

Selling Bike to Work Day to the Local Media

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What's the good of doing all that work if nobody knows about it? Increase your visibility by working with local media to publicize your event.

Developing a Media List

Targeting your public relations campaign to the proper media is half the battle. Sending a press release to the wrong person will get you nowhere. Your local library should have media directories in which to glean media information for your area. Make sure to distribute your press release to a particular person. For newspapers target the Metro Editor; magazines the Managing Editor; television stations the Assignment Editor; radio the News Director. Also, if certain reporters have produced bicycling stories in the past make sure they are on your media list, as well. In addition, make sure you hit all print publications "Calendar of Events" sections.

How should you send your press release? Most will take faxes, all will take them by mail. Be careful with e-mail. Unless a media person specifically wants it by e-mail, don't do it. Spamming the media is not a good thing.

Developing a Media Strategy

PR is just like advertising. However, instead of the general public you are trying to reach editors and reporters. And as with advertising, repetition can get you everywhere. The more times an editor or reporter sees your message the more effective your PR campaign will be. I don't mean keep mailing or faxing the same press release over and over again. Instead, start three to four weeks out and produce a weekly press release, each from a different story angle. For instance, one could announce the event, another could focus on specific bicycle commuters in the city, another about Bike to Work Day pit stops. An editor or reporter seeing your message three or four times instead of just once adds credibility to your event. It will force the media to take notice. See the "Time Schedule" for tips on when to contact the media.

After you have sent out your press releases it is time to get n the telephone. An effective PR campaign means personal contact between you and the media. See "Telephone Etiquette" for tips.

Time Schedule

Two to Three Months Before the Event

- Distribute the first press release to all local daily and weekly publications, radio and television media.

Two Weeks Before The Event

- Distribute second press release to all local daily and weekly publications, radio and television media. Telephone major newspapers for possible editorial before the event.

One Week Before the Event

- Distribute third press release to all local daily and weekly publications, radio and television media.

Three Days Before the Event

- Telephone all major media especially television stations.

The Day Before the Event

- Fax or E-mail "Media Alert" to major media (especially major daily newspapers and television stations). The piece should include what, where, when, and why.
- Follow up with phone calls to the major daily newspapers and television stations.

The Day After the Event or Day of the Event

- Distribute post event press release to all media.

Telephone Etiquette

- 1) Always send a press release before you call.
- 2) Always be polite. Nothing will turn off an editor or reporter more than somebody rude pitching a story idea.
- 3) Always ask, "Do you have a minute?" before you go into your spiel. Most times you will get a "yes," or the media person will have you call back when they aren't so busy.
- 4) When you get the okay to talk be concise and to the point. You might want to write down a brief paragraph on what you are going to say. When you have finished, listen and be prepared to answer any questions. Also, be prepared to provide story angles. A good story angle can many times sell the story. For instance, with gas prices so high, bicycle commuting is a great way to save money. If one angle doesn't spark interest, try another. You might want to think of story angles beforehand and write them down.
- 5) If the person you are trying to reach isn't in, don't keep leaving messages. Stop after a few, but keep calling until you get through.

Resources

Want to know more? Try these two excellent PR books (you can probably even get them from the library):

Guerrilla P.R. by Michael Levine,
Targeted Public Relations by Robert W. Bly