



MEDIA RELATIONS FOR SMALL ORGS

May 2019



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

START THE CONVERSATION

Do an inventory of local media.

Include mainstream newspapers and TV and local news blogs

Ask influencers (Councilmembers, chamber leaders, non-profit Executive Directors, students etc) where they get their news, what they read. What matters to them.

Look at these outlets and decide who might be interested in your stories.



Why this works: if you want to influence the discussion, you have to know what outlets your influencers turn to.



the B-TownBlog
www.b-townblog.com



 **Nextdoor**

NEWSRADIO
590KQNT

START THE CONVERSATION

Call them up, invite them to coffee. Offer a tour. Meet a judge.

You want to establish a relationship.



Why this works: You communicate that you are open and available.



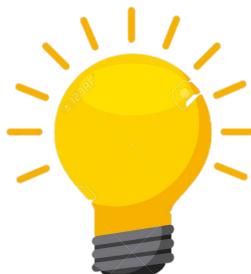
“WE ARE THE MEDIA”

Tell your own story

Take pictures and write a couple sentences

Send these to the media.

They don't know what's going on unless you tell them! So don't make them guess and make sure the first interaction is a positive story.



Why this works: you will own and control your story. You will tease them into doing your stories.

This means they don't have to work very hard and proves you are transparent and know what they need.



“Loved seeing the cute kids today at Family Treatment Court. Today we reunited three families by providing free or low-cost addiction services. Learn more ([link](#)) about our program.”



The Juvenile Court team that manages 2600 juvenile court cases each year. They are proud of the work they do.

WE ARE ALL STORYTELLERS

Deputize colleagues as storytellers

Encourage them to write a blog, take a picture, add some sentences.

Send it to the media



Why this works: your coworkers are closest to the story. They see things you won't. It will help tell a real-er story and make them happy.



“When Judge Halpert walked into the room, everyone rose. It was an important day. Ten new attorneys were sworn in. They will carry civil and criminal case loads.

Parents were all there and, understandably, cried happy tears.”

Is this ok to write? Yes, it is.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

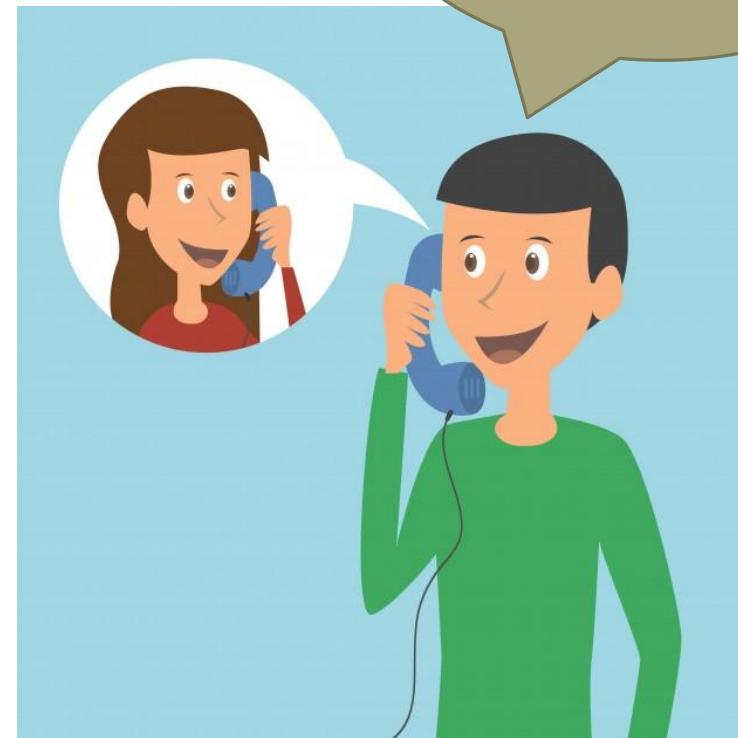
Feel free to invite them in, ask questions.

Pay attention to their stories, compliment them when they get it right.

Draft press releases and stories, send links to the media when you post them.



Why this works: you become accessible and easy to talk to. Plus, everyone likes to be complimented.

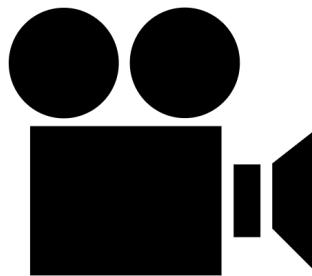


WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY

INFOGRAPHIC 01



Pictures



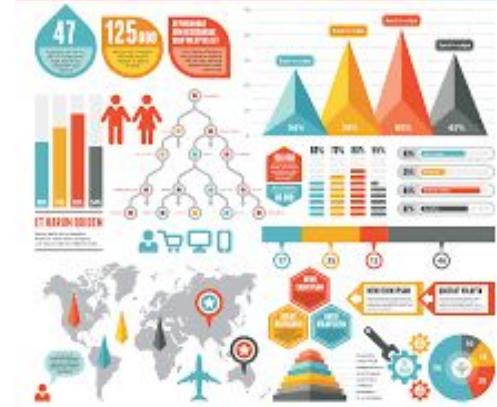
Videos



Tours



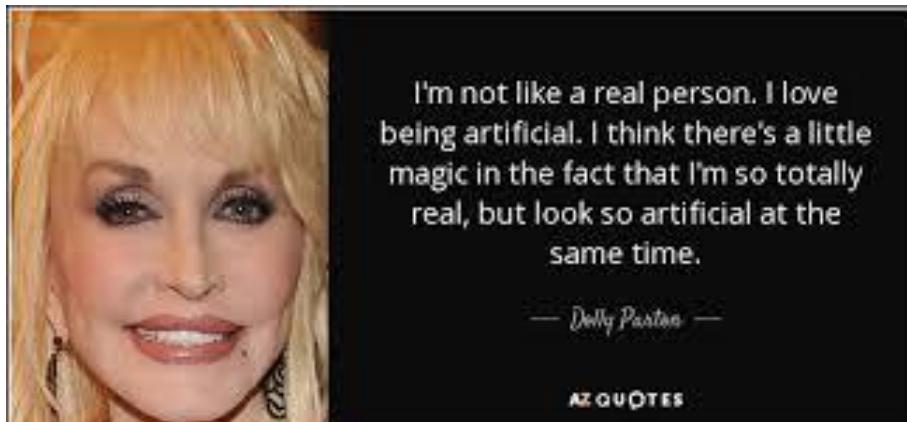
Data



Visualizations



Accessibility



Real people, real honesty

It's getting easier to do all these things.. Easier than you think. If you have people under 35 on your team, just ask them. ;-)

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY

What's new (Why now and not yesterday?)

What's interesting (Why should I cover this when there are other things going on?)

What's important (Will this make people richer, stronger, smarter, safer?)

Be succinct

Sound bites are less than 15 seconds

Paragraphs are only 4 sentences

Press releases and blogs are 5 paragraphs – max

Interesting headlines (you are competing with other people and other stories)



“Aim for Brevity while avoiding jargon” Edsger Dijkstra

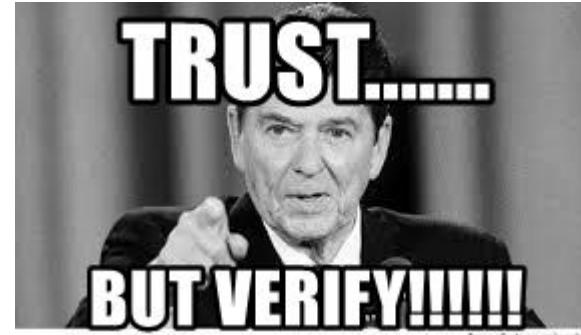
TRUST BUT VERIFY

When they make a mistake, correct it/them. Newspapers and other published materials become the de facto record. Mis-information will be repeated until it's corrected.

When dealing with a reporter, be curious, not combative

Google them and see what type of stories they write

Ask open ended questions “I’m curious where you heard that?” “Did you talk to others?” “What kind of story are you looking for?”



The New York Times

Corrections: May 16, 2019

May 15, 2019



NATIONAL

An [article](#) on May 4 about restrictions in Florida that will require felons to fully pay back fines in order to regain their voting rights referred incorrectly to the number of states that have laws prohibiting anyone with a felony record from voting. In addition to Iowa and Kentucky, Virginia has a similar law, but it permits the governor to restore voting rights in individual cases.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Bad things happen.



Be clear on what happened: Corral ALL relevant members of your team – including the team member who last interacted with the issue and get the answers to: who, what, where, when, why, how. Ask the questions the media will ask. Think about the worst possible question they will ask. Be prepared to answer it.

There is only one story: Create your “story”. Develop your key messages (the one or two things you want people to know). Everyone on the team gets a copy so you are literally working from the same set of facts. Put them in logical order.

There is only one spokesperson: All questions should go through one person who is knowledgeable, accessible and comfortable. Splitting spokespeople can lead to conflicting information.

There is only one set of facts: Write and publish a press release so the media can access the facts as you know them to be. Do NOT count on them to get it right when they are only listening to you.

Practice, practice, practice: Do a practice session where one person plays the media so you are comfortable answering.

Trust but verify: Watch all relevant media to make sure they got it right. Correct when it's inaccurate.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Some standard responses that always work

“I don’t know about that, but what I can tell you is...”

“We have policies and procedure that work. We will certainly review what happened and make any changes as necessary.”

“The data shows...”

“I don’t have an answer for that, let me get back to you or put you in touch with someone who has more experience with that than I do...”

“We don’t have all the information yet, but we are working diligently to get it as quickly as we can. We will let you know if we learn anything more.”



WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE



“My entire interview ended up on the cutting room floor! The video was misleading! That’s not at all what happened!”

You have every right to call them up and ask them about that. If they don’t apologize or see your point of view, acknowledge that you are disappointed but don’t freeze them out. The next time, ask lots of questions as the story is being shot.

“I gave them information and they got it wrong.”

When a story is complex, take the time to write a “press release” or some type of summary statement with facts and attribution. Post it on your website and/or send it to the media in advance of an interview or press briefing. This ensures the media is literally working from the same set of facts.

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE



“There were so many things in my interview they could have chosen. But they chose that. UGH!”

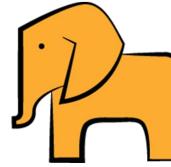
Yes, it happens. Just don't let things come out of your mouth no matter how much they goad you into saying them.

Don't repeat the negative.

“No, we didn't lose her” should be “We had her in custody as per procedure. She was found later at home. We will certainly look into what happened.”

If you don't know the answer, block and bridge.

I can't tell you specifically what happened, but what I can tell you is that we have procedures, we have a 100% in-custody success rate. We will certainly look into what happened.



FINAL THOUGHTS

FINAL THOUGHTS

We are the first and best source of information good and bad.

Only you can tell your story correctly. Don't cede this ownership to the media or anyone else. Just look to AG Bill Barr. He called a press conference to release the first four pages of the Mueller Report and after that nothing else really mattered. He controlled the narrative.. and still does. #BeBillBarr.

We are the media

We tell our own story. We share pictures of good work. We own our messaging.

Think about your audience

What do they watch, what are their values, what matters, what words do they use. Think about them every time you pitch a story and massage the language, the media, the tools and the story to make it easy to access, digest and support your story.

Meet people where they are

Don't make it hard to cover you. Be accessible.

Practice makes perfect

Always, always, always practice – by yourself, with a co-worker, with your dog. Make the words come out of your mouth and it will be easier. I promise.