus on a Story**, April 2000
- * **The Art of Story Banking**, July 1999
- * **Getting in the Editorial/Opinion Pages**, March 1999
- * **Creating Working Media Lists**, December 1998
- * **Drafting a News Release**, October 1998

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