



THE BENEFITS OF MEDIA RELATIONS:

and how to

- Protect Your Brand
- Speak Confidently with Media
- Increase Profile & Credibility

Connect with Keen Media

Phone: 604.721.7948
Email: andrea@keenmedia.ca
Website: www.keenmedia.ca

About Andrea Keen

Andrea Keen is the founder of Keen Media, a consulting company she established in 2003 to provide strategic communications and public relations advice and counsel to executives in government, nonprofit and private sector organizations.

She has nearly 20 years of experience developing programs and managing alliances to meet communications and public affairs objectives. Past clients include provincial and local governments, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, leading industry associations, and not-for-profit organizations.

Prior to founding Keen Media, Andrea was account manager at a boutique PR agency, where she oversaw media and PR for national and international clients and was communications manager at a leading nonprofit organization in Vancouver. Her political experience includes leading election campaigns and serving as constituency assistant to the Speaker of the BC Legislature. She graduated from programs at Kwantlen University College, of Simon Fraser University and the Royal Roads Communications and PR Management program.

About Keen Media's *Media Training Workshops*

Media training workshops are usually designed for up to six people in an organization and take place over one or two days. Each workshop is tailored for the group and so the focus can vary a great deal. It is an interactive exchange to gauge issues, levels of experience and the type of training required - from presentation skills to media training, crisis PR, as well as public and political speaking.

Generally these workshops will be delivered to a team consisting of spokesperson(s), communications staff and / or front line managers. This provides a valuable opportunity for the team to work together and learn and respect each other's roles and responsibilities, opportunities and challenges in developing and presenting messages on behalf of the organization.

The Benefits of Media Relations e-Symposium

This interactive e-symposium has been prepared specifically to serve the needs of AMSSA BC and its members. *The Benefits of Media Relations* will introduce the principles of communicating with mass media, do's and don'ts to remember when in the spotlight, and how to engage a larger audience in your organization's mission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Demystifying the Media	4
What is News?	4
Proactive, Reactive and 'Soft News'	4
The 5 W's: who, what where, when, why and sometimes how.	4
Types of Media	4
Print media	5
Broadcast media	5
Social media	5
Ethnic media	5
Why a Reporter Calls	5
What is Media Relations - Why is it Important?	6
Non Profit Spokespersons - Who is doing the talking?	6
Responding to Media	7
When a reporter calls	7
Preparing for an interview	7
Presentation	8
Interview Guidelines	8
Crafting Key Messages	9
Difficult Reporters / Hidden Agendas	9
<u>Exercise for Break Period</u>	<u>10</u>
Media Outreach	11
Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS)	11
Develop a Plan	11
"Staying on Message"	12
Bridging Words to Help you Stick to your Key Message(s)	12
Mock Scenarios & Exercises	12
"Pitching a Story"	13
Know Your Publication	13
First Pitch Should be Email	14
Calling to Follow Up	14

Demystifying the Media

From the reporter's perspective, you are a means to an end. You are a potential source to information on a story they want to tell; nothing else. Reporters are always working on brutal deadlines - they don't have time to think of building a relationship with you, your need to be understood, whether this interview will help or hurt your career, etc. etc. They are thinking of their editor and the deadline that must be met. It is your job to know what your organization wants to say to the audience, and how to best communicate that, not the reporter's.

The deadlines reporters work on are tight and you likely won't have time to prepare the story you want told after the reporter calls. However, you can prepare messaging in advance and even use the pressure that news organizations are under to your advantage by anticipating their needs.

What is News?

As the word implies, news is NEW information that the media you are working with believe is important, interesting or relevant to their audience. Today's news cycle is so fast, and with stories breaking sometimes on social media, a reporter is always looking to "stay ahead of the story". Hence, deadlines are a cruel reality in the media world.

Reporters often look to give a big story a local angle, and that story is often told through the voice of sources. You may be but one source for the story.

Proactive, Reactive and 'Soft News'

Proactive is when you call up a journalist and ask them if they're interested in hearing more about an issue or subject you want to raise awareness about.

Reactive is when the reporter calls you and asks if you can answer questions about X, Y or Z.

News stories are referred to as hard or soft. Soft news isn't breaking news: it is considered newsworthy, but is not time sensitive. Many human interest stories such as arts, culture, marketing information about programs, products etc. will be considered "soft news" and will run when there is time or space to cover the story. Hard news is usually breaking news, time sensitive with some level of urgency.

Every news story needs the 5 W's: who, what where, when, why and sometimes how.

Types of Media

The media is a diverse mix of institutions using a variety of technologies to communicate to the masses. The technologies through which this communication takes place include a variety of outlets. Each has unique advantages or disadvantages, depending on the story, and there are some key differences in working with them.

It is to your advantage to understand the needs of different media outlets you are working with in order to use them effectively. Working on the front line you may work

with reporters and occasionally an editor, producer or camera person. We will focus on the needs of the reporter and the main types of media.

Print media

Community/local, regional and national newspapers. Magazines, journals, special publications, ethnic media, and newsletters. Many can do in depth stories, series, etc. Relevant photos are helpful when pitching. Variation on deadlines, but magazines and journals will likely prepare months in advance.

Broadcast media

Community, local, regional and national, specialty and ethnic TV & Radio. Radio & TV have extremely tight deadlines and look for new stories every hour. Visuals are key to making a TV news story interesting. Both may clip quotes from your interview, likely 12-20 seconds in length. Ideally your quote is around nine words and in any case should not exceed 20 words.

Social media

Social media has been a game changer for all the mediums. It is important to understand that social media is more of a conversation than traditional media, so listening is key. As there was a recent social media webinar hosted by AMSSA, I encourage you to visit the link to [Maximize Your Impact: Building Collaboration Through Social Media](#).

Ethnic media

There are dozens of media outlets in B.C. targeted to specific ethnic groups, which can be a valuable resource for communicating with certain demographics. It's important to know how to incorporate strategic communication tactics for each one, and to have someone who can speak, read and understand the language well. Ensure that you use an experienced translator in all communications to diminish any chance of misunderstanding.

Why a Reporter Calls

Reporters call because they need a story. It may be a specific story related to breaking news. The story may be about your organization or a competitor's, or about an individual or family member of someone employed at your organization.

Reporters will often follow up on a lead or be on a fishing expedition about an issue they wish to report on.

How did they find you? Are you the media contact for your organization? Do they know you in some way or find your name on commentary in relation to another story or social media?

Determine as best you can what lead the reporter to call you. If the opportunity presents itself, pitch story ideas about what your organization is working on and why it matters.

Remember the reporter has a job to do - they get to write the story. You get to answer the questions, but not tell the reporter what to write or broadcast to their viewers and how you wish to be perceived. You don't get sign off on the story or see the final version before it is aired or published.

Your job is to be prepared, answer questions knowledgeably and truthfully, while anticipating your audience's wants, needs and expectations.

What is Media Relations - Why is it Important?

Media relations is, quite simply, you and/or your organization's relationship with the media. Sooner or later your organization will interact with the media.

Talking to reporters can have a significant impact on your organization's bottom line, not to mention your career. Knowing how to manage your public profile and your organization's brand is more important than ever. The profile of your organization and your brand's reputation is the responsibility of leadership, yet you don't control the audience's perception. Stakeholders and clients can and do share their opinions and interactions with your organization and its representatives on multiple platforms (even if you aren't speaking to media). A story or even a rumour can gather speed like an unstoppable train, so planning is key!

Practicing media relations will become more comfortable over time. Your skill at speaking with media as well as your ability to work with important stakeholders, answer difficult questions, anticipate needs and issues and perform research will all be enhanced.

Non Profit Spokespersons - Who is doing the talking?

Your organization should have a written communications policy in effect that sets out the role of the spokesperson(s). It is very important that every employee in the organization is familiar with the policy to ensure that those who are **not** designated to speak will not do so if they are approached even in a casual way by a reporter following up on an incident or story regarding the organization.

The spokesperson(s) must be someone who can be available for media. It is not enough to have your Board Chair or Executive Director designated as the main (or only!) spokesperson if they are continuously backed up with meetings, away or traveling for periods of time. They need to be available on short notice. It is best to have at least one other person designated and trained as a spokesperson. If your organization has more or increasing interaction with media, that number should also increase.

The designated spokesperson has a duty to speak truthfully and openly to the best of his/her knowledge regarding the organization, subject to specific (and extremely rare) disclosure restrictions (*ie. matter before the courts, election or shareholder embargoes, etc.*)

Every employee designated as a spokesperson should have at least *some* media training to help them with Q&A scenarios and to ensure messaging is clear and consistent. I guarantee that those spokespersons with the most experience and flawless interviews under pressure have had media training recently. All members of the team who may be on the front line can benefit from some media training, and this should be frequent and take place in teams so that individuals can understand the collective effort involved to be successful when interacting with media.

Responding to Media

As someone who has fielded thousands of calls from media, I can tell you that it is of monumental importance that you do whatever you can to accommodate media requests. Co-operate as much as you can to ensure you get the story you want while meeting the needs of the reporter.

The sooner you know what is needed, the more time you will have to prepare before deadline. Those precious minutes wondering why a reporter has called and what you will say is only going to work against you. It is always better to get the information as soon as it is available.

The story will likely run with or without your input. If you stonewall, fail to respond, or prove to be unreliable, it reflects negatively on **you** and your organization. It may also result in the reporter thinking you have something to hide and be a red flag for the reporter to delve deeper.

When a reporter calls

- Return calls to reporters in a timely way (*ASAP or within the hour*)
- Ask for the reporter's name who will be doing the story, and who they work for
- What do they need to know?
- What is the angle of the story?
- What is the medium? TV, radio, print, web?
- What is the deadline? Usually same day!
- When will the story run?
- If broadcast, will it be live or taped?
- Who else will the reporter speak to? Other experts, organizations etc.?
- Where will the interview take place?
- Don't ask or expect to see a list of questions that the reporter plans to ask

Preparing for an interview

The better prepared you are for an interview, the better that interview will be. Whether you are an old hand at giving interviews, an expert in any given subject or not, 99 per cent of the time the newbie without expertise in the given subject area is going to give a better interview.

It is extremely helpful if you monitoring media and are aware of issues that are being talked about in your community and with regard to the work you are doing. Hopefully, you have also gone away from this training, done your homework and have some key messaging or narrative pre-written. You go to your designated spokesperson(s) and that person is available and capable of speaking to the issue at hand with some level of expertise. A few key things to prepare in advance of that interview:

- Research the media outlet and the reporter to get insight into perspective, context, or possible agenda
- Learn everything you can about the subject area
- Write down all possible questions & answers
- Consult with spokesperson(s) / colleagues for insights
- Practice answering interview questions with a colleague, use a camera to review delivery, tone, style etc.

You will likely be able to anticipate the majority of the questions that you anticipate will be asked in the course of the interview and correct a number of errors in your delivery by watching yourself in advance of the interview.

Presentation

- Arrive on time if the interview is out of the office
- Show up prepared with backgrounders, photos, research etc. with extra copies for handouts
- Bring notes relating to specific dates, times or numbers that might be difficult to remember
- Turn off your cell phone (unless using to tape, then place into airport mode)
- Be professional and courteous - try to acknowledge everyone in attendance
- Make sure you look good - dressed well, hair, teeth makeup, etc. It's not vain to look in the mirror before going on air!
- Nerves: take a moment to breath deeply - do some self-talk if you need to. Remember you are being asked to do the interview for a reason
- Look the reporter in the eye while speaking

Interview Guidelines

What you say should always be in line with the mission, vision and values of your organization. Remember, ultimately you are speaking to your audience **not** the reporter or your organization.

- Don't joke, curse or swear (*ie. - "You didn't hear? Kim died."*)
- Be courteous and respectful, even if you disagree
- "No comment" is not a thing

- If you don't understand a question, ask the reporter to repeat or clarify
- Never lie, guess, sensationalize or exaggerate in answer to any question
- Politely decline to answer questions that are hypothetical
- Speak active, in the first person - don't use the reporter's name
- Most of the time the reporter and their questions won't be a part of the interview
- Provide short, tight answers to highlight your main point to ensure the reporter takes the right message from your response - if your words are edited they may be taken out of context
- Always use positive language, even if asked a negative question. No BUT'S!
- Never use jargon or acronyms particular to your industry
- Pause after each question and think about what you want to say
- There is no such thing as off the record
- High stress changes the rules

Crafting Key Messages

- Key messages are tools with which the spokesperson(s) delivers the organization's narrative to answer specific questions in your Q & A
- Write bullets, not novels
- Don't assume knowledge or lack thereof
- No more than three messages in crisis situations - up to seven in "hard" or soft news
- 4 c's of messaging: **CLEAR, CONCISE, COMPLETE, & CORRECT**

Difficult Reporters / Hidden Agendas

Even the nicest reporters have agendas - and so should you. Some are obviously more difficult than others, but this is not always apparent. Always be cautious when answering questions, as it may not be the reporter who trips up. If you lose your focus, before you know it you may volunteer additional or irrelevant information that can take the story off message. Some caveats:

- Answer one question at a time & stop talking once you have answered it!
- Be mindful of dead air. Reporters will ask a question and then pause for what can seem a long time in the hopes that you will keep talking. It is not your job to fill the dead air, it is the reporter's.
- Always circle back to your answer and key message, even if the question is repeated multiple times
- Beware of going off topic - reporters are trained in how to get sources to "loosen their lips"
- Try to do the interview standing up - it will help bolster your confidence

Exercise for Break Period (~ 15 minutes)

During the break, grab a coloured pen or Sharpie and a copy of a recent newspaper, or even a magazine or journal that is relevant to your organization. Set a timer for 10 minutes. Go through the paper and circle all the stories that are relevant to your organization in some way. These stories can all help you to generate ideas for pitching your own story.

Note names of the publication, the reporter, columnist etc. These may be valuable “earned media contacts” for pitching story ideas.

Then set the timer for five minutes and circle all the advertisements in the publication which showcase a business that is related in some way to a service you provide, a product. What is their mission, vision and values? These are potential allies or sponsors.

Media Outreach

Using mass media correctly can build profile, credibility and is an excellent tool in helping to reach important objectives. A story generated through outreach or “earned media” is far more valuable than advertising in terms of its credibility and reach - and it doesn’t “cost” anything beyond the man hours of developing a strategy and messaging.

It is an opportunity to get your story across to stakeholders and the community at large, and can be valuable in terms of networking and having contacts in this arena if a problem or crisis develops with your organization.

Once you have a story idea you would like to generate, meet with your team and senior managers. You can reach out to media via a phone call, a news release, a news conference, and by continuing to do things that are newsworthy!

While it can take time to develop relationships with reporters, it will be worth it and will make media engagement much easier. Don’t be too hard on yourself if at first your stories aren’t picked up. Next time the reporter might be interested, and in the meantime, you are still keeping media informed about current issues and information about your organization.

Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS)

IMPACS was an international, Vancouver-based non profit with a mission to help civil society organizations develop effective outreach skills, evaluate laws that apply to advocacy activities, and to foster the development of a free and effective media. Their [Media Communications Toolkit](#) summarizes common media tools you can use to help increase the public profile of your non-profit organization.

Develop a Plan

As Mark Twain said, *“It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.”*

While a daunting task, there are many examples on the Internet of good media plans that you can use as a guide in formulating your own. Your organization’s media / PR plan often includes a description of the following:

Goals

- *Pull from the strategic plan and from your organization’s mission statement*
- *Set 1-3 measurable goals for the coming year.*

Strategies to Consider

- *What is the right timing? Events, milestones that are newsworthy?..*
- *What newsworthy issues external to your organization dovetail with each of the goals?*
- *Be nimble and flexible enough to accommodate external events in the news cycle*

Target Audience

- *Who is the intended audience for your message?*
- *Consider demographics (Ethnic, youth, senior)*

- *Where can you find your target audience? (locations, publications)*
- *Who are their **influencers** and how can you engage them?*

Messages

- *Write out narrative, key messages, and supporting information.*
- *Write out Q & A*
- *Anticipate criticism, and how to counter it*

“Staying on Message”

- The more you say, the bigger the chance that your message will get lost
- Try to think in advance of a strong sound bite as a leave-behind
- Ensure you speak slowly enough - for sound bites and for clarity
- Statements that include conjunctions are negative and weaken your message (*no buts, however or nonetheless*)

Bridging Words to Help you Stick to your Key Message(s)

- *We believe the important issue here is...*
- *I think it would be more accurate to say...*
- *Here's the real problem...*
- *What I've said comes down to this...*
- *Let me emphasize...*
- *While what you say is important, it's also important to remember that...*
- *It all boils down to...*
- *Let me emphasize...*
- *That reminds me...*
- *I would like to add...*

Mock Scenarios & Exercises

1. An illness breaks out following a catered luncheon event at your organization. There were many clients in attendance for this “Getting Acquainted” event, and several people have been hospitalized as a result. One elderly person is in critical condition.

A well known reporter is outside of your offices after hours and speaks to Jane Smith, the new receptionist at your agency as she is rushing out to go home for the day. Jane recognizes the reporter right away.

Reporter:

“Hi, how are you? I am the Reporter from the 6.00 news. I notice you coming out of XYZ Multicultural Society. Do you work there?”

Jane:

“Yes, I do.”

Reporter:

“Are you able to update me about the condition of the people who have fallen ill?”

Jane:

“Sorry, I am not sure and I probably couldn’t say since that would be private information. Ultimately it probably isn’t our fault. It’s likely a case of food poisoning from the sandwiches we got from ABC Catering Company.”

What happened here? What can we learn from this scenario?

2. Your Executive Director is the designated spokesperson for XYZ Multicultural Society. The Reporter calls and you have set up an interview for them.

List the questions you might anticipate if you didn’t know about the earlier interview with Jane. Then list the questions you might anticipate if you did know about the Reporter’s earlier interaction with Jane.

Would the questions you anticipate be different if a story had already run headlining that someone from your organization had said the problem wasn’t their problem, or accused ABC Catering Co. as being responsible.

Reporter:

“Do you feel as though XYZ should shoulder the blame for the illness that broke out near the end of the luncheon at your offices?”

Executive Director:

- We’re very concerned about the wellbeing of our clients.
- A team of doctors and public health are investigating what happened.
- We want to find the cause and make things right.

Reporter:

Do you think this is a case of food poisoning caused by ABC Catering Co?

Executive Director:

We are all working with public health investigators to try and determine the cause of this illness. We expect to have more information tomorrow. Our staff are working closely with the families affected during this difficult time.

“Pitching a Story”

Coming up with a good story (and presenting it well) is a lot more involved than it seems! Even experienced journalists can make mistakes when pitching their ideas. There is no silver bullet, but there are several steps involved in making a successful pitch.

Know Your Publication

You must be familiar with your target publication and the editor, reporter, producer you are pitching to.. Do not pitch off-topic pieces!

Carefully read articles or get to know the program you are pitching to. Note the writing style, demographics, recent pieces (even not so recent). I pitched a radio series based on a story the reporter had done 10 years ago. The reporter was not only flattered and got the producer on board with my idea, she still remembers me. She appreciated not only the insight I brought, but also the fact that I knew her past work so well.

Know the lead time. Depending on the media type (hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly...) this is how long in advance you need to make a pitch for your piece to be viable before deadline. For a daily news publication, I usually give about a one to two week lead time, depending on the situation. Magazines and journals are months, even a year, ahead of time.

Remember, you also have to know the audience of the publication as that is who you are ultimately speaking to.

Twitter is an additional tool to get to know a reporter or a media outlet better, but should never be used to actually make a pitch.

First Pitch Should be Email

When it comes to reaching out, email should be your first approach, especially if they don't know you.

Many email pitches are not even opened, but an awesome subject line is key to that first step being successful. Without an awesome subject line, it is unlikely that the reporter will even open your email. You also need to sell your story in a short and concise manner. Brevity is key!

Attached to your email is your press release and possibly a photo. It is best to embed these into your email rather than have them as separate attachments.

Remember you are pitching a story, not your company.

Calling to Follow Up

When you speak to the reporter, immediately introduce yourself and ask them if they have a minute or two to speak with you. Then get straight to the point. Don't try to butter him or her up to your pitch. Give them a compelling reason to want to know more so that you aren't wasting their time. If you pitch badly, and waste their time, the reporter is less likely to want to hear your ideas in future.