



Module 9: 10 tips for getting the media's attention

You've [uncovered newsworthy stories](#) within your organization and used them to [create engaging, well-written press releases](#). So why isn't the press returning your calls? How you distribute your press release or pitch your stories to the media can have a huge impact on how much coverage you receive.

In this module, we've assembled the top 10 tips for getting the media's attention.

1. Build relationships



The sports media in British Columbia - or even in Canada - isn't very big. In fact, shrinking newspaper budgets means that fewer journalists are covering the sports beat. Forming positive relationships with the press may take more work, but it is much more effective than just blasting a press release out and hoping for the best.

To network with reporters and editors:

- Create a spreadsheet of all the journalists that have covered your sport, athletes or/or organization in the past. Note the contact information for each journalist, how he or she would prefer to be contacted, and what type of stories he or she likes to cover. Track stories you pitch to each journalist, and what the response was.
- Respect the journalist's preferred method of contact. Traditionally, public relations professionals are taught to call journalists to pitch their stories, but some reporters at small papers prefer to simply receive your press release and run it with minimal changes because they do not have the time to attend your event. Ask the journalist what method of contact they would prefer and if they have any deadlines to file their story that you should keep in mind.
- If you have a great story, pitch it exclusively to the reporter who will do the best job of covering it. Give that reporter time to respond before including the story in a press release or

pitching it to another outlet.

- Don't waste the reporter's time with press releases or pitches that are outside his or her location or area of interest.
- When a reporter covers your sport, make sure to thank him or her and broadcast the final story through your social media channels to give it a broader audience.

2. Make a list and check it twice

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	REGIONAL MEDIA LIST							
2	City	First Name	Last Name	Outlet	Title	Email	Phone	Coverage history
3	Vancouver	John	Smith	ABC Sport News	Reporter	johnsmith@sportnews.ca	604.123.4567	Adam Red - National Team - Jan.18.2015 Tricia Brook - Provincial Team - Feb.01.2014
4								
5								

Instead of lumping all reporters and editors into one big media list, separate your press release lists into smaller, targeted lists. Many communications professionals maintain a media list for each city and for athletes and coaches who get a lot of press. Make sure to also include prominent bloggers.

If you use a program like MailChimp or Constant Contact, monitor your bounce rate and update any email addresses that are returned undelivered.

Not sure how to build your email list? The email addresses for most reporters are listed on the outlet's website. When a new journalist contacts you, add their information to your list.

3. Amplify your reach



While it's important to have your own media list, you should also amplify your reach by submitting to news release distribution services. The [Sport Research Intelligence Sportive](#) (SIRC) is free and targets sports news. [Wireservice.ca](#) is another free press release distribution channel. Other services like [Newswire](#), [The Canadian Press Wire Network](#), and [Marketwired](#) require a subscription or charge a fee per press release sent.

4. Timing is everything



When should you send out your press release? If you have breaking news, you should announce it as quickly as possible. When it comes to promoting events, however, most experts send out an advisory 5-7 days before the event, or 3-4 days before they would like the coverage to appear. If you are hosting a larger event, you might choose to call two weeks in advance to gauge a reporter's interest.

If you are hosting a large event, you should also prepare a media strategy for the months leading up to it. This strategy will usually involve pitching event milestones to the media, such as:

- The announcement of early bird ticket sales.
- The announcement of partners and sponsors.
- The selection of teams/athletes who will be attending.
- The one-month/six-month countdown to the event, especially if you can find a concrete angle to make this milestone interesting. For example, you might celebrate the one-month countdown to your event by hosting a meet-and-greet with the national team.
- The release of the schedule.

Studies also show that most press releases are sent on Monday and Tuesdays between 8:00 am and 9:00 am local time. Another spike in press releases occurs between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm local time. The problem is, however, that sending your press release at these times could cause it to get buried in a flurry of other releases. For this reason, some sport communicators choose to submit press releases "off cycle." For example, you might experiment by sending out a press release in the evening, or later in the week.

5. Find a Hook



While the timing of a press release is important, today's fast-paced news cycle has caused many public relations experts to argue that taking part in a conversation is more important than sending out a press release at a peak time. Monitor news outlets and follow journalists on social media to find stories that you can piggyback off of. For example, if a journalist is tweeting about how children today are too sedentary, you could pitch your innovative physical literacy program as an example of what's being done to combat the problem. For more tips on engaging the media via social media, check out the media module in our social media toolkit: [Ten great ways to engage the media using social-media.](#)

Though most of the journalists who use the service are American, you can also subscribe to [HARO](#) (Help A Reporter Out), which connects reporters to potential sources.

6. Think of the media early



To make it easy for the media to cover your tournament or competition, consider their needs early in

the planning process.

- If possible, avoid hosting your event during major sporting events like the World Cup or the Stanley Cup.
- Work with teams/athletes to schedule open practices and media meet-and-greets before the competition starts. When you plan open practices, work with coaches to ensure that any broadcast media will get solid visuals. A practice where the team is working on small technical details won't be as visually appealing as a scrimmage.
- Consider whether you will need to create mixed zones, press tribunals, or a media center for your event.
- Work with the organizing committee and teams to come up with a clear set of directions for the media. Where can photographers and videographers shoot from? Where should they avoid? Will reporters have access to the coaching staff at half-time or between events? Will athletes be available directly after the competition or will they need to go directly for cool down and treatment?

7. Be responsive



Building relationships with the media isn't just about pitching a great story. Help the reporter get his or her story from beginning to end by being responsive at all stages of the process. Have your cell phone with you at all times after you've sent out a press release and monitor your email closely. If you suspect that a reporter will want to interview a particular athlete or coach after reading your press release, connect with him or her in advance to ensure availability.

8. Find the human element



Whenever possible, tie your press release or pitch back to a human story. Reporters know that stories about people are the most compelling to their audience. They're more likely to cover your story if you've given them a good interview subject. If your organization is hosting a major tournament, for example, you could pitch a story about a local athlete who is looking forward to competing in front of a hometown crowd.

9. Don't forget social media



In the past, earned media consisted of a mention on the nightly news or an article in the newspaper. Today, however, news outlets have sophisticated digital teams and are getting more creative in finding new ways to engage their audiences. Your national team or star athlete could host a Periscope session, take part in a Twitter Q&A or do a Snapchat takeover of a news outlet's feed. Many outlets also look for athlete bloggers. These unique earned media opportunities can sometimes reach a wider audience than a traditional news story, and athletes often enjoy them.

10. Follow up



After a reporter covers your story, you should follow up to say thank you. This is a great opportunity to mention any upcoming events that your organization will be hosting.

Every sports communicator has a different strategy for engaging with reporters. What works for one sport communicator might fall flat for another. With a little trial and error, however, you can build a media outreach strategy that works for your sports organization.

Have a question about engaging with the media? Have a tip that wasn't mentioned in this module? Get in the conversation by tweeting @viaSportBC or emailing info@viasport.ca

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