

But YOU Said YOU Would Be Here!

by Karen Friedman

How to get that second chance when it comes to media coverage.

The phone rang at my desk in the newsroom.

"Hello."

"So, how much longer until you get here?"

"Get where? Who is this," I asked.

"I'm at the convention center and when I called yesterday, you said that your TV cameras would be here to cover our event."

I had never spoken to this person before, but chances are someone in our newsroom did tell the caller "we'll be there" and probably meant it at the time. Yet, a lot can happen in a span of several hours or even minutes. In media land, entire programs can change based on the impact of those happenings. On that particular day, our news desk had planned to cover a trade show at the convention center, but a commuter plane crashed and our crews were diverted. There was simply no one else available to dispatch to the convention center.

The day-to-day operation of a newspaper, nightly news program, radio show or magazine is an endless series of harried hurdles. The challenges you face in trying to get these people to cover your event are only equal to their challenges of trying to gather and report information from so many sources.

Imagine these operations as a box of Band-Aids stuffed with all shapes and sizes because editors and producers never know which bandage they'll need next. Quite often, a planned program format established at the beginning of the day doesn't even resemble the final product that is produced at the end of the day.

For example, when Princess Diana died, many news crews were covering end of the summer celebrations. Beach-goers, picnickers, Labor Day ceremonies were on their agendas and those taking part in the festivities looked forward to getting press. The story of Diana's death, however, took priority, as it was "real news" with mass appeal that had to be covered as it was happening. Before we examine how you recoup if the coverage you expected doesn't materialize, it's important to understand the mind-set on both sides of the playing field.

You: I can't believe they wouldn't interview me when I was right there and offered to talk!

Media: We already did ten other interviews and have more than we need.

You: They covered a similar event last week. Why won't they come to ours?

Media: We did the story last week.

You: They said we were on their agenda. Why would they tell us that and not show up?

Media: Three people called in sick. Two reporters are on vacation. Our equipment is down. The news car has a flat tire. We had some breaking news and couldn't get there in time.

You: Our sponsors are going to be really irritated because we told them to expect coverage.

Media: That's not our problem. We're not in business to promote your sponsors.

You: They took pictures and interviewed people, but never printed the story.

Media: We ran out of space in the paper, but hope to run the story another day if it's still timely.

You: They came, but only stayed for a few minutes.

Media: We realized the story would only appeal to a few of our readers, listeners and viewers. You might want to call a more industry-specific trade publication.

You: They interviewed me for about ten minutes and never used it.

Media: You kept talking about your product but never talked about how that product might benefit my audience.

You: The reporter told me this was a great story and would get great play, but when I turned on the news, they ran it for ten seconds at the end of the show.

Media: The show producer had too many features and needed a more significant news story to run at the top of the show, so the tape of your event was edited and moved to the end of the show.

You: Our event had international appeal, yet they spent more time covering some ribbon cutting.

Media: News organizations look for a blend of local, national and international news. Our audience was regional.

You: We gave them so much advance notice...

Media: Just because we've had the information for three months doesn't guarantee we'll cover your story.

So, how can you pick up the pieces if your event falls through the cracks? Honestly, sometimes you can't. However, there are some post-coverage opportunities.

If your event didn't attract the mainstream media, think about industry-specific trade or technical publications whose readers would benefit from learning more about your application or product.

Think of ways the convention may spark interest in other stories? Can you tie these other stories to a news announcement, current event, or milestone? Was there a specific product at the show that will provide useful advice to the public? Were startling financial earnings revealed in these difficult economic times?

Create a news hook or what insiders call a follow up. Is anything happening as a result of your event? Is there a drive to raise scholarship money in the community or funds that might be donated to a worthy cause? Years ago, we covered a story about several students who died in a car accident. It was later revealed that alcohol might have been involved. The follow up stories were focused on education programs.

Make sure to call the organization and find out WHY they weren't able to cover your event. If they simply weren't interested, ask what would benefit their readers or viewers in the future. Don't push yourself on them, but offer your organization's spokespeople as key sources and experts who can offer perspectives for future stories.

Smaller media organizations often don't have the staff to get to many events. If you provide a release and include your own video or photographs taken by a professional, they may run the story.

If your spokespeople are called, make sure they get good media training so they can deliver your message in clear, concise and personable quotes or sound bites if you want to be called again.

To maximize your opportunity of generating interest after the fact, try asking yourself the question that reporters, editors and producers ask. Who cares about this? Why should they care? How many people does this affect? The more people affected or impacted by what you have to say, the more likely you are to get that second chance.

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