

Public Relations Handbook –

A Guide to Reaching the Media



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

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Introduction

The Benefits of Publicity

Whether you're just breaking ground in a new practice, reaching a milestone in your established clinic, receiving an award, publishing cutting-edge research, kicking off a new program in your city's schools, or just trying to get the word out about your work within the community, public relations can help you reach consumers, peers, and the general public.

Public relations allows us to effectively communicate our messages to the news media – and ultimately to the public. The time devoted to public relations can pay off considerably because the resulting publicity is essentially free and carries with it the type of credibility only achieved through the endorsement of a third party such as the news media. This type of credibility cannot be realized through even the most aggressive advertising campaign because of the authority and objectivity attributed to the media. Overall, the public believe what the media have to say! Think of Oprah's book club – nothing can propel a book to the top of the bestseller list faster than an endorsement from one of America's most influential news personalities. That is the power of public relations!

This handbook will show you how to effectively promote your practice, programs, research findings to the public, and in doing so bring further information about speech, language, and hearing problems and treatment for these problems to the forefront of the media's agenda and the public's mind. This handbook contains specific tips on how to identify media contacts, successfully pitch stories to the news media, position yourself as a credible media source, and much more.

Getting Your Message Out

What Is News?

Whether you are seeking coverage on television, radio, newspaper, magazines, or the Internet your message faces stiff competition. Every day hundreds of messages and story ideas flood local newsrooms. In order to get your story in the news, it must be perceived as newsworthy. Here are some key criteria the media consider when deciding which stories to cover. If you can demonstrate that your story meets some of these criteria, your chances of attaining coverage will increase.

- Says something new
- Sounds unusual, different, or unique
- Touches on controversial topics
- Showcases statistics and trends
- Has human interest
- Has a celebrity-oriented angle
- Appears timely
- Affects the local community

Example: Propose a story about a patient who has made great strides toward recovery after a stroke left him/her unable to speak clearly. Demonstrate how a new treatment approach made all the difference. Offer statistics outlining how many others this treatment has helped and show how many more may potentially benefit.

Criteria met: Says something new – Sounds unusual, different, or unique – Showcases statistics & trends – Has human interest



Basic but Essential Tips for Reaching the Media

- **Read, watch, and listen before you approach.**
Key things to consider: Is this the best outlet to reach my target audience? What type of stories do they typically cover? Will my information fit their format?
- **Know your reporters.**
Before reaching out to a reporter, read/watch some of his/her recent stories. Make sure the story you propose fits his/her format and beat. Ask if there is a method of contact he/she prefers (phone, fax, or e-mail).
- **Respect deadlines.**
- **Pitch your story idea.**

- A successful media pitch will include both written (press release, pitch letter, etc., see samples pages 14 and 15) and verbal communication (phone calls) and repetition of your message.
- **Get to the point.**
Always put the most important information first. Don't include non-essential information.
- **Follow up.**
Follow up with reporters to offer additional information, statistics, or interviews. When offering interviews, tell reporters who they can interview to humanize their story (perhaps yourself, a patient, and his/her family). Focus on the visual, especially with TV. Offer TV reporters not only interviews but good video opportunities, i.e., access to your practice/lab, filming interaction with patients, etc.
- **Sell your story.**
Be enthusiastic about your story. Tell the media why they should cover the story; don't just ask if they will.
- **Remember that they need you too.**
Don't be intimidated by the news media. You are an expert in your field offering important information and access to people and places, which helps a reporter tell his/her story.

Get to Know the Media

Why wait until the media call you? Positioning yourself as an expert in your field takes advance work but can pay off in the future. Cultivate relationships with the health care/medical beat reporters in your market to increase your chances of being included in future stories.

- Keep a list of health/medical reporters and others who cover your industry. Call and introduce yourself; offer to send information about your work; and offer yourself as a resource for future stories.
- Let reporters know you are available to speak as an expert on a range of topics related to speech-language pathology or audiology or on your area of specialty; e.g., speech-language development in children, aphasia in adults, etc.

Example: As an audiologist, you can speak to the media about your specialty, which may be researching the impact of hearing loss on children. However, you can also offer your expert opinion on related topics in the news ranging from noise pollution from a proposed new airport to a new city ordinance banning excessively loud car stereos.

- Make yourself easily accessible. Let media contacts know to call on you when they need information, interviews, or statistics.
- Familiarize yourself with the stories covered in the local news. If there is a story on your field of audiology or speech-language pathology, call and offer yourself as a source of further information on the topic. Consider how you can give a national story a local angle.
- Once you've developed good working relationships with your media contacts – keep in touch!

Seek Opportunities

Make the most of your PR initiative by continuously seeking new public relations opportunities. Pay attention to what stories get covered and who is covering them. Which media outlets tend to cover stories in your field? Which reporters or editors write these stories?

- Read health columns, science pages, business and feature sections.
- Seek opportunities for story placements or writing letters to the editor when appropriate.
- Watch and listen to multiple television and radio programs seeking shows that feature live guest segments or have a talk show format. (Many local television morning news programs include a segment featuring in-studio guest interviews on a variety of topics. Call the morning news producer to see if he/she is interested in a story in your field.)
- Seek news program or public affairs show media opportunities.



Crisis and the News Media

Contact with the news media is especially important in a crisis situation or any time you are expressing a viewpoint or taking a stand on an issue. The more difficult the situation, the more important it is to make proper use of the news media. Hypothetical situations that could benefit from a response from you, your company, or employer include

- An increase in the need for at-home nursing care for aging patients.
- A critical need for speech-language pathologists in the local school system.
- Misinformation that has already been printed or broadcast involving the professions, benefits of treatment, or accountability of services provided.
- In these situations, identify two or three positive messages to carry to the media. These can be opportunities to use the news media to influence people. Positive public posturing can be of critical importance.

Additional Publicity Ideas

Good news stories are everywhere – keep your eyes open and learn to identify interesting, newsworthy stories (keep in mind the criteria listed above which the media consider when choosing stories).

- Who are your patients? Find out their occupations. Are there any writers, reporters, DJs, editors, etc. among them who may be interested in writing a first-person story about their experiences?
- Community calendars. Most media outlets publicize a calendar of upcoming community events. To have your event included in this listing contact the community calendar editor at the respective newspaper or radio/television station. Find out their established deadlines and preferred format for receiving this information and adhere to their guidelines.
- Hold special events for your past patients or a lecture series that is interesting and newsworthy.
- Pitch stories related to holidays or other news events.

July 4th - Preventing hearing damage resulting from loud noises at July 4th fireworks celebrations.

“Back-to-School” - How to know if your child is developing reading skills properly is a good “back-to-school” story in August.

Legislation – Pitch stories that demonstrate the pros or cons of new or proposed legislation.

Better Hearing and Speech Month—Talk about the “big picture” of communication disorders as well as community or state statistics.

Media-Generating Events

Are you planning a grand opening for a new facility, throwing a summer alumni picnic, or simply looking for a new reason to generate media coverage? Special events are a great way to produce some additional publicity. You may have an event already planned that will interest some media outlets, or you may consider planning an event with the specific goal of garnering media coverage. When pitching special events to the media, be sure to pitch only to outlets who cover this type of story, and use a combination of phone calls and a press release and/or media advisory (see sample pages 15 and 16) to sell your story.

Some Tips

- Allow plenty of time to plan the event.
- Have a comprehensive game plan and timeline.
- Tend to the details (invitations, refreshments, location, parking, decorations, etc.).
- Take pictures—Hire a professional photographer to photograph the event (or take your own high quality photos). You may want to send a follow-up press release summarizing the event to your local newspaper the following day (if they didn't attend) and include a photograph. Newspapers with small staffs often accept photographs and may run a story about your event with the accompanying photo.

Some Ideas

- Alumni events
- Free speech-language/hearing screenings for the community
- Open house/grand openings
- Informative seminars for the public



Speeches

- A public-speaking engagement presents yet another format to deliver your message to a targeted group of people. During a speech, you have sole control over the content and delivery of your message. Make the most of this opportunity.
- Know your audience—Who are they? What are their needs and interests? Tailor your speech to them.
- Pinpoint your main message and stick to it.
- Provide information to support your key message or idea.
- Determine the setting—What size is the room? How large is the audience? Will you have a lectern?
- Master props ahead of time (computer, TV/VCR, other visual aids) and make sure they work.
- Speak from a rough outline, not a full script.

Approaching Different Media Outlets

Television

There is one very important thing to remember about television that differs from other media outlets – it is a completely visual medium. Without good video and sound, a story cannot be told effectively on television. Therefore, you must demonstrate that the story you propose includes not only great interviews and important information but also opportunities for compelling video. The best person to contact at a television station is the assignment editor/manager or a specific beat reporter (i.e., health reporter). If you are proposing a story for a particular show (i.e., an interview for the morning show) contact the producer of that particular show.

The Television Interview

Advice for those interviews in front of the camera.

- Relax. You are the expert; remember the reporter is coming to you for information.
- Speak to and maintain eye contact with the interviewer, not the camera.
- Talk to the reporter as if he/she were a patient or family member of a patient. Make eye contact. The more it looks as if you are speaking to one person, the more personable you will appear to viewers.
- Never answer questions with a simple “yes” or “no.” If you’re asked a yes/no question, answer it, then take the opportunity to explain or emphasize a related point you want to make.
- If you make a mistake or misspeak, start over.
- If you can’t answer a question, say so.
- TV reporters and photographers love props. Props help them visually tell the story. If you have anything that can be used as a prop bring it out and let the reporter know.
- Avoid jargon. Explain even simple medical terms with a few words.
- Speak naturally in a conversational tone. Avoid long, run-on sentences. Talk in sound bites of 10 to 15 seconds.
- Prepare your office, clinic, treatment room, etc. Remove stray coffee mugs, files not in use, and other unnecessary items. A neat, well-organized office or lab, reception and treatment area sends an unspoken message to viewers about how your business is run.
- Dress appropriately. Shirts other than white are preferable. Avoid wild prints.

Radio

While radio coverage may not seem as glitzy as getting an event covered by your local television station, more than 95% of Americans tune into the radio at some point each day. There are nearly 16,000 radio stations across the U.S. Nearly 3,000 are all-news or all-talk formats. Almost all others air some form of brief news update at points throughout the day.

The only way to know if a particular radio station may cover a story is to tune in. Stations carry different programs at different times of the day. Listen to them, and see when or if the story you are selling may fit in. You'll want to contact either the show producer or, for smaller stations, the news director about your story. If you can reach him/her by phone great, but they may request further information in writing, or may not have time to talk. Ask the best way to send him/her more information (fax, e-mail, or regular mail), and do so. For a general story idea, send a pitch letter. If you're promoting a specific event, send a press release or media advisory (see samples, pages 15 and 16).

News/Wire Services

News wire services can be valuable publicity outlets because wire services gather news and provide stories for other media. Stories carried on wire services can appear in hundreds of newspapers or be broadcast through your area or across the country. While wire services are typically located in larger cities, they frequently use "stringers" (local reporters) to cover news in other areas. Check the yellow pages to find out if any of these news services have bureaus near you:

- Associated Press (AP)
- Gannett News Service
- Reuters America
- Scripps-Howard News Service
- United Press International (UPI)

Be sure all publicity materials go to the nearest wire service bureaus and/or their local stringer. Associated Press also has radio bureaus that transmit stories to stations regionally and nationally. You can also file a story with a wire service by telephone to give them announcements or brief comments about a story. State news services also operate around the country and include state radio networks. You can consult a local press directory to determine the names of local news services and the issues they cover.

Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers and magazines offer a nearly unending supply of opportunities for media coverage. There are newspapers and magazines geared to virtually every profession, hobby, interest, subject, and community. Both large and small, these publications offer a wonderful opportunity to tell a story and often offer the public more information than can be conveyed in a 1- to 2-minute story broadcast on television or radio.

- Read first – Make sure your story is appropriate to the publication. Keep in mind the interests and needs of the paper's audience before you pitch the story.
- Target your pitch – Pitch your story to the appropriate person. Where would the story most likely appear – news, life, or living sections, health column, etc.? Identify the appropriate contact person for that section and contact them about your story. Try a phone call first, follow up with written information – pitch letter for a general story idea, press release or media advisory for a specific event (see samples, pages 14 - 16).

HINT: Have written information ready so you can fax it over immediately, if requested.

- Don't forget the small ones – You know those small, local newspapers and newsletters you find dropped in the driveway or pickup at the grocery store? Don't neglect them. While small, these publications are usually widely read within the community. Plus, you'll find it's easier to generate coverage from a smaller newspaper than from the biggest name in town.
- Seek letters to the editor or "op ed" (opposite editorial) opportunities when appropriate – When you feel strongly about an issue, or disagree with something published in a newspaper, you may wish to voice your opinion. Publications have guidelines and formats for accepting these letters. Find out what they are and adhere to them. Remember, if you are reacting to a story recently published, time is of the essence.

Internet

Don't underestimate the power of this comparatively new medium. The Internet is a powerful and vast source of news and information. From web sites, bulletin boards and chat rooms to online newspapers and publications, the web is a powerful public relations tool. Just as with traditional media, familiarize yourself with the Internet-based outlets that cover your field. Get in touch with these writers, and don't forget about them when you have a story to tell.



Additional Resources

How the National Office Can Help

ASHA's National Office can help by providing free resources for ASHA members, the media, and the public.

Visit ASHA's Web site for the Media Update, a monthly newsletter containing story ideas for the media. Fact sheets produced by ASHA's research department is also available on the Web.

- **www.asha.org** "Press Room"
"Science & Research"
- A model photo release form is available through fax-on-demand by calling 1-877-541-5035—document #0918
- Find the Associated Press (AP) bureau near you. Check out the AP Web site.
www.ap.org "Contact AP" "U.S. AP Bureaus by State"

The ASHA ACTION CENTER , 1-800-638-8255 (TALK) (Voice or TTY), is available to provide brochures and referrals to the public seeking more information about communicative disorders or referrals to speech-language pathologists and audiologists in their state. When you receive publicity or participate in a public event (a health fair for example) you may choose to refer the public to ASHA for additional information. Please direct the public to the following ASHA resources:

ASHA ACTION CENTER: 1-800-638-8255 (TALK)
Email: actioncenter@asha.org
Web site: www.asha.org
Mail: ASHA Action Center
2200 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850

ASHA's National Office can also help you further your individual public relations initiatives. Do you have questions about something you've read in this handbook? Do you have specific questions or need further guidance for a special project or upcoming event? Please contact ASHA's Public Relations Department at 301-296-5700, ext. 4321, or email us at pr@asha.org.

Glossary of Terms

AP Daybook/Calendar

A daily calendar of events compiled by the Associated Press (AP) wire service early each morning in cities across the U.S. Fax a press release to the AP Daybook editor in your city's AP bureau the day before an event.

Beta

The type of video used by television stations. Stations usually request video footage in this format.

B-Roll

Generic, background video footage. Stations will often request this video to include in their story.

Deadline

The time when a story must be submitted. A reporter working on "deadline" must have the story written and submitted by that time.

First-Person Story

A story written or broadcast by a reporter detailing his or her own personal real-life experiences.

Follow-up Calls

Telephone calls placed to the media the day or the day after a press release is sent.

Freelancer

A writer who is not on the staff of a publication. Freelancers write and sell articles to more than one publication.

Lead

The first line of an article or press release. It is written to grab the attention of the reader.

Live

A television, radio or webcast segment that is broadcast as it happens.

Media Advisory

An abbreviated form of a press release, often in bullet form, sent the day before or early the day of an event. Reminds the media of the event by providing basic facts: who, what, when, where and why.

Media Contact List

A list of local media outlets and reporters used to distribute press releases and contact the media. Contains the publication/station name, contact name, address, phone, and fax numbers.

Media-Generating Event

A special event planned and publicized with hopes of attracting attention of the media (i.e., Grand Opening, Alumni Day, etc.).

News Media

Print and broadcast outlets (i.e. newspapers, wire services, magazines, Internet, television, and radio stations) that present news and information to the public.

Pitch Letter

A letter directed to one specific reporter, written to generate that person's interest in writing about a certain topic.

Press Release

A written statement providing information to the media to get them to cover an event, performance, or other newsworthy item.

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

A short message that runs on television or radio (generally 30 seconds long) to inform the community about an event or service that benefits the public.

Sidebar

A short article that runs next to a larger article in a newspaper or magazine. Often used to explain or expand on a section of the larger article.

Stand-up

The part of a television story when the reporter appears on camera, giving the reporter a chance to refer to the surroundings or emphasize a point.

Taped Segment

A television or radio segment that is taped or recorded in advance of the broadcast, allowing time for editing before it airs.

Wire Services

Organizations providing news stories and updates to print and broadcast media – some operating 24 hours a day. (Associated Press, Reuters, Scripps Howard, etc.).

-30- or ###

Indicates the end of a press release.

Samples

Sample Pitch Letter
(Date)

Rhonda Tisch, Producer
The Morning Show
WXZU-TV
Grand Rapids, MI

Dear Ms. Tisch:

Babies begin developing speech and language from the moment they are born. They learn by listening to and interacting with the sounds and voices around them. But hearing loss is more common than any other detectable disability among newborns. When sounds and voices are not heard, language learning is often delayed.

Only half of babies with hearing loss have a known family history of hearing problems. The remaining infants with hearing loss often have no specific risk factors. Many babies' hearing loss goes undetected until they are between 12 and 25 months of age. Thanks to advances in audiology, this delay is unnecessary because we now have the technology to detect hearing loss a few hours after birth. A simple test is quick and inexpensive.

Your viewers, whether they are parents or grandparents, will appreciate learning about these non-invasive tests and other important steps they can take to make sure their little ones get all they need to develop on par with their peers. Early detection and intervention for infants with hearing loss and their families prevents language development delays—delays that can affect social, emotional, and educational development.

I would be pleased to provide you with further information about this important issue as well as families who have had direct experience and/or benefited from early hearing detection and intervention for their infants.

I will call you next week to talk with you further about this story idea. In the meantime, if you have any questions, or need specific information, please feel free to call me at (your number).

Sincerely,

(Your name)
(Title)
(Place of employment)

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:
(YOUR NAME)
(YOUR PHONE NUMBER)

SPECIAL SERVICES HELP LOCAL PROFESSIONALS SPEAK FOR SUCCESS

(Duluth, MN-today's date) A special course offered by Duluth speech-language pathologist, (your name), will offer local professionals help with their voice and speech patterns.

"This is especially important to people who use their voice and speech as an important part of their profession," said (your name, title, where you work). "How you sound is important. America is a land of immigrants who come to this country with their own speech patterns. Even people who are born here have regional speech patterns. Other people have voices that are very high-pitched, very soft, or too monotonous."

Altering lifelong speech and voice patterns is not as difficult as it sounds, according to (your last name), who specializes in helping people improve the way they talk. Many speech-language pathologists work with individuals and small groups to improve the overall quality of speech, and voice.

"If a person's speech cadence is too slow or accent is too heavy, it, unfortunately, can prove to be an obstacle to career advancement," said (your last name). "For example, foreign-born physicians who need to be understood clearly by their patients or people whose jobs require them to speak more effectively in pressure situations, have such a need."

The course series entitled "Speaking for Success" will run from October 1 through December 15. For more information, contact the (your name or where you work).

Speech-language pathologists are health care professionals who identify, assess, and treat speech and language problems including swallowing disorders. A qualified speech-language pathologist has a master's or doctoral degree; the Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC-SLP) from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and a state license, where required.

###

Sample Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Date)

CONTACT: (YOUR NAME)
(YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER)

MEDIA ADVISORY

LOCAL CLINIC TO PROVIDE FREE SEMINAR ON HEARING LOSS, TINNITUS, AND HEARING SCREENINGS

As a result of an overwhelming response by local residents last Spring, another free series of events addressing hearing loss and communication will be offered again this Fall by the Déjà Vu Clinic in North Hampton. The series will include information on noise and practical tips for hearing protection, tinnitus, free hearing screenings, and information on the latest technology for hearing amplification and assistive listening devices.

- WHAT:** FREE HEARING SCREENINGS, SEMINAR, OPEN HOUSE... (add other information about the event as appropriate)
- WHO:** Sponsored by (list company, business, place of employment and the credentials of those who will be offering the services or making the presentation or conducting the seminar) (Add any other pertinent information about those being served)
- WHEN:** (Appropriate Day, Times)
- WHERE:** (Location or locations)
- HOW:** (Provide information on how people can register for the event or how they can find out more information)

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